THE PRE-PLANNED COMMUNITY: GOLF'S NEW LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

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Golf courses at residential communities offer superintendents, professionals and managers greater fringe benefits. In this second of a two-part series, GOLFDOM examines the advantages and the disadvantages of working at these courses

Competent superintendents, professionals and managers are scarce, and if found, are generally rewarded by the club and given an opportunity to perform. Pre-planned community golf courses, however, suffer the image of offering low wages and strangling control on their golf course administrators.

This reputation is good and bad. Good—for club managers, superintendents and professionals, because their skepticism forces them to scrutinize the practices and policies of a land developer before accepting a position. Bad—for the land developer interested in attracting top caliber personnel and willing to pay for them. He has to overcome an image problem.

In the first part of this series presented in May (p. 64), GOLFDOM examined the land developer's point of view on the relationship of the golf course to the entire development. In this part, GOLFDOM examines the salaries, fringe benefits as well as the types of working relationships that superintendents, club managers and professionals can expect to encounter with the developer, with each other and with their memberships.

We might have looked solely at the Innisbrooks, Inverrarys and Deerwoods, developments backed by substantial financial outlays from large corporations that cater to the life style of the upper crest of society—and we did. The large developments can be generally classified as non-risk types for club officials, because they are operated similarly to large successful country clubs. The risk type (from an employment and opportunity standpoint) are also looking to attract superintendents, professionals and club managers. Here is a sampling of some of the advantages and disadvantages the three club officials have observed at land development golf courses.

Donald Davis, top photo, left, vice president, The Deerwood Club, discusses golf shop inventory with professional Manuel Pope. Pictured in the bottom photographs, left to right, are: William Lewis, director, Golf & Recreation Associates, Ellie Spinnell, manager, Gulf Gate, and William Schoenfield, superintendent, Killearn.

CLUB MANAGERS

The club manager has a tremendous opportunity to expand his position at a land development golf course. He can remain as a clubhouse manager, or if the situation changes and he is qualified, he can move up to general manager of the total golf facility. At a medium-sized development, about 1,000 to 3,000 acres and with a golf membership the size of a small country club, there will generally be only three administrators. An executive of the company building the development usually has the responsibility of coordinating the operations of the golf course with the rest of the development. He serves either as a general manager of the golf course or he may serve as a liaison between the course and the developer and appoint a member from the management team to be responsible for the course's over-all operation.

Ken Creely, president of the country club and recreational developments at Killearn Estates, Tallahassee, Fla., discusses opportunities for club managers at land developments: "I was a club manager at Cherokee CC, Knoxville, Tenn.," Creely says. "I received an opportunity to become general manager at the Killearn G&CC and recognized this as an opportunity for not only financial, but professional advancement. After proving to the developer that I was capable of handling my initial duties, I was given greater responsibilities in over-all recreation management within the company. As the development became successful," Creely says, "additional positions opened up, not only for the manager, but for the superintendent and professional as well."

Ellie Spinnell, manager of the Gulf Gate GC, Sarasota, Fla., has also benefited professionally from the management opportunities at pre-planned community golf courses. Initially a waitress at a club, she was given more responsibilities as her management abilities increased. Soon she was handling everything from public relations to bookkeeping and accounting. She received her first head managerial position at Gulf Gate, a private executive course.

The course is one of four executive courses managed by Golf and Recreation Associates Div. of First Development Corp.

"There are many opportunities in pre-planned community golf courses, both regulation and executive, for club managers and women," Ms. Spinnell says. "I was given the opportunity to use the knowledge I had acquired over the years working in clubs, and it has paid off for me."

"It has also paid off for FDC," William Lewis, vice president of FDC and director of Golf and Recreation Associates, says. "We offer a training ground for young club managers and assistants and then provide a program of upward mobility for them after they have attained greater managerial skills. For example," Lewis continues, "an assistant manager, professional or superintendent, or one with limited skills, may start at one of our executive courses. Our division builds and manages golf courses, both for ourselves and our parent corporation U.S. Home (which has 21 other divisions in addition to FDC), and other land developers. We also supply these facilities with trained personnel to staff these courses. As a person's skills increase, he may be transferred from an executive to a regulation course or be in charge of several executive courses."

Pay for club managers at most land development golf courses is comparable to that at country clubs. If the manager is in charge of the clubhouse only, salaries range from $11,000 to $15,000, depending, of course, on the size of the development and his responsi-

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bilities. For the general manager in charge of the total golf complex, salary ranges average from $14,000 to $25,000. Additional benefits for club managers generally include company-paid family hospitalization and major medical coverage, stock options and purchase plans in the company and also discounts on investments in land at the land development.

At non-regulation courses salaries are naturally lower, but fringe benefits are similar to large developments. However, a club manager may be in charge of running several non-regulation clubhouses in close proximity to each other.

The staff and budget of the clubhouse will vary greatly from development to development, depending on the emphasis they place on their dining facilities. Some developments actively compete with local area restaurants and try to attract the public. Other developments may have dining facilities for just members of the golf course and the development.

SUPERINTENDENTS

The pre-planned community offers the superintendents the most attractive prospects. He works for a profit-oriented, professionally-run company. They generally expect the golf course to be run the same way and hire the personnel to make it successful. The superintendent will generally have only one boss, either a general manager of the golf course or someone with the developer, not a club member. In most instances he will be allowed to work without interference from the company.

The average salary ranges for superintendents are from $7,000 at non-regulation facilities to $16,000 at regulation courses. If the superintendent oversees more than one course, then his salary is higher. Some superintendents, in addition to a regular salary from the land developer, also receive compensation from a homeowners association within the development. Most developments charge a monthly maintenance assessment. A portion of this may go to pay the superintendent for maintenance of curbings and right-of-ways throughout the development (not lawns). Another advantage for superintendents at land developments is their access to additional men and heavy equipment. If he needs to meet some disaster on the golf course he can draw upon the construction crew and equipment (such as a bulldozer or tree spade) that are setting up homesites for the developer.

Benefits other than salary for the superintendent can include:

☐ Rent-free house. One developer constructed a home on the golf course property especially for the superintendent.

☐ Company-paid hospitalization and major medical for himself and his family, and life insurance.

☐ Free vehicle, usually a truck for take-home transportation.

☐ Stock options in the company.

☐ Discounts on land purchases within the development.

For superintendent Mike Koss, Eaglehead G&CC, Lake Linganore, Md., pre-planned community golf courses are a two-sided coin. Koss was previously superintendent at another land development golf course that floundered. "At the previous course," Koss says, "our budget was totally inadequate for the degree of playability and quality which the developer expected. The superintendent was looked on as just a grass cutter. It soon became obvious to me and the other members of the management team that this development was not going to be successful because of their attitude toward the golf course and its personnel. It was a vicious cycle. We weren't given the money needed to maintain the course, consequently, the course had no hope of becoming self-supporting.

"After this unfortunate experience," Koss continues, "I was very careful in examining job opportunities at land development golf courses. This skepticism enabled me to examine the management philosophies of Eaglehead G&CC and the developer William Brosius, president of the Linganore Corp."

"Because the development is profit-oriented and the golf course must be self-supporting, the emphasis by the developer is on communications, both with himself and the other members of the management team," Barney Orr, superintendent at The Deerwood Club, Jacksonville, Fla., says. "Superintendents must be attuned to the problems of the other administrators. I ride the course on Tuesday and Friday mornings with golf professional Manuel Pope. He is able to give suggestions from a golf professional's viewpoint on current and potential problems, and I can give him feedback on any problems I have encountered."

There are bad land developments, just as there are bad country clubs, so the picture is not 100 per cent rosy.

Problems superintendents may face include poor communications with the other club administrators or the developer. There may be fluctuating maintenance budgets, because if the course loses money, the difference must come from the developer's pocket, not from assessments on members. Members may try to form green committees with more than just a liaison in mind.

One surprising instance uncovered while researching this article occurred at one reputable development. The superintendent received a very rewarding salary, had excellent fringe benefits and good working relationships with the other administrators and the developer. But he was barred from playing golf on the course he had to maintain. The explanation went something like, "What would our members think?"

GOLF PROFESSIONALS

The rewards of working at pre-planned community golf courses can also be received by golf professionals. However, professionals are usually the most reluctant of any of the management team to accept positions at these courses. Members at some developments have not supported the golf shop with the revenues the professional needs to make a living. Golf courses associated with retirement communities, with people on fixed incomes, have produced a modest lesson income, but almost no income from equipment or soft goods. There are also other recreational and social pursuits, so golf may not be the essential reason for living in the community.

Golf courses that are part of

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recreational developments in which the emphasis is on "second homes" provide patronage of the golf shop sometimes only two months out of the year. If the golf course is in a beautiful new development, the course may lack the membership necessary to support a fully-stocked pro shop.

Here are several examples of the arrangements under which golf professionals at several land developments work.

Golf Professional A:

☐ Base salary of $7,200.

☐ Percentage of gross sales: No investment on the professionals' part. The company owns all of the stock in the pro shop, but the professional, working within a budget, orders merchandise for the shop.

☐ Half of his lesson revenue.

☐ Percentage of the monthly dues: This is an incentive for the golf professional to encourage monthly memberships.

☐ Basic hospitalization and major medical furnished by the company. Insurance pays 100 per cent of first $600, 80 per cent thereafter up to $10,000.

☐ Life insurance furnished by the company.

☐ After a year of employment, the professional is eligible for profit sharing program.

☐ Non-contributory retirement program.

☐ All dues and expenses to PGA meetings paid by the company.

☐ Entitled to clubhouse discounts and discounts on land purchases in the development.

For the assistant professional: Base salary, half-lesson revenue, medical and hospitalization insurance, all paid by the company.

Golf Professional B:

☐ Base salary of $7,200.

☐ Percentage of golf car rentals and driving range fees.

☐ Total bag storage fees.

☐ Percentage of lockers.

☐ Furnishes all merchandise and receives all revenue from merchandise sales.

☐ Stock option purchase plans with the company.

☐ All lesson revenue.

☐ Group health insurance.

☐ Percentage of revenue from new memberships: Another incentive program to encourage professionals to attract new members.

☐ Company pays salaries of all assistant professionals needed by the professional;

Golf Professional C:

☐ Declining salary. Starts at $10,000 and as income from lessons and merchandise increases, salary decreases to base of $7,800.

☐ Must furnish all stock and receives all revenue from shop.

☐ Ten per cent of golf car revenue.

☐ All lesson revenue.

☐ Percentage of driving range. The assistant is paid by the company. The assistant receives a percentage of his pro shop sales from the head professional. This is an incentive program for the assistant to increase golf shop sales.

In some infant operations, where the professional may have a difficult time at the outset, the declining salary structure is an attractive guarantee. Additionally, one developer offers the professional a guaranteed wage—$16,500. If the net profit of the golf professional at year's end is $13,500, the company pays the professional $3,000. This protects the professional from financial ruin if weather, or a delay in opening the course, leave him with a substantial year-end inventory.

Professional Mike McGinnis, Eaglehead G&CC, has fought an uphill battle, which may be eased now that construction of a new $125,000 clubhouse and pro shop has just been completed.

"The golf professional is the public relations man for the entire development," McGinnis says. "This is why developers put strong emphasis on solid club professionals rather than big-name touring pros. It is very hard to sell memberships, initially," he says. "It is up to the professional to get the members, and he is usually rewarded by the developer when he does. You have to have support from non-residents of the community. It will take a few years before the development is able to draw strictly from the lot and homeowners. Consequently, you have a membership made up of lot owners and non-lot owners, each wanting preferential treatment. To attract members I sent a personal letter to known golfers in the area trying to alleviate their fears about the course being plowed under or poorly maintained."

Members of a pre-planned community golf course support the club, just the same as a country club member. One professional's monthly intake included: range balls—$162; golf cars—$6,115; apparel—$1,400; golf balls—$760; equipment—$1,519, and green fees—$3,701.

Joe Donadio, head professional at Killearn G&CC has great rapport with his members. "They have really supported the pro shop," he says. "They have a lot of tournaments and purchase all of the prizes from my shop. We have strong women's and junior program, and I offer golf clinics to generate enthusiasm." The members appear pleased. Last year they (not the company) paid for all expenses and sent him to Scotland and England.

We're not trying to make every land development golf course look like a Shangri-La. Working relationships and budgets are on an individual basis, just like at country clubs. Any club administrator going to a course with Cadillac tastes and a Volkswagen budget is destined to face problems.

However, as one club administrator put it, "Superintendents, professionals and club managers have little security in their fields. If they are capable and qualified, they will always be assured of a job as long as they are healthy. The wages may be good, but the fringe benefits are meager. As a result," he says, "they are job hopping looking for the club which pays the most money and offers the best benefits for the future. These new courses, residential communities with golf as part of a recreational amenity, are owned by large corporations with established employment and management practices. Even though they may be novices in the golf course field, they are way ahead of the golf industry in benefits."

And, as one superintendent says, "After working under the profit-oriented business management principles of a land development golf course, it is very hard to go back to the member-run avocational management system." ☐