

Winter golf the easy

Neither sleet, nor snow or rain can stay these golfers from their appointed rounds when they swing away on these indoor golf courses.

This fall will mark an interesting first for Product Investors Corp. in New York, the company that markets GOLFOMAT, the indoor golf game. While the units are located all over the world in luxury apartments, aboard ships and self-contained centers similar to bowling alleys, the trend is now toward installations at golf clubs.

At the Lakeside Golf Club in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the installation of 20 units will permit the club operators to keep open on a 12-month basis with an uninterrupted schedule of tournaments. (Normally Lakeside, like most other northern clubs, would close down for the duration of winter.)

In addition, the indoor facilities will permit play during the evening, when the 18-hole out-door course is closed, and during bad weather, regardless of season.

Lakeside has built a special wing to house the indoor golf facilities, which will be connected to the existing clubhouse by the pro shop.

Russell Strouse, who is one of the four investors in the operation and the club's professional at the same time, likes it this way. His pro shop will now be able to operate regular store hours on a twelve-month basis. As a result, he plans to work his three-man staff on an eight-hour, five-day week, year round. This not only means there will not be periods of unem-

ployment, but he and his staff will not have to work from sun-up to sun-down during the season to earn enough money for the balance of the year.

As Strouse says, "Your family still eats twelve months of the year, even if you only have income for seven months."

The Lakeside owners estimate that their investment of \$200,000 will be repaid within three years, based on current traffic. These units (\$7,000 each) represent \$140,000 of the total investment, and the remainder is for the 70ft. by 140ft. wing for indoor play. The club charges \$2.50 greens fee during the week and a \$3.50 fee on weekends. The same amount will be charged for indoor golf.

The Lakeside owners had felt the squeeze for additional clubhouse and golf facilities shortly after the club opened in 1954. The clubhouse was rebuilt in 1960 and then it was again found that it was inadequate to handle the traffic. This year an entirely new clubhouse was built, and, before it was completed, the owners decided to alter their plans to add the indoor golf wing.

In planning the indoor golf facilities, it was determined that 20 units were the equivalent of 18 outdoor holes, giving the club 36 holes in all. The indoor facilities will be posh in keeping with the present clubhouse. The units will be set in pan-

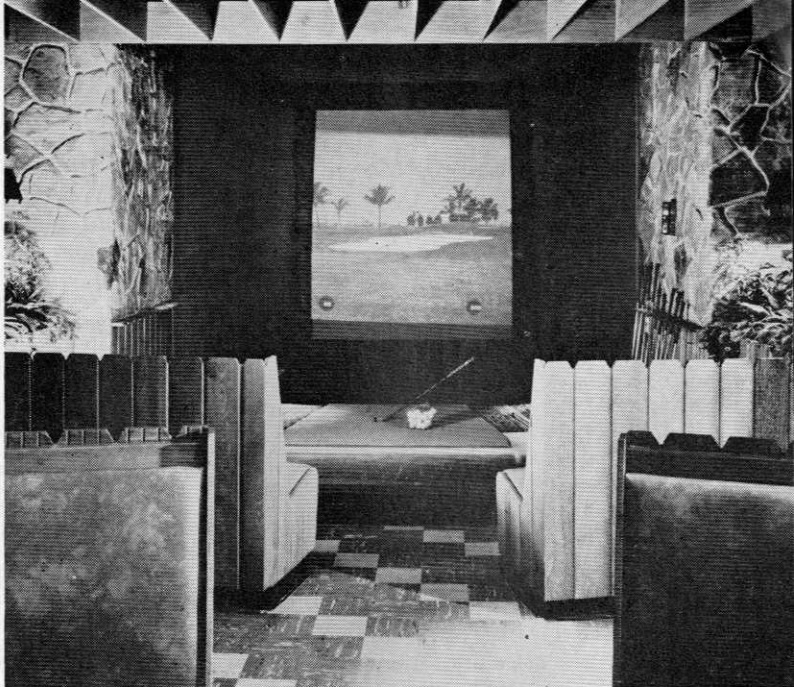
way

elled recesses, amid lush, thick green carpeting.

An important added source of revenue to the club will be derived from the bar and restaurant kept open to accommodate the indoor players — two waitresses will be assigned to this area.

Besides seasonal situations, the units have been the solution for land shortage problems. At the St. Ann's Country Club near St. Louis, the play was so heavy that the club faced adding another nine or moving the course. The situation was further complicated in that there was not enough adjacent acreage to build another nine, and the location—next to McDonnell Aircraft—was too good to abandon. (The aircraft plant's 40,000 workers comprise the heaviest part of the play at the golf course.)

Charles Vatterott, who owns the club, has built a 10-unit facility, or the equivalent of another nine holes. The workers on the night shift can now play at any time. Also, the indoor golf units will be open 18 hours a day to accommodate all shifts.



A typical GOLFOMAT unit. Through use of a 35-mm film, which show slides of each hole photographed at 10-yard intervals, the movie screen, on which the distance of the shot is shown, and the modular transistorized computers, golfers can "play" a round on Pebble Beach, Doral, or Congressional. A foursome will complete 18 holes in about two and one-half hours. The machine can also be set up to function as an automatic driving range.

Because of the extensive anticipated play, Vatterott estimates that his investment will be returned within 18 months or less. (Neither the St. Ann's or Lakeside's figures include the additional revenues from the pro shop or restaurant-bar sales which could reduce the return period by as much as six months.)

There are still some professionals like Dick Drennen, president of the Wisconsin PGA, who prefer an in-town location for teaching. Dick's GOLFOMAT facility is located in a shopping center in Madison, where it is most convenient for women shoppers.

Drennen believes the golf unit is a boon for teaching and estimates that novices learn 20 per cent faster on the machine. Also, they don't have the frustration of looking for lost balls. ●