



WAYS TO BUILD GOLF COURSE/ COMMUNITY RELATIONS

By Jerry A. Olson
Associate Editor

Clubs that expect the community to grant open land, tax concessions will find themselves obliged to return something to the community. Here's how some clubs are doing it—and it's less trouble than you think

For many years, the golf course has provided a haven of tranquility for its members away from the everyday rat race. Superintendents, professionals and club managers were expected to concentrate solely on serving the club members. Catering to the non-golfing public in the surrounding community wasn't necessary.

But times are changing, and unless golf courses can make an evolutionary transition to meet the needs of the surrounding community, they may be forced into revolutionary changes which could rock the very foundations of their existence.

The revolution has already begun.

Public enemy number one—the property tax—has forced scores of golf courses throughout the nation in the past three years to close their doors and move out of the city to areas with more favorable tax climates, or to just sell to real estate developers.

However, legislators, reacting to public outcry over the loss of greenery surrounding urban landscapes, have passed favorable property tax legislation for golf courses in some states, thereby dangling an attractive solution to the tax menace.

The success of the golf course to obtain or keep this favorable tax legislation will be determined by how well it can become an integral part of the surrounding community. The adoption by golf clubs of some form of community relations program becomes more necessary as attacks on the exclusivity of clubs and charges of discrimination emanate with greater frequency from local legislators as well as national figures. Even consumer's champion Ralph Nader recently unleashed a volley of charges against country clubs.

Nader charged that country clubs in Maryland, which may discriminate, are receiving preferential tax concessions by being assessed as green belt, open spaces or agricultural property as opposed to assessment based on "highest and best use." He asks why should the public subsidize, by making up the shifted tax burden, exclusive country clubs in which they cannot belong? In this case, Nader contends, golf courses are actually getting something and not giving anything in return, because the open spaces which they provide are fenced, preventing the public from enjoying any of the benefits of the open spaces they are paying for.

Currently, California, Hawaii, Minnesota, Washington, Wisconsin

and Virginia join Maryland with preferential tax legislation for golf courses. Other states, such as Oregon, are considering legislation to relieve property taxes. However, unless golf courses can respond to mounting attacks of discrimination and exclusivity by instituting programs and activities designed to make the community aware of the benefits of their continued existence, then preferential tax legislation for golf courses will not receive public support

GOLFDOM has found examples of superintendents, professionals and club managers who have effective community relations programs and, incredibly, they do not involve a loss of exclusiveness, or a great deal of time or expense—only dedication and commitment.

A superintendent has many opportunities available to him in the area of community relations. Perhaps the most far-reaching and the one which receives the greatest opposition is setting aside a small portion of unused land for strollers and picknickers. This has been undertaken by several golf courses, and any misgivings about the golfers and strollers getting in each other's way has never materialized. Meadowhills CC in Nogales, Ariz., allows the public access to its 800 acres, including its 18-hole private golf course, for strolling. Main attraction is bird watching.

"Nature enthusiasts abound," Smiley Rodriguez, pro-manager of Meadowhills, says. "They are very considerate of golfers and stick to the marked paths."

Desert Island CC in Palm Springs, Calif., opened up their course to bird watchers and still maintain an 18-hole private golf course within its 160 acres. According to Walt Sibbert, president of Desert Island, when developing the course, 25 acres of lakes were created using 40 million gallons of water. Migratory waterfowl have become attracted to this sanctuary. Sibbert estimates that as many as 5,000 birds and waterfowl have "stopped over" at Desert Island at one time. Members of the Audubon Society and nature lovers in general have spotted a multitude of species of ducks and other birds from their viewing points around the golf course.

Jim Estep, Tantallon CC, Tantallon, Md., has been accepting requests from the Boy Scouts for sev-

eral years to use the golf course for overnight campouts. "The boys are supervised and are extremely considerate of the natural beauty of the golf course," Estep says. "They pitch their tents in unobtrusive places and never go near the greens."

Superintendents not prepared to take that big a plunge in community relations can still make significant contributions to their surrounding community. Superintendents in

Superintendents

1. Conduct free clinics for homeowners on lawn care and pesticide use.
2. Discuss benefits of golf course for the community (dust control, soil conservation, ecology) to community groups.
3. Work with extension services, agricultural groups and city park personnel in testing new seed strains and sample planting.
4. Work with colleges and universities developing curriculum and classes in agronomy.
5. Provide on-the-job training programs for golf course mechanics or agronomy students.
6. Set aside unused portion of land for picknickers and strollers.
7. Arrange nature walking trails away from the golf course.
8. Write columns on lawn care for local newspapers.

Professionals

9. Conduct free golf clinics for local youth groups, disadvantaged youths and handicapped persons.
10. Conduct free golf lessons and clinics for school golf teams.
11. Conduct golf clinics for local park and recreational districts.
12. Provide old or donated golf equipment to local youths.
13. Allow disadvantaged youths playing privileges free with a club member in supervision.
14. Conduct charitable events and tournaments at your club.
15. Participate in charitable events and tournaments.

Club managers and the membership

16. Make facilities available to charitable organizations.
17. On off-days or at specified times, allow non-member disadvantaged youths use of the pool and tennis courts with a member in supervision.
18. Offer price discounts for events of charitable organizations with cooperation from distributors.

Everyone

19. Become involved with community service organizations.
20. Provide on-the-job training programs and summer jobs for youths.
21. Keep news media informed on all of the above activities.

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Community relations

continued

Oregon have a very positive approach to community relations. Some superintendents, such as Kim Jones at Pleasant Valley GC, work with the Oregon GCSA in educating the public in the use of chemicals and pesticides. Jones has conducted free clinics for homeowners on lawn renovation and general maintenance through the county extension service. He is also preparing a series of beautiful slides for community groups and garden clubs on the enhancement of the golf course to the environment. Rogue Valley CC near Medford, Ore., works with the Oregon State Department of Agriculture in testing seed strains and sample plantings. Some superintendents write articles or a regular column in newspapers on lawn care.

John Zoller, superintendent at Eugene CC, considered one of Oregon's finest, has earned considerable respect from both the golfing and non-golfing public for his contributions throughout the Pacific Northwest with other superintendents in developing and adapting new strains of grass. Zoller was instrumental in acquainting many parks and playgrounds with strains of ryegrass used on golf courses in the area. The board of directors at Eugene CC provides financial support for Zoller to employ and train agronomy students from Oregon colleges on an intern program, thereby creating future turf managers.

In their contacts with the public, the superintendents mentioned emphasized the importance of a golf course to the community ecologically, including soil conservation, temperature and dust control, production of oxygen and sound absorption.

Individual golf professionals have also adopted community relations programs. Many professionals conduct clinics at a nominal fee through park and recreation districts for beginning, intermediate and advanced golfers. Perhaps the most unselfish contributions of many golf professionals in the United States are exemplified by two professionals, 3,000 miles apart.

In California, Norm Goodmanson, Westlake Village GC, has initiated a golf teaching program aimed at rehabilitating delinquent boys. Once a week, Goodmanson conducts free lessons for young boys from California correctional institutions.

A similar, but independent undertaking by a golf professional in New York is also worthy of note.

John Consiglio, owner and operator of the Galvano Golf Academy in New York City and head professional at Glenmere CC, Chester, N.Y., has begun the first step of what he hopes will become a golf program as part of the curriculum in high schools throughout the United States: To teach golf to boys in the inner city.

Consiglio started a golf pilot program at John Jay High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. It is in the heart of a ghetto. Physically, he teaches approximately 50 boys the basics of the golf swing. But he also feels the courtesies and benefits of golf can go a long way towards shaping the future of his pupils. "The character-building amenities associated with golf can build a great atmosphere for these kids," Consiglio says. "They know that when playing golf they must be honest with themselves. If they cheat, they only cheat themselves. It is a sport where the individual can triumph and attain confidence in himself."

Consiglio also makes the boys aware of the opportunities for employment associated with golf; caddying, sales and maintenance. Although the boys have yet to get onto a golf course, Consiglio hopes that perhaps after they have received enough basic instruction, they will be able to play at some of New York's public courses free of charge under supervision.

Consiglio, along with members of his teaching staff Joe Liss, Dave Weber and Harold Weisblute, donate their time and equipment for this experimental venture. Consiglio feels they have received a great deal in return. One day 12 of the boys in the class came to the studio on a Saturday morning to practice and hit balls. After hitting balls, they tried to pay for use of the studio. Consiglio would have no part of that and offered subway tokens to reimburse them for their one-hour ride because he felt the kids couldn't afford it. "They strongly refused," he says, "and one boy said 'thank you, you've already done enough for us. I have really developed an interest and appreciation for golf. It has got me off the streets and I am now caddying on weekends and channeling my frustrations into the golf swing.'"

The number of tournaments sponsored by golf courses each year

are too numerous to mention. The West has the Bob Hope Desert Classic, The Midwest boasts the Onwentsia Pro-Am, and such clubs as the Suburban Club of Baltimore County (considered a "Jewish" club) host an annual tournament to benefit the Catholic Youth Organization in the Baltimore area.

PGA sections are also becoming actively involved in community relations programs. The Arizona chapter has a tremendous program working with handicapped persons. In Illinois a golf school sponsored by the Chicago Tribune has been attended by thousands of persons. The Illinois PGA has over 200 of its members serving as instructors for these clinics. Their services are donated.

Club managers have also become community relations oriented. Many private country clubs in the Midwest make their facilities available for charitable organizational activities. They also offer these groups a price break. Idlewild CC in Chicago has developed a strong cooperative educational program which has received support from the Chicago Club Managers Assn. They have a chef training program with the Washburne Trade School. In fact, the Chicago CMAA contributed \$1,000 to the school this year to train future chefs and club managers.

Of course, no program in community relations can be successful if the membership does not back up the superintendent, professional or club manager 100 per cent. Undertakings of any magnitude which will ultimately affect the club should be a cooperative venture among all members of the country club. Special emphasis must be placed on informing the membership that any community activities will not interfere with their privileges, but will enhance the image of their club within the community with a minimum of time and expense.

The tasks facing golf courses are not insurmountable. Criticism of private clubs, however, must be satisfactorily answered if they want favorable property tax legislation from the public, who ultimately must pick up the tab. The green belt argument is not strong enough to stand on its own.

Golf courses must prove to the members of their community that they are an asset to more than just a few golfers who enjoy their privileges. In effect, golf courses must become aware of the needs of the community and move to supply these needs. □