

WHAT'S PLAGUING THE PROS?

Ten years ago, the answers to our title question would have been a set of problems as traditional as the golfer's slice—bad weather, slow deliveries, too much paperwork and lack of space. But ask what is troubling professionals today, as GOLFDOM did in a nationwide survey, and a new and more difficult group of problems emerges in addition to the longstanding ones. The new problems, encompassing the areas of costs, labor, management and competition, are symptomatic of an over-all situation that has developed in the club industry. Willingly or not, golf clubs have come out of the isolation of the past and have entered the "outside world," with all the accompanying concerns and problems faced by other industries.

No longer does the pro shop sit nestled in a protective atmosphere, facing relatively small problems emanating from the immediate environs of the club. The pro shop held a distinct position separate from the cares of other small businesses. Today, it is doubtful that there are many professionals left who view their counterparts at neighboring golf facilities as their competition. Those respondents to GOLFDOM's survey who viewed competition as their chief problem over the past year without exception mentioned discount stores, giant sporting goods chains, department stores—a list of competitors any small retailer would cite.

In addition to sales competition, professionals also find it difficult to siphon off even a small part

GOLFDOM's survey shows that professionals are experiencing problems, which, although new to them, have been troubling other industries for years

by VINCENT J. PASTENA

of the available labor force. "Can't get enough good, reliable help, particularly for peak season," is a common complaint voiced by responding professionals. Tied to this problem are labor costs and what a professional can afford to pay. "Even the minimum wage is killing me," comments one hard-pressed professional. Therefore, many young people are succumbing to the lure of businesses that offer more lucrative compensation. Fewer young men have the opportunity to even view the business of the golf professional. In the days when every course had a platoon of caddies, some of the young men, attracted to the pro shop activity, would be anxious for a job. However, this source of help has all but vanished.

As responses indicated, local and national economic conditions also are upsetting the pro shop, which once had been fairly well insulated against such con-

cerns by its affluent clientele and a lineup of equally well-heeled people waiting to gain membership.

Some of the professionals in their complaints mention rising taxes, overhead costs and wholesale prices in the face of a diminishing market, which would dwindle further if retail prices were increased commensurately. Not only is downtown competition cutting into their market, according to the professionals, but many clubs are "hurting" for new members, and it is obvious what this means to pro shop traffic. As one professional put it, "I've sold 92 per cent of the existing membership clubs, bags and other major equipment items in the past four years. Who do I sell to now?"

Meanwhile, other professionals are feeling the affects on their lesson business.

Because many clubs and courses are in tight straits themselves, many professionals noted that officials these days are eyeing more often the financial arrangements between club and professional in certain income areas. As a result, some professionals are getting a smaller piece of the golf car revenue, or no share at all, and other professionals said that their clubs are moving in for a bigger cut of the driving range business. Although he did not specify, one professional said he felt threatened in some revenue areas, which traditionally have been his alone.

Professionals also are bumping into another national problem—theft. And it is not restricted to any particular type of facility,

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because theft, burglary, breaking and entering were noted by professionals from private, semi-private, public and resort facilities. The frequency of theft has driven one professional's insurance costs sky high; another said his shop has become such a high risk that he's having trouble getting insurance.

With all these troubles, one wonders why the professional keeps plugging. First, of course, it should be remembered that the survey asked him to name his major problems in the past year, not the brighter notes. Secondly, the analysis of the survey represents a compilation of major problems. No one professional is suffering from all of them. In addition, as was pointed out, problems being experienced by professionals generally are not peculiar to them. Many problems are national, cutting through every industry.

Although some professionals expected "more of the same" when asked about problems anticipated in the coming year, others did volunteer positive comments: "Expect economic upturn," "see revived customer interest in major equipment" and "program to bring in new members expected to increase business." □

WHAT'S "BUGGING" PROFESSIONALS?

The following is a listing of the 10 problems most frequently noted by professionals surveyed.

- "Downtown" competition (department stores, discount stores and large sporting goods stores);
- Availability of competent, reliable pro shop help;
- Rising labor costs, taxes, wholesale prices and overhead;
- Theft, resulting in higher insurance costs;
- Slow deliveries from suppliers;
- Bad weather conditions, resulting in less play and pro shop traffic;
- Lack of new members to fill openings in clubs' rolls;
- Smaller share of income from certain revenue-producing areas—golf cars and driving range;
- Lack of pro shop space;
- Overdue payment on members' pro shop bills



ARIZONA TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, Plaza International Hotel, Tucson, Ariz., April 4-5.

ATLANTIC PROVINCES TURFGRASS CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION, Halifax, N.S., Canada, April 9-10.

SOUTHEASTERN TURFGRASS CONFERENCE, Georgia Coastal Plain, Experiment Station, Tifton, Ga., April 9-11.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TURF AND LANDSCAPE INSTITUTE, Quality Inn, Anaheim, Calif., April 18-19.

SPORTING GOODS MFG. ASSN. INDUSTRY ANNUAL MEETING, The Breakers, Palm Beach, Fla., April 29-May 2.

FLORIDA TURF-GRASS ANNUAL SHOW, Curtis Hixon Convention Hall, Tampa, Fla., April 29-May 2.

NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION ANNUAL MEETING, The Breakers, Palm Beach, Fla., April 30.

FLORIDA NURSERYMEN AND GROWERS ASSN., The Breakers Hotel, Palm Beach, Fla., May 17-19.

INTERNATIONAL SHADE TREE CONFERENCE, Hotel Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah., June 17-20.

FOURTH ANNUAL GCSA/UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA TURFGRASS SHORT COURSE, Center for Continuing Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Ga., November 12-13.

45TH INTERNATIONAL TURFGRASS CONFERENCE AND SHOW, Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, Calif. February 17-22, 1974.