

# Put a woman in your shop

By Max Brown

*Your profits will increase with a person who can sell both your lady members as well as the men.*



**A** woman's place is in the pro shop. This successful professional feels that many of his brother pros are missing the boat by not having a lady merchandiser.

"A man can sell to another man, but not to a woman. A woman can sell to a man or a woman." So says Bob Wolfe, head professional at Middlebay CC in Oceanside, New York.

"Years ago, all a pro had to do to open his shop was invest \$5,000 in balls, clubs, bags and a few shirts," Bob points out. "Suddenly, golf started growing, and, with family memberships, many clubs now have, as we do, as many as 250 lady members in addition to 350 male members. Today, the pro has to stock his shop with \$30,000 or \$40,000 in merchandise to satisfy the needs of the members, and particularly the ladies.

"I have found," Wolfe says, "that a lady merchandiser can sell anything except hard goods—which my assistant, Jimmy Corrigan, or I handle—and she can sell easier than a man. It's also a pleasant fact of merchandising that men like to be sold by a woman. So your

lady saleswoman is not just restricted to sales to the ladies."

Working from this premise, Wolfe has had a woman working in his pro shop all during his three years at Middlebay. The results have been amazing. Over-all apparel sales have been excellent, with one-third of his gross sales, he estimates, coming from ladies.

"There is definitely a place for a woman in the pro shop today," says Wolfe. "However, some pros get quite irritated, whenever you mention the idea to them. They're simply used to having a man there—someone they can ask to go out to the back room to get a bag. Obviously, you can't ask a woman to do that. But she *will* earn her salary in a million other ways."

Bob has been fortunate in having the help of his wife, Paula. "At my previous club," he points out, "she ran the ladies' apparel for me. But now, we have two young children, and she only works weekends." So Wolfe hired another woman, Mrs. Millie Florea, to help out, primarily with the selling of ladies' apparel, during the week.

"A key point to remember,"

says Wolfe, "is that the wife is the buyer in the family. So, why not aim your merchandising towards her?"

This is exactly what Wolfe has done in having both his wife and Mrs. Florea handling the sales and buying of ladies' apparel.

In the over-all atmosphere of his shop, subtle, indirect lighting accents the colors of outfits on counters, in displays and on mannequins which dot the shop displaying both men's and ladies' outfits. Soft hi-fi music unobtrusively plays in the background. The "hardware-store" look is gone. Of course, the clubs, bags and other golf tools are there, but the main stress, at least in display, is on clothes for the well-dressed golfer.

On the subject of display, Bob has some strong views. "You should change your displays weekly," he says. "Your members come out to the club every weekend at least. So, Friday is the day you should change the displays in the showcases and on the mannequins. Every week you must have a different 'look.' Otherwise, if you let it go for a month at a time,

Bob Wolfe, Mrs. Florea (center) and Mrs. Wolfe work as a close-knit team to operate the pro shop as efficiently as possible.



your members will just walk through the shop without stopping."

Here again, it's the woman's touch about the shop that is so important, Wolfe feels. "In shops I visit, I can always tell whether there is a woman employed there, because of the many things that only a woman would do. Besides keeping everything spotless and tidy, a woman always has time for those little, artistic touches that would never occur to a man. My wife puts flowers in our shop. What man would ever think of that?"

"Also, the displays are always professional. Somehow, women can coordinate the colors of an outfit on a mannequin much better than the average man. I'm from the 'new school' of golf pros," says Bob. "The 'old school' taught golf all day. I feel that the money is made in the shop, not on the lesson tee."

"Even when I was in college (Duke University for one and a half years, then finishing up at U.S.C., Calif.)," says Wolfe, "I realized this. I therefore took extra courses in merchandising, business leadership and public speaking.

"But I honestly believe you must have a good woman in the shop to sell the soft goods to the ladies—and many of the men. You have to have a soft goods buyer and seller on the ladies' side and many pros just don't have the time or sometimes the knowledge to adequately handle the job."

Wolfe first discovered the value of having a woman in the shop several years ago, when he worked under a married couple at an Illinois club. "The wife could really sell," he recalls, "and I saw right then that this was the answer to running a successful shop. I've talked to other pros since then who have failed in regard to selling ladies' apparel, and I feel it's because they don't have anyone who knows what the ladies want, and then how to sell it. Most any pro can sell clubs and bags—that's his business—but few can sell a lady a sweater or a blouse."

Wolfe believes in letting his lady merchandisers have almost complete charge of their department, from buying the merchandise to setting up the displays. In fact, the two women make occasional

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*Top left:* Mrs. Florea never misses a chance to keep shop neat. Sweater rack shows sweaters to best advantage. Note neat club and bag display in rear.

*Top right:* Personal attention is a rule of the shop. Wall partition behind can be used to display apparel while giving the hat area a note of intimacy.

*Bottom:* Perforated wall behind counter is used for display. Apparel in counter is changed weekly to create interest. At left is Jimmy Corrigan, assistant pro.

## woman in your shop

Continued

trips into New York and go directly to the company showrooms to see the entire line. "I give them a budget," Wolfe says, "and then they go from there."

Mrs. Wolfe and Mrs. Florea have found that the ladies usually buy complete outfits, and they in turn try to buy merchandise they feel will appeal to the lady members. This requires knowing the members well, and also necessitates carrying a big inventory.

"I'm fortunate that I have a warehouse within 10 minutes from the club where I can store merchandise," Bob says. "This enables me to fill an order often in a matter of minutes instead of days or even weeks."

Wolfe feels he is very fortunate to have such a fine membership at Middlebay. "Our members are very fashion conscious," says Bob. "They want the latest and best, both in colors and style. In a friendly way, they try to outdo each other in the clothes they buy. And our members are always so well dressed that I get a lot of apparel customers from other clubs."

To satisfy the needs of such a membership, Wolfe is naturally a great believer in assembling data on member's sizes, and preferences. In the main, Mrs. Wolfe and Mrs. Florea get the facts together on the lady members' needs, with Bob and his assistant, Jimmy Corrigan, making a study of the needs of the male member.

"I'll go down to New York and visit the fine men's stores that sell similar apparel to our shop," says Bob. "I'll ask them what is big in color and style for next year. My wife and Mrs. Florea are also constantly checking on the distaff side."

"Our theory is to deal mainly in quality merchandise," Wolfe explains. "But this doesn't necessarily mean the most expensive. We specialize in custom design, that is placing special orders for items in certain colors or special design."

By customizing the merchandise, our members get an exclusive item different from anything in any oth-



Personal service always appeals to customers. Above, Mrs. Wolfe carefully gift wraps a package, another added customer service.

er shop. The ladies, especially, really seem to appreciate this."

Bob points out that the only snag to these special orders is that it takes the manufacturer three to four months extra to make up these items for you. So early orders are really imperative.

To present the new line of apparel, Wolfe puts on an annual style show at the club. This is held at the ladies' opening luncheon, around April 15th, before the season opens on the first of May.

"My reason for showing only to the women is that it is very difficult to get the male members to attend a style show," explains Bob. "A man works all week, and on weekends he is anxious to play. But their wives aren't working, and can come to the show during the week."

"We usually have about eight lady members model for us," Wolfe says, "and then a couple of the assistant pros model the men's clothing. That gives the ladies some ideas for their husbands, and, surprisingly, we have almost as many sales in men's wear as women's at the open house after the show."

"The lady member gets together with my wife or Mrs. Florea in the shop, and when she has bought something for herself, she invariably will say something like, 'It's

selfish just to get something for myself. What have you got for my husband?' And they'll move over to the men's side of the shop right then and there. This holds true for sales made to lady members throughout the year."

"At our next fashion show," says Bob, "we are going to have a grandmother model. This is because the average age of the lady members is between 40 and 50. Here again," Wolfe stresses, "the importance of having a woman to coordinate the style show is vital, because most pros simply wouldn't have the knowledge to select the right clothes."

So successful has the show become that Wolfe gets around 250 lady members attending, with 50 of their guests from other clubs in the surrounding area.

During the height of the golf season is when Wolfe most appreciates his feminine help around the shop. "A pro just doesn't have the time that's needed to sell a woman apparel," he insists. "A woman wants to spend a lot of time looking and talking, and with the big demand on the pro's time, it just becomes impossible."

"I'd advise any pro to hire a woman to work for him," Wolfe says. "A lot of pros are afraid to lay out the money for this kind of help, but it will pay off in the end."

"Some say they don't have enough lady members, but a woman assistant can always help out with the books when she isn't busy. I believe there is always plenty to do around a pro shop, even if she isn't selling, and I think there should be a clear understanding that she will be available for such other duties when she is hired."

"Of course, it isn't easy to be a smart buyer," Bob adds. "So she will have to spend a lot of time choosing the items she wants to carry in the shop."

Finding the right lady for the pro shop is, of course, vital. "When I set out to find Mrs. Florea," says Bob, "I wanted someone familiar with ladies' sportswear, and, if



possible, a golfer too, who would understand when to sell, and, most important, when *not* to sell. I wanted a mature, attractive woman with a friendly, outgoing personality. (One pro I know lost his job over an argumentative woman.) It also helps if she has a good figure and can model the merchandise in the shop. This is a great form of advertising and both my wife and Mrs. Florea do this admirably. They also both play golf. "I think the best approach to finding such a woman is first to check with any pro who has a lady merchandiser working for him. She may very well have a friend with similar background and interests. You can also check the managers of ladies' sport apparel

shops, and ask if any ladies are looking for a position. Thirdly, an ad in the local or area newspaper will often turn up someone for the position."

Once you have your lady merchandiser, Wolfe feels it's important to give her an incentive. "In my own case," says Bob, "I pay a salary, plus bonus. Other pros pay a salary, plus commission on sales. But whichever way you do it, she must be motivated to sell."

"As to hours, many pros will find it necessary to have their lady merchandiser only on Tuesday (Ladies' Day) and Saturday and Sunday. Then it's vital to let your members know when she is available. Here at Middlebay, my two ladies split the work, with Mrs.

Florea coming in Tuesday through Friday, from 9-5:30 and my wife coming in on Saturdays and Sundays from 12-6.

"Of course, a pro can only do so much if his facilities are limited," Wolfe concedes. "If he doesn't have enough display space, storage room and good lighting, his shop simply isn't going to be attractive, and all the female help in the world won't change that. A lot of pros work under this handicap, and then they get labeled as poor merchandisers when it often isn't the case."

"However, if a pro has an adequate shop and good female clientele," says Wolfe, "he is really missing the boat, if he doesn't get a lady merchandiser." □

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