

New Shop, Intensified Effort
Made up for Loss in Customers

Membership Slipped But Houghton Increased Sales, Profits in 1963

Driving to the financial green in 1963 had more than the usual hazards for Al Houghton, pro at Prince Georges CC in Landover, Md. In 1962, Prince Georges switched from a partial to a complete member-owned basis. Extensive club and course improvements saddled the members with heavy financial responsibilities. As a result, membership dropped from 580 to a low of 375 in 1963. Yet, Houghton and his staff pushed sales up 25 per cent for the year. Profits increased to a lesser degree. Now that membership at Prince Georges is climbing back toward the 600 mark, the



Assistant Chuck Collett and head pro, Al Houghton, relax in anticipation of continuing to increase sales at Prince Georges club in future.

things Al learned during touch times should pay off — with extras!

The key to Houghton's feast rather than famine year was a new pro shop built within the Prince Georges clubhouse. Formerly, Al's sales operations were located in a shop 100 yards from the main clubhouse. While sales to golfers were satisfactory, non-playing members and guests seldom visited the out-of-the-way shop. Since late 1962, as part of the new clubhouse facilities, Al's pro shop has been in the center of club activities.

"Our members are especially proud of their well-stocked pro shop," Houghton says. "They often bring members from other clubs to see us. Even non-golfing club members have now become frequent customers because of our handy location."

The new sales and display area gives Houghton and his staff the chance



Al Houghton's retreat is shown in the foreground. Glassed-in office gives him unobstructed view of the sales operation. On wall racks (shown below) one of the largest club and bag displays in the Middle-Atlantic area is to be found.

to effectively merchandise playing equipment, sportswear and tournament prizes. Service to the customer has been made easier, more pleasant and more efficient.

Attractively decorated in Bali-beige, the shop has four large windows and plenty of fluorescent lighting. The floors are heavy-duty cork and rubber tile covered with wall-to-wall wool carpeting. Air conditioning adds comfort to the scene and soft background music encourages leisurely shopping.

The first thing customers see as they enter the Prince Georges CC pro shop is a smart display wall. The merchandise and theme in this display are changed quite often to suit the season. Holiday gift ideas plus specials such as "Get Set for Spring," "Cool and Fresh as a Daisy" and "Vacation Bound" are given special play. Running from the entrance to the exit door is a pegboard-covered wall. Matched woods and irons are attractively displayed here along with utility clubs and golf bags.

Roll 'Em Out

"Many pro shops have rolling carts," Houghton remarks. "This year we plan to use our cart on the first and tenth tees during special events and on weekends. It will be stocked with last minute things a player might need during a round and will be another way of bringing merchan-

dise closer to members and guests."

Effective displays, and pro shops that are stocked year around with summer sportswear can keep winter travel dollars from being spent in other than a member's home pro shop. "Summer sportswear now is in demand all year at Prince Georges," Houghton says. "We've concentrated on building up this phase of our business. A few years ago all we could sell in the winter months were 'Warm-up' items and maybe a few gifts for the following season. Now, with so many members traveling south to resort golfing areas, they can do a lot of their vacation buying right here at home."





There is plenty of open space in the Prince Georges shop, plus a small lounge — both designed for the customer's shopping convenience.

Al gives a three-minute special — a tip or two to help a troubled player with his game. This technique has done a lot for Al's relations with his members. "Remember, nobody makes a better pro shop customer and a more responsive student than an encouraged golfer," Al observes.

"Of course, a pro at a busy D.C. area club can't be too generous with these free tips," Al warns, "but it surely creates good will. And I have no problem booking lessons. In fact, at times the demand is greater than my assistants and I can handle."

Houghton's first assistant, Boe Estridge helps out by teaching, acting as starter and in generally being "handy." Chuck Collett is his second assistant. Charlie Tabb handles cleaning and storage duties. Everyone's on hand in the shop when things get busy. During the summer months, additional assistance is added wherever needed.

Wife Helps Out

"Mrs. Houghton helps out, too," Al adds. "There was considerable gain in ladies' sportswear last year and I credit Naomi with the success in this department. Also, she's a CPA and very capable when it comes to handling our books."

During the last year, Mrs. Houghton has streamlined the shop's filing and or-

dering system. "We keep careful records of our orders," Mrs. Houghton states. "That way it's simple to check each shipment to make sure un-ordered merchandise isn't accepted. Also, complete records are a great help when we re-order. We can tell at a glance whether we've ordered too much or too little and tie our future orders to past sales. We know that stock shortages are embarrassing and lose the shop sales. Overstocked items can be expensive, too. The profit for our shop lies in knowing where we stand at all times. Accurate records help us pinpoint the money-making middle-ground."

Besides teaching fees and pro shop sales, Al rents electric cars at \$7.00 for 18 or \$4.00 for nine. During the summer an extra man is added to maintain and handle the golf cars. Club storage rates at Prince Georges run \$18.00 a year.

About 75 per cent of the Prince Georges CC membership makes purchases at the shop, according to Houghton's estimate. The inventory averages \$12,500 with five or six turnovers a year. In addition to playing equipment, Al carries specialty items such as ceramics and quality handbags that are in demand as tournament prizes and gifts. Sportswear adds 35 to 40 per cent to the sales picture.

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facturers will again meet at dinner in the Tavern Club in company with suppliers. The latter, at the meeting in Palm Beach Gardens, expressed willingness to participate in the AGCMA program.

Complete information about the Golf Car Manufacturers organization can be obtained from David Metcalf, secretary, c/o Versal, Inc., 1626 Werwinski st., South Bend, Ind.

Houghton Increases Sales

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To handle all of the various bookkeeping tasks, Al originally had his records set up by an accountant. "Books set up in this manner are certain to include all the necessary figures used in year-end profit and loss statements and tax returns. It's simply good business to start off with an adequate record system," Al advises.

50 Years in Golf

Al's success at Prince Georges is based on 50 years in golf. Starting out as a cad-dy, he has moved up the line. During the 35 years he has been a member of the PGA, Houghton has served seven

years as president of the Mid-Atlantic section and three years as national PGA vice-president. During the '20s and '30s, Al made a name for himself on the circuit and four times won the Maryland Open and twice took honors in the District of Columbia Open.

"Over the years, I've seen this business become more and more complicated," Al comments. "Today it takes more than ability on the teaching tee to break even as a home pro. It takes long hours and very few days off, service and plenty of it, plus skillful promotion, careful book-keeping and sound business sense. It wasn't always this way. Sure, a lot of the glamor has disappeared but today a home pro can make a pretty decent living if he plays the game by the revised rules."

Heads Ladies Auxiliary

Mrs. Massie Miller, Howell, Mich., is the new president of the PGA Seniors Ladies Auxiliary. Other officers are Mrs. Todd Houck, Fort Knox, Ky., and Mrs. Clarence Doser, Gaithersburg, Md., vps and Mrs. Paul E. Erath, Ligonier, Pa., secretary-treasurer. Mrs. Miller succeeded Mrs. William Taylor, Hyde Park, Mass.