

A New Brand of Pro

By RON RUTHFIELD

The emergence of planned communities and condominiums has brought a new type of golf course to the traditional list. Pros who accept positions at these establishments are likely to encounter some unique conditions and problems



Don Kay, a club professional for the last 12 years, discovered a whole new world of golf when in 1967 he accepted the position as golf professional at Heritage Village CC in Southbury, Conn.

On paper, the club is similar to other New England layouts—golf shop, restaurant, cocktail lounge, 18 holes, 6,900 yards, driving range, putting green and plenty of players. But upon closer inspection, Heritage Village CC becomes one of the most unusual professional situations anywhere.

First, the club is part of the national award-winning planned adult community Heritage Village (1967 First Honor Award by the American Institute of Architects), set in the rolling hills of west-central Connecticut, where fairways wind their way through what used to be the property of pianist-comedian Victor Borge and inventor Alfred Krueger. So the village has attracted many residents who at one time or another have been members at "some of the finest golf clubs in the country," says Kay. Other residents are exposed to the course because many of the \$25,000 to \$42,000 clustered homes line the fairways.

Second, being a club pro at a planned unit development in itself is still a relatively new position. Add to that the condominium ownership in the community, and you wind up with even more of an exceptional situation.

Third, memberships at the village's golf club are increasing at the mind-boggling rate of about 100 a year, which automatically results in merchandising, teaching and staff modifications.

And fourth, the very ages of the majority of Kay's students indicate that Heritage Village is a dynamic, viable and recreation-oriented adult community, even though one of the residents in each home must be 50 years old or over in order to live there.

Kay figures that most of his be-

ginning students are about 55 years old and some "are playing golf for the first time in their lives. It's almost unbelievable to see so many of them develop into such fine players. Like the woman who picked up an eight-iron and drove her ball 90 yards straight down the middle. Not that hitting a golf ball 270 feet with an eight-iron is so extraordinary, except that this particular woman was 76 years old and was on a golf course for the first time in her life!"

Kay tries to implant an attitude of fun in these lively members, who didn't know a fairway from a freeway before they moved to Heritage Village. "Enjoy, enjoy," preaches Kay, "and most of them are on the course for nothing more than that. They're not interested in becoming scratch players, so it makes it easier on everyone. But for them to enjoy the game, they not only have to know the basics of playing but the rules of etiquette. So that's where I place heavy emphasis while giving them lessons."

The 35-year-old Kay feels it is of major importance to get out and play with as many different members as possible, especially when there are such vast numbers of new members as compared to other clubs where there might be only five or 10 additional memberships in an entire year. "Not only can I make the members relatively new to the game feel more comfortable, but playing at least three rounds a week with the beginners allows me to learn their games so I can match them with compatible partners."

Kay says memberships never have to be promoted because "as the village builds more units, we get additional members," even though there is a membership fee. Of the approximately 650 units now occupied at the 1,000-acre community—one-fourth the number expected to be built, when it is completed in 1972—about 200 have family member-

Continued



Don Kay (above) works out of a reconverted barn (left) which serves as the pro shop. The light fixture, wooden golf display racks and apparel display rack, although modern, enhance the rustic atmosphere.

NEW BRAND

Continued

ships at the country club. Another 100 memberships come from golfers living in neighboring communities, although memberships are no longer open to anyone living outside the village.

In addition to giving group golf clinics to women members in the spring—once a week to beginners and once a week to advanced players—Kay also utilizes a comparatively new technique in teaching during the winter months. Inside the activities building, which houses meeting rooms, auditorium, exercise room, sauna and whirlpool, he gives individual lessons via a videotape camera, equipped with instant replay to visually show the student what he is doing right and wrong. The acceptance has been great, he says, because it not only gives a member the opportunity to keep aware of his game, but gives him a chance to improve it even though there might be six inches of snow on the golf course.

When the snow finally clears, however, Kay readies the golf operation to handle the increasing numbers of members and guests.

“At a community like Heritage Village we get more use out of the course since many of the residents play during the week, enabling us to handle more members than the average layout. The members who didn’t have a chance to play over the weekend will almost definitely come out sometime during the week.”

During heavy days, 175 to 200 players will tee off. “So we have to keep the pace moving all the time. We use three starting points—the 1st, 10th and 12th tees. To expedite play, we normally send the slower players out to the 12th and make maximum use of our electric cars.”

One might consider Kay, not only the professional, but the golf director as well. His responsibilities include overseeing the once-a-week men’s tournaments and the once-a-month special tournaments; with his assistant pro Steve MocKovak and two other assistants to help handle bookkeeping and merchandising, Kay takes charge of everything from scheduling to starting to scoring the tournaments.

Recognizing his specialized, above-50 market, Kay gears his golf shop to more conservative merchandise than most other

clubs. “I keep away from off-beat styles and try to maintain enough of an inventory that serves the entire village, non-golfers included. My prices are competitive enough so that potential customers don’t have to go out of the village to pick up a sweater, skirt or pair of slacks. I try to maintain many lines and several grades of equipment, whether they’re pro-only or less expensive lines for new players.” Most of Kay’s spring and summer buying is done at the Professional Golfers’ Assn. Merchandise Show in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., in January; he depends on direct salesmen contact for fall purchases.

Final testimony in describing Kay’s unusual position is his headquarters—a reconverted barn, silo and all. The structure once belonged to Alfred Krueger and now houses men’s and women’s locker rooms; sauna bath; snack bar; space for storing, cleaning and repairing equipment; and golf shop. Although the original walls of the barn are still standing, floors have been added where necessary. Fixtures such as shelves, lockers and club racks are made in the nearby carpentry mill. The silo is used as an observation tower to look out over the course, which opened for play in 1967.

Kay thinks the opportunities for club pros will increase greatly as more and more planned developments are built, since many developers are beginning to realize the value of having a golf course right on the property. In fact, Papparazzo, Heritage Corp., developers of Heritage Village, are also building the 400-acre Heritage Woods condominium golf community in Avon/Farmington, Conn., as a result of their success in Southbury.

But just as important as professional opportunity is that the sport is being exposed to thousands of people who probably would never have had the chance to play the game if Heritage Village had never been built. □



The exterior of the pro shop conforms with the country atmosphere of Heritage Village.