

It's cheaper to go first class

Bargain-hunting for country club needs is much like buying for the home or anywhere else—no matter what the product is, you can expect to get exactly what you pay for.

by Carl-Fredrik Saether

To my way of thinking, buying for a large country club is very similar to buying for the home. No matter what the product is, you can expect to get exactly what you pay for. This is especially true when it comes to food. You can never expect to get top quality results with bargain bought food—that is why I say quality is really your only bargain.

When you shop for quality, you can expect to pay a higher price, but regarding food, for example, you can be reasonably assured of having little or no waste when you buy the best. In order for a wholesaler who is higher priced to sell me a perfect case of, let's say, strawberries, melons or lettuce, he has to buy a larger quantity and sort out the good from the bad. If you buy bargains, you can expect to sort out the waste yourself and, in some cases, the waste can be quite a bit.

The same is true even in canned goods where actually waste does not pose any problem, but there are other reasons to buy quality. All of you, I'm sure, have been approached by people who claim they can sell you a particular canned good similar to the one you are now using, but for "10 cents a can cheaper." However, after pouring off the juice or syrup and then weighing the remaining contents, one quickly learns why the higher priced canned good was more expensive.

Of course, I have bought bargains on some food items and tried them out, but I can honestly say they have never worked for me. Fortunately, I am at a club where only the best is good enough for the members and, as long as they know I am striving to serve them the best, they do not mind paying a little more.

I learned very quickly in my career that the kitchen can't produce the best without having the best raw materials. I'll give you some examples and reasons why I am a firm believer in quality buying.

At Minikahda Club, I buy a large amount of fresh Maine lobsters during the course of a year. I have heard, "why not buy from so-and-so and you can save 25 cents a pound." I gave this a try and thought it was an accident when the first shipment arrived and the lobsters were not very good. So, I tried again but the same thing happened and I went back to the higher priced firm and was never again disappointed.

Actually, when lobsters are in the ocean, they are all pretty much the same, so why should one wholesaler charge more than another? This may sound odd to some, but captured lobsters must be kept happy and the wholesaler who takes extra precautions, does not crowd the lobsters, and sends you only the ones that are really alive, gets more

money. When I buy from this wholesaler, I have bought a bargain because I am serving a lobster that is the best.

There will, of course, be fluctuations in prices for all food items, and this is usually the case in fresh fruits. For instance, melons that cost \$4.00 a case today may be \$6.00 a case next week because of weather conditions or transportation, but you have to gamble on this. If you think the price is too high, don't buy them. Wait until the price comes down and it is doubtful that even the most critical member will notice the absence of his favorite.

I am also a firm believer that you can not run a model country club from an office. You must be your own catering manager, always being around the scene, checking, tasting, supervising. This assures you that the members are going to get only what you personally feel is the very best quality. You must be on top of your operation at all times.

In the same sense, you can not be a smart buyer over an office telephone. You buy in conference with the staff and other important staff members and committee chairmen, and by checking things until you are positive that firms you buy from will only bring you the best. It's also a good idea to discuss your buying tactics and procedures with

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other club managers in your area from time to time. You can help each other a great deal.

Actually, you, as a club manager, have a distinct advantage over an average eating establishment as regards to being assured quality. A wholesaler likes to tell prospective buyers that one of his top accounts is the "Ultra-Plush" Country Club, and they usually are so afraid of losing this prestigious account that, if you demand the best, you will get the best.

Quality buying should not only pertain to food but should carry through the entire country club complex. When considering such small items as a clothes hanger or a large purchase such as new carpeting, you will save money in the long

run if you buy the best, because the best will look better to start and also last much longer.

ment consulting a qualified rug expert. Let him meet with the board and help you in the selling act. When you are given the green light to buy, the most valuable advice I can pass along to you is to be sure you buy an extra amount and also have the rug laid in narrow strips for easier moving. Make sure that there is a provision made with the installers that they will come and stretch the carpet after about two months and then come and re-stretch it again after about six months. A rug not properly stretched will wear out much faster.

You also want to be sure to move the rug around periodically so you will get even wear. In areas of heavy traffic, and especially stairways, move the rug at least every six months even if it does not ap-

I also believe that one-colored carpets are not practical for a country club. In a rug with a pattern, you do not see the spots, stains or cigarette burns as easily, thereby reducing the money you would normally have to spend for shampooing.

Now, you may be asking if I always buy only the higher-priced top quality items, won't this mean that I must charge ultra-high prices in order to show a profit? I am aware that country club managers, with few exceptions, are expected to show a profit in their operation, but my answer to the above question would have to be, "No, you do not have to charge ultra-high prices if you specialize in quality."

Buying quality does mean, however, that the entire operation must have closer supervision by the manager. You must not only watch the buying of the goods and the preparation to see that leftovers are kept at a minimum or well taken care of, but you must also keep an eye on the payroll.

You want only enough staff to provide efficient service. There are, of course, times when you are prepared to serve 200 people and you get 300 people. This is where having a well-trained, high-quality staff, efficient in all phases of the operation, can pull you out of the jam. It will pay you to have this type of staff, which of course, will cost you more in individual salaries, but believe me, they will be more than worth it.

You must have good help if you are going to succeed and, if you treat and pay your help right, they will take care of you. Personally, I would rather pay one good man a top salary than pay two mediocre men a mediocre salary. It is just another case of getting exactly what you pay for.

You must also use good judgement when it comes to buying. For instance, if you have reason to believe that the price of china, or perhaps silverware, may go up shortly, you will be wise to investigate the matter and, if you have space to store the merchandise and the club can afford such a purchase,



run if you buy the best, because the best will look better to start and also last much longer.

I would like to dwell on the subject of carpeting since this usually turns out to be one of the club's most expensive projects. Now, I am assuming that you will only think quality as far as new carpeting is concerned and I also am aware that the club's board of directors may sometimes be reluctant to spend too much money. The manager must then turn salesman and convince the board of the importance of having quality carpeting. It is up to you to do it.

To begin with, I strongly recom-

pear to be wearing. You know it is wearing, especially if it is where spikes are allowed to be worn.

Re-arrange the furniture occasionally to change the flow of traffic, and if an area becomes very worn, this is where you were wise to have purchased the extra amount. You will now be able to replace the area of worn carpeting and not have to spend thousands of dollars to buy an entirely new rug. It might not even be a bad idea at this point to show the board how they just saved thousands of dollars by having allowed you additional money to buy the extra carpeting in the first place.

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then by all means, buy it now.

As you can see, my idea of a bargain is not the same as in the dictionary which explains a bargain as, "something which is purchased cheaply." As far as I am concerned, when something has a "sale price" tag on it, it is merely the price for which the merchandise should have been sold in the first place.

I have mentioned some of the reasons why I buy only quality goods and I hope I have been able to convince you of the value and importance of doing so. Perhaps the best reason of all for buying quality, however, is that your members soon learn that they are getting the best for their money. Stress quality not only in your menu but in your entire operation and you will not need quantity.

Personally, I do not believe in featuring a large menu at Minikahda as this means buying and storing a

lots of frozen foods. The only thing featured on my menu that is frozen is game and fresh fish. My menu is small but the quality is there. My members know they are getting the best.

When they get the best, they usually are happy. Happy members do not complain and this makes for happy working conditions. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR—Born in Oslo, Norway, 54-year-old Carl-Fredrik Saether came to the United States in 1956 after spending several fruitful years learning and practicing the hotel and restaurant business throughout Europe. He is a graduate of Oslo Junior College, attended business colleges in Oslo and London and also is a graduate of a special hotel school in Grenoble, France. In addition to English and Norwegian, he also speaks

German and French fluently. He has worked at luxury hotels throughout Europe, spent time as a waiter on luxury steamers and was instrumental in helping open the famous La Belle Sole Restaurant in Oslo. He is a former manager of the Dombass Turist Hotell in Dombass, Norway, and later purchased this hotel where his wife now serves as manager. Saether spent several years teaching the hotel and restaurant business in Europe and today he is frequently called upon to teach in this country. In addition to cooking, his favorite hobbies include skiing, figure and speed skating. He is a former member of the Norwegian Olympic figure and speed skating team and also has served as an Olympic judge and referee. He has been the manager of the Minikahda Club in Minneapolis since April, 1962.

How to hire a pro

by
Russ Osgood

The conference table at a country club, is, relatively speaking, just as important as the board room of a large corporation. One important piece of business transacted at the club's table is the form of agreement on terms between the club, as employer, and the professional, as employee.

Whether a club or employer is hiring a pro for his abilities in playing, teaching, public relations or merchandising, the most important preliminary is that the employer produce a piece of paper outlining the pro's (1) estimated income, (2) duties or responsibilities, (3) conduct, (4) eligibility for club's hospitalization, vacation and retirement programs and (5) terms for concluding

employment. The piece of paper doesn't have to be a contract—it could be a pact, bond or agreement.

When a club is going to hire a capable and respected golf professional, the employer must have sufficient knowledge of the shop operation to make a good estimate of the income to be expected. A rough estimate will not suffice, since income from club storage, car rentals, lessons and merchandise sales will vary. A poor estimate can lead to trouble, as some clubs have learned. Should a pro do a good job for the club and top the estimated income, this, then, should be treated as a bonus for his services.

Widely varying opinions are expressed on the duties required and conduct expected of a pro. In setting forth rules, the club must establish a code that, if fully observed, will promote the golfing atmosphere desired by most of the members. A written outline of these rules will make the pro fully aware of his responsibilities.

Whether a club wants or allows

a pro and his employees to participate in its hospitalization, vacation, retirement and other fringe programs is the club's concern. It would seem, however, that if the pro is to be treated as an employee, without a contract, than he should be eligible to benefit from all these programs as are other employees of the club. If a contract is involved, it again becomes the decision of the club to allow participation. Any benefit offered should be put in writing, with the pro given an option to participate.

If the pro has a contract with the club, duration of employment should be established. When no contract is involved, some other piece of paper must be provided to give the pro protection for the \$15,000 to \$50,000 inventory on hand should his dismissal be abrupt. This is a delicate situation and must be arranged so that neither party is "holding the sack" to such an extent as to restrict future action. In most instances, the pro can return balls, clubs and bags to their respective vendors for credit. Soft goods,

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