



Seventy-five year old Plainfield (N.J.) CC invested \$85,000 in two-story pro shop building two years ago.



# Merchandising Hypnotism

*Dazzling displays that make subtle suggestions to the wallet prompt golfers to buy heavy at Plainfield CC pro shop*

A visiting pro upon sinking his spikes into what feels like knee-deep nap of the Creslen carpet in the golf shop at Plainfield (N. J.) CC, noting the comfortable bay which looks out onto a long first tee that seemingly doesn't have a blemish in its bent, seeing a colorful panorama of sports apparel in the Display Creations centerpiece, and kind of breathing in the warmth of the walnut stained birch panelling, couldn't help but start talking to himself. "How could a fellow go wrong in a place like this?" would have to be the first thing he muttered.

The shop at Plainfield, housed in a large, separate frame building and not yet two years old, may be as fine as anything found in the East. It gives the pro a running start on being a good merchandiser. But the opportunity can be muffed, as it has been at so many other clubs where pros have had everything to work with, if the fellow who runs it takes things for granted.

This isn't likely to happen with 32-year old Bob Benning around. He proceeds on the theory that if a fellow falls heir to class, he should do what he can to add to it. There are two distinct ways in which this is manifested at Plainfield — in the pro shop personnel itself, and in the atmosphere of the shop which is never allowed to become diminished.

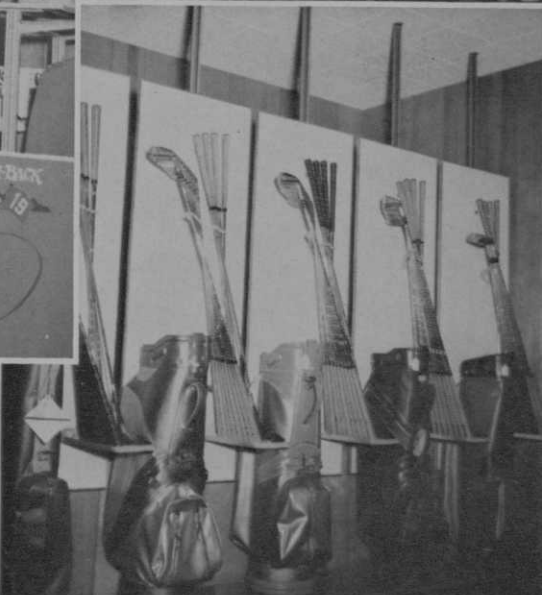
## Could Do With Less

Benning, who waited until the advanced age of 27 to turn professional, is convinced that pro merchandise has to be sold almost exclusively by suggestion. "We can't buttonhole anyone and force him to buy a single item," he observes. "The golfer could do with half of the stuff he purchases in a season if he had to. So, the only thing left for us to do is try to make him drool over the things he sees in the shop and want to buy them."

That is where the personnel and the



Beautiful furnishings in Plainfield shop are complemented by displays that are just as exciting. Shop is lighted by 11 square sand-blasted ceiling lamps and seven spots. Basement of shop contains large room with a driving net and a caddie room complete with toilets and showers. Ten golf cars, operated by the shop, are garaged in the basement.



shop's atmosphere come in in Benning's scheme of running things. He and his assistants are more than just affable and helpful. Benning himself tries to reflect what has come to be accepted as the image of the pro. He expects his aides to do likewise. That means that good grooming is a must.

"We are walking displays," he says. "We should wear colorful, well tailored clothes that make people constantly take notice of our apparel. If a member compliments me or one of my assistants on a gold shirt one of us is wearing, or says he likes the style of a pair of slacks one

of us may have on, I count on selling several of these items. It is simply because the word gets around."

Having the word get around at Plainfield can be quite profitable since there are 250 male members, many of them Wall Street brokers and executives of large concerns such as American Cyanamid and Johnson & Johnson.

#### How About Women?

Assuming that Benning does well enough selling to men via his back, where does that leave him with the 100 or so women members, since he doesn't



Bob Benning, Plainfield's capable young pro, is shown at upper left. Above is Charles Genter, who is in charge of displays. At lower left is Lou DomAruma, who has been caddiemaster at the club for four decades and has worked for only four pros during that time.



at a cost of \$85,000, it is one of those places in which a golfer has no objection to whiling away an hour or two. A huge bay window gives him a fine view of three or four holes. The paneled walls and thick carpeting still retain an aroma of newness. There is a small lounge in which a member can sit and relax, and there is plenty of floor space in the ample shop for him to get off in a corner and practice putting.

#### Subtle Suggestions

All the time he is being exposed to the Display Creations island in the center of the shop which, artistically decked out in a rainbow of merchandise, is making subtle suggestions to his wallet, whether he realizes it or not. The idea is, of course, that if the fellow keeps putting or lounging long enough, he'll see something that he wants. Charles Genter, assistant pro, handles the merchandising hypnotism here, since he is in charge of setting up displays at Plainfield.

"Most of Chuck's displays are what you'd call dazzling," says Bob Benning. "He has as much imagination in setting them up as anyone I've seen and you'd be surprised at how many members comment about them. As he explains it, the

*(Continued on page 75)*

have a girl assistant? "If you do a good volume with the male players and don't sell even more to the ladies, you have no charm," says Bob in a bantering way. "Seriously, the wine, gold, maize whiskey, warm blue, etc. colors found in men's apparel have a great influence on women who, as everyone knows, are more color conscious than males. Anyway, you can't argue with that old pro sales maxim that if men buy, women will buy even more."

Benning, incidentally, doesn't let the women players stray too far from the influence of the pro shop since he has a display of clubs and apparel, complete with mannequin, set up in the ladies' lockerroom.

As for atmosphere, Plainfield's shop is redolent with it. Built in late 1963

# Merchandising Hypnotism

(Continued from page 30)

trick is to catch a person's eye with a carefully placed bright color and then lead him on to looking at the rest of the merchandise on the shelf or in the case."

Suggestion leads the golfer this far. He may then spot something that he has intended to buy, or Benning or one of his assistants may point out something that stirs his fancy. Selling, or the theory behind sales, is that simple at the New Jersey club.

## Checks on Game

The Plainfield pro feels that there is one other way in which suggestion can be used in making sales, although at best it is only indirect. It consists of no more than checking once a week as to how a person is playing. This may result in some quite lengthy discussions, but it shouldn't be forgotten that when a person starts talking about his game, the conversation usually can be steered to a possible need for new clubs or for taking lessons.

"You can drop a hundred suggestions into a conversation when you are discussing clubs with a member," Benning remarks. "And most of us should be filling in more of our time with lessons. There's a big leak in lesson revenue simply because we aren't going after this business."

## Four Years in Training

A onetime caddie who later captained the Purdue University golf team while taking a degree in Economics at the Indiana school, Benning has been in golf since 1960. He deferred his entry into the field until after he did a three-year hitch in the Marine Corps and worked as many years in real estate and industrial sales. From 1960 until 1964, he traveled the apprenticeship circuit from Dayton, O. to Glendale, Calif. to West Caldwell, N.J. and spent a winter at Thunderbird in Palm Springs. He worked for Tom Foree, Jim Swagerty, Wes Ellis and Claude Harmon. All taught him a great deal about merchandising and Ellis and Harmon, both noted players, showed him the tricks of teaching. Benning furthered his golf education by playing the U.S. winter

tour two seasons and the Caribbean tour in 1964.

Benning's ideas about running a shop have been borrowed directly, or are variations on the things he learned from the above mentioned pros. He notes that all these men have one thing in common — they insist that a shop's success is contingent on how bright and fresh it looks and the kind of service the pro and his staff are willing to give.

## Service Never Wears Thin

"These fellows haven't done anything to revolutionize golf merchandising," says Bob Benning, "but they certainly have a thorough understanding of its fundamentals. One, in particular, used to talk about service. He said that among pros the word itself is overworked, but too many don't have a real concept of what it means. The thing to remember, this man emphasized, is that if you give it unstintingly it will never wear thin with members. That may be the best lesson I learned during my apprenticeship."

One other thing that Benning learned during his four apprentice years is that the pros he worked under insisted on getting the best possible assistants, and then gave them broad responsibilities after it was seen that they were going to work out satisfactorily. Bob copied their lead. As already has been implied, an assistant such as Chuck Genter is hard to improve upon. Quality in the pro staff at Plainfield doesn't stop with him because Benning has another very capable aide in Louis Don Aruma, the caddiemaster, who has been at the club for 40 years. A fellow like Don Aruma is particularly valuable because he is completely familiar with the likes, dislikes, whims, etc. of the members and can flash the pro signals as to how to proceed in handling them. Don Aruma, too, has been around long enough to know where to get cash for trade-in clubs when it may seem that it is almost impossible to give them away.

## Organize Par 3 Group

An association of Ohio Par 3 owners and operators is being organized by Karl Kushin, pro at Imperial GC, Mansfield, to seek relief from heavy taxes that are being imposed on recreational businesses.