



Accent on management

by Ken Emerson *Executive Director, National Club Association*

Isolation, once a major problem for golf clubs, has largely succumbed to progress.

It isn't only the logistics of supplying food and equipment that have been solved by modern technology, but the members to use—and pay for—the clubhouse and golf course that has been solved by new developments and trends in transportation, food technology, communications, and management techniques.

Twenty years ago I played a round of golf near Lincoln, Nebraska; hardly what we think of as an "isolated area" today. The weather was delightful, but there was no one on the course. Neither the dining room nor the grill were open in the clubhouse, there were no caddies, no golf carts. The pro shop was open, but there was no pro. It was a short, nine-hole course; the fairways were like brown roughs, the greens were wet packed sand. But it was a private golf club; the only one in the area.

Last February I attended a meeting at Roswell Country Club in New Mexico, a place not easy to reach even today. I knew the area better as part of the Billy the Kid legend and was doubtful about the quality of the facilities I would find. Expectations were not raised by the flight in (five stops between Dallas and Roswell) or the landscape. The single overpowering impression is an endless flat dry land broken only rarely by string-straight roads and twisting dry riverbeds. The dominant color is brown, varied occasionally by black buttes and low, rearing cliffs.

I wasn't even reassured by the landing at Hobbs, New Mexico. Hobbs Country Club which parallels the airport there was sparkling, immaculate, and busy, but I knew that manager W.L. "Pete" Gillespie had the reputation of doing the impossible.

However, the reality of Roswell

Country Club was, and is, an experience and a revelation. It is an example of what country clubs in remote areas can accomplish with the resources that are available today.

The clubhouse is not imposing, but fits into the land on which it is built. The interior is cool and comfortable; furnishings are tasteful, colors are restful.

Developments in building materials and engineering permit the club, through imaginative use of partitions, folding walls, glass, and drapes, to serve large club functions and intimate dinners with equal ease in an atmosphere of spacious comfort. Good management makes it possible to handle them with a small basic staff.

To enable it to appeal to the widest possible membership, Roswell incorporates nearly all the facilities of the larger country clubs. In addition to its golf course, it sports two tennis courts, swimming, sport fishing, and even an historic landmark; the oldest house in Chavez county. The picture windows in the dining room look out across a lake well stocked with bass and sunfish and a green, well manicured golf course.

Yes, this golf course in a land where water is obviously in short supply is green. Modern technology makes available abundant effluent water from the city's wastes.

To illustrate how well they have retained membership support, president Sim Christy points out that the club is still financially sound and used to near capacity in spite of the recent closing of Walker Air Base, one of the town's major sources of income over the past years.

Much of the success of Roswell Country Club—indeed, of any country club in an outlying community—must be credited to a combination of good management and modern

transportation and communication.

Roswell's manager, Ed Ehmann, is consistently challenged in his efforts to maintain member interest and club usage, but inexpensive direct dial telephones and fast air freight make it possible for him to surprise his members with live Maine lobsters and Chesapeake Bay oysters.

Ed's managerial skills are tested in many other ways as well. Staffing, always a problem in an area of limited population, is partially solved by maintaining a small nucleus of permanent employees who are trained to fill two or more positions.

Advance planning is a necessity, both for major purchases of staples and equipment and for entertainment, tournaments, and other club functions.

In many other respects managing a small golf club requires even more individual management skills than does running a larger club. In order to keep abreast of trends and new developments, managers in New Mexico are now making a point of getting together on a statewide basis; no small feat when you consider the distances to be traveled.

During my stay at Roswell, 14 clubs managers and nearly as many club officers met to compare notes and gather the latest information on minimum wage regulations, tax laws, and the latest in accounting procedures.

In New Mexico, the golf courses themselves are a tribute to the advances the science of agronomy has made in developing heat resistance strains of grass that can survive the extremes of temperatures that prevail in the area and still provide adequate playing surfaces that will stand up under heavy usage.

And, of course, transportation again makes it all possible by increasing the mobility of the pop-

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ulation and making the club available to residents from a wide area.

Mobility also plays a major role in the story of the success of clubs in other parts of the country.

Consider Sankaty Head Golf and Boat Club on Nantucket Island off the coast of Massachusetts. Yacht clubs are not unusual in this area, but only modern transportation and technology makes golf possible. It also causes some unusual problems.

Two of the basic means of reaching the club, whether for a round of golf or for dinner, are boats and airplanes. Here, both the foursome on the first tee and the guests arriving for dinner are at the mercy of the weather.

Manager Peter Berrini has had more than one party cancelled by bad flying weather and more than one tournament lost to off-shore fog.

Staffing is even more of a problem at Sankaty Head than it is in other areas. Not only must the club provide living quarters for its employees, but it must plan their maintenance on a seven day a week basis; for recreation on days off as well as work days—almost like having a club for employees as well as for members.

Sankaty Head also discovered a unique solution to its caddy problem when a caddy camp was organized on the island.

Privately operated, the caddy camp not only provides a vacation spot for its occupants, but caddies for the clubs and a chance for the boys to earn some money as well.

One fact seems evident from the activity at these clubs. Their managers, by their imaginative thinking and their evident skills, make it apparent that they need stand aside for no one when it comes to management skills. And their clubs might be wise to insure that they do not loose them to their big city brethren. □

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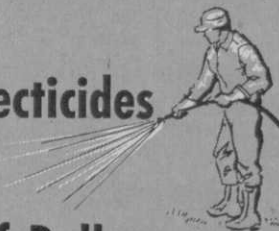
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