



Golf Business SO FAR IN '74

"Neither the best of years . . . nor the worst." From club managers. Professionals. Superintendents. Here is GOLFDOM's exclusive barometer on how the industry views 1974 — its impact in the first seven months; its promise in the remaining five. Material was prepared by Don Curlee (San Francisco), Joe E. Doan (Chicago), and Douglas Lutz (New York City). Their reports are based on extensive survey work along both coasts and through the heartland.



club managers

WEST

Everybody in the golf business talks about increased costs, but the responsibility for doing something about them rests with club managers, even if it's nothing more profound than raising prices for food, beverages and club services.

In some cases the economic pressure is forcing managers and boards in the West to make plans and changes they might otherwise delay.

For example, one San Francisco Peninsula club manager (Arthur Frey, Burlingame CC, Burlingame) described by its manager as "very social" is in the midst of a youth movement, with several activities reminiscent of those of 25 years ago or more — junior tennis and golf, a swim team, and the real possibility of teen-age dances.

The club budget is up 15 percent over 1973, and dues have been increased 12½ percent. "We've got a younger generation coming on", the manager (Frey) said, "and it means some changes."

He said committees must work harder to find new sources of revenue, and to avoid stagnation in club programs.

In contrast to superintendents in the area, who have at least one consolation in a plentiful labor market, managers consistently complain about the lack of trained help. As one (Frey) said, "Well trained chefs are very hard to find. European-trained people just aren't around; it may mean prefabrication of meals from central sources some day".

Another manager in the San Francisco area (Al Meillon, California GC, South San Francisco) said club income at the midpoint of 1974 was ahead of 1973, but admitted the food department is a ma-

jor concern. "Recent increases in both food and beverages make it very difficult to get our money back from the members," he said.

On one hand managers must encourage their members more and more to take advantage of club facilities, while increasing the prices repeatedly.

He is experiencing a youth movement also. His membership has turned over almost 50 percent in the past three years. "Younger members tend to use the facilities more, and more often," he said.

His club is planning modernization of the clubhouse facilities later this year, and favor seems to be growing for the construction of tennis courts, which could be the result of a more youthful membership.

An East Bay club manager (Peter Pinot, Round Hill CC, Alamo) has ridden the crest of the tennis popularity wave to new highs. With 15 courts and tentative plans for three more, he has 400 tennis members as compared to 500 golfing members.

He believes many other clubs could increase use of their existing facilities and increase revenue significantly by emphasizing tennis. As for maintenance: "Super!" he said. "All you have to do is hose down the courts and replace a net now and then, a far cry from the constant worry about golf course condition".

Although he may be oversimplifying the maintenance formula for tennis facilities, he does more than worry about the golf course, because he describes its condition as the best it has been in the club's 13 years. Playing is up, reflecting member appreciation for the course's condition.

The club also is involved in a \$250,000 remodeling program to update furnishings in the dining room, bar and kitchen, with restrooms and a snack bar on the course, the plan-

ting of several trees, 100 percent cart paths and recent repaving of the parking lot.

In spite of a dues increase the signs of a vigorous membership are more evident than ever at one San Francisco club (Peninsula CC, San Mateo, Glenn Scott, manager), and 1974 seems sure to surpass 1973.

He's at a loss to explain the improved membership and transfer sales, especially in view of a less than optimistic economic outlook. And somewhat surprisingly, most of the new members are over 40. A tentative plan drawn last year to offer special memberships in the under-40 age has been shelved.

He describes his club as very stable membership traditionally. "We work hard at analyzing our members' needs, and supplying them," he said. Committees are unusually busy, involving many members in club affairs. "When management, board and house committees understand the membership it works," he said. And it appears he's right.

CENTRAL

"Business in the first two months of the season was so good that it almost scared me." Thus, in a manner as succinct as his name, did Norman Norman, manager of Flossmoor on Chicago's far southside, describe patronage through the middle part of May.

"We were getting three or four visits a week from considerable percentage of our members, something I hadn't seen before in the six years I've been at the club," said Norman. "Luncheon business was up 15 percent or more due to better ladies' day turnouts and because women mem-

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professionals

WEST

In spite of uncertainties in the economy and changes in the golf business, professionals in the West are having a steady year, most of them far enough ahead of last year's business to feel they are staying even with inflation. By mid-year however, few held hopes for 1974 turning out to be a great year.

It appears to be a year that rewards those with enterprise and the willingness to experiment, those who will deviate from traditional practices if necessary and those who can sell the sizzle even when their steaks are no different than the competition's.

What pays off for professionals in one area might not work in another.

For example, one professional (Dale Mead, Del Rio CC, Modesto) has reacted to the pressure from discounters by limiting his club stock basically to two lines. Demonstration sets of three others are on display, and even more available on order, but he has concentrated his inventory on only two — Ping and Lynx.

A metropolitan area municipal course professional (John Fry, Harding Park, San Francisco) has tried to keep up with the proliferation of club brands, but admits it creates an "inventory crunch", and "cuts up the pie so many ways".

He has been instrumental in working with the Northern California Section of the PGA to establish a travel arrangement whereby professionals represent the travel agent in helping arrange golfing tours abroad for members. The agreement includes contribution of a percentage of the total business to the section, and the opportunity for the professionals to travel as tour directors.

He sees a round of price increases in golf equipment this Fall, and believes the business may be headed for another buyers' market, as opposed to the sellers' market that has been in effect for about a year and a half as demand outpaced supply.

"The biggest challenge we face is keeping golf business in the golf shop," said another private club professional (John Zontek, Contra Costa Country Club, Richmond). Downtown discounters have lured a significant amount of club business from him, so he has increased his emphasis on soft goods. "This is holding well so far," he said, "but we'll get close-out pressure there too." He expects a drop in total volume in his shop from 1973.

A remodeled and expanded golf shop is paying off for another private club professional (Bob Moore, Peninsula CC, San Mateo), who took the occasion to install an old barber chair in his shoe department as an interesting sales gimmick.

After two or three years of good volume in low-priced shoes (\$25 range) he is convinced that higher priced shoes are better for him and his members. Even though manufacturer's "make-goods" replace faulty cheap shoes, the buyer is upset by the inconvenience and delay, and the professional's time is occupied in replacement. Higher priced shoes tend to satisfy all parties.

He has noticed a strong preference among his members for forged-head irons, in spite of the recent popularity of investment-cast clubs. "We allow our members to try sets of clubs before buying, and they tell me they simply hit the ball better with forged clubs," he said, "so that's what we sell mostly, though the others are available."

Downtown discounters have made inroads in his club sales

volume, and he has turned to soft goods in defense. Now, however, he plans to reduce his soft goods inventory, "because the department stores can offer such a wide selection."

One private club professional (Mead) has developed a rotation system for clubs and soft goods that satisfies his members and maintains a healthy level of sales. He emphasizes a given item about every three years. For instance, his inventory of men's slacks is normally about 150, but he has 350 pair this year. Next year he'll return to normal, and the following year he'll double or triple his stock of women's soft wear. It gives his inventory a freshness, avoids saturation of his members and builds anticipation for the special years.

He has found the same system works well in clubs by specializing in one or two different manufacturers each year. In spite of this he too is feeling the effect of price-cutting in the club business, and plans to emphasize soft goods sales more. "After all," he said, "nobody asks for trade-ins in clothing."

CENTRAL

As business in pro shops in the Chicago area goes, it is not the best of seasons; nor the worst. At clubs where volume for 1974 at the end of June exceeded that of 1973, the range was from 5 to 10 percent. At clubs where business was lagging, a decrease of from 5 to 10 percent was most frequently quoted.

A total of 15 clubs was recently surveyed by Golfdom, and pros at six of these said current volume is higher than it was last year. Five pros said it was down and four others reported that it was very close to what it was in 1973. Overall for the season, it

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superintendents

WEST

The higher cost of almost everything — if it can be found — is first on the list of concerns for superintendents in the West. The more fortunate ones have been allowed budget increases to cover rapidly rising costs, while others are looking for short-cuts and time-savers.

"We're experiencing more delays all the time", said one superintendent (Cliff Waggoner, Del Rio CC, Modesto), "and if you don't order fertilizer (up at least 50 percent over last year) far ahead you just don't have it when you need it".

He specified increased costs of electricity of about 15 percent; parts, 20 to 25 percent; and varying increases in the prices of equipment. "We've received a justified increase in our budget, but eventually it will cause an increase in dues, and nobody wants to do that," he said.

Because much of the equipment and supplies a superintendent uses are hard and slow to get, one (Paul Paulsen, San Francisco GC, San Francisco) said: "A breakdown can become a catastrophe. It seems like everybody stalls, and you can't get things done. It makes patchwork necessary".

Even though his club has its own wells for irrigation the cost of power to pump the water has increased. "We're walking more instead of taking power carts," he said, "but that costs us something in time."

He continues to cut the greens five times a week, but fairways don't get mowed so often, and they have been narrowed to reduce the area the mowers cover.

Another superintendent at a major San Francisco club (Ed Berardy, Lake Merced CC) said everything he uses has just about doubled in price, but club management has increased

his budget to cover it. He echoed the common complaint about having to wait when equipment items are ordered.

A superintendent at one club on the San Francisco Peninsula (John DaDalt, Burlingame CC, Burlingame) added another worry that has plagued him this year, abnormally wet weather in the early season, and in the spring and summer, high winds and hot spells. He fights a traditional battle against pythium, but has confidence in the chemicals he is using now.

Because most of his fairways are lined by eucalyptus trees the winds mean not only drying conditions but trashy fairways that must be cleaned by his small crew of six.

He referred to another looming cost increase, compliance with newly imposed safety regulations of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Maintenance employees seem plentiful in Northern California. "Almost every week we have people looking for work," one superintendent said, "all of them claiming to be experienced. Of course, we often find after hiring them they have no experience."

Another superintendent said a round of wage increases underway this summer in closely related fields that compete for his help, such as construction, will mean yet another cost increase soon — salaries.

None of the superintendents interviewed could begin to predict where the increases in the cost of maintaining golf courses will end, if ever.

CENTRAL

Superintendents who have been around for 25 or 35 years can't recall when golf courses in the

Chicagoland area ever were in finer shape than they were as of Memorial Day. Since the State of Illinois became befuddled and seemed to elect two Memorial Days this year, May 27 and May 30, there may be a little confusion as to when the splendor of the courses reached a penultimate. But their almost ineffable beauty easily blanketed both these dates, and barring blight or some other of nature's quirks, were a good bet for keeping their cosmetic luster throughout the summer.

The winter of 1973 to 1974 was quite the most equable that superintendents, such as Bob Williams of Bob O'Link and Adolph Bertucci of Lake Shore, both golf husbandmen since the late '30's, can recall. March and April didn't exact retribution, as is often the case following a mild winter, by serving up stern weather that equalizes everything for the winter-spring period. Both months were good for turf growth, and in April ground crews were able to get in more maintenance work than usual.

May was a different story. The early part of the month was unseasonably cold. As so often happens, there was no week or 10 days of warm weather in the first three weeks of the month. Until the first Illinois Memorial Day, the entire month was accompanied by rain — 19 of the first 26 days. It was enough to discourage golfers, keep farmers out of the fields, according to agricultural reports, and it did a good job of keeping course maintenance crews confined to their sheds.

April was a better month for golf than May. According to Jim Husman, manager of Midwest CC, a 36-hole, semi-private club, there were more playable days in the former month, but the trouble is that most golfers aren't in the mood this early

to unsheath their clubs. However, on the next to last Sunday in April, good weather beckoned nearly 500 golfers to Midwest, almost as many as will be entertained on any Sunday from June through September. Thereafter, the weather turned disagreeable and it was Memorial Day, the first one, before the golfers were able to swarm out again. Considering the play they had to forego during the first three weeks or so of May, a pair of Memorial Days were needed to make up for the rounds that had been involuntarily back ordered.

As was reported in the clubhouse article, club business didn't suffer because players couldn't get out on the course. They did a great deal of spending while sitting around lounges, lobbies and dining rooms wistfully watching the greens explode in the grass and scanning the sky for the first sure sign of the sun. Pro business started to pick up around mid-May, but not enough to appease the shop custodians. "For all the people we've got milling around the club, we should be doing better," said one pro. "But we have at least 10 days of golfing weather in May to get them buying. We'll catch up to some extent, but I don't expect to have as good a season as I had hoped for."

Except for a few isolated cases, courses on Memorial Day one were in superb condition. With the exception of the roughs, which are being allowed to grow a little higher this year by design, playing conditions were as good as anyone would want. While golfers and farmers were being kept confined during most of May, superintendents were slipping their men out to mow and do other chores between showers. The result was that course maintenance hadn't fallen too far behind.

However, Pete Voykin, at whose Idlewild Club on Chicago's south side the final United States Open qualifying round was played on June 3, nearly got stymied. On the weekend before Memorial Day one, his acres were partly submerged by a creek that overflowed its banks. Three greens and several fairways were flooded. A goldfish was netted in a trap at Number 12. A lot of

debris piled up, and it was necessary for Idlewild to spend around \$2,000 in extra labor to haul it away. Voykin has had to neglect paring the roughs to some extent, providing an exacting but fortifying test for those who hoped to go on to Winged Foot, and it wasn't possible to replenish all the sand that was washed out of the traps. But by working furiously and overtime, Voykin, who has been at Idlewild for 16 years, came close to restoring the course to normalcy. He brought it back so far, in fact, that Bob Sender shot a brilliant 132 in the single day, 36-hole qualifying trial. The rest of the field, however, came closer to posting scores that had been predicted for Idlewild's quasi-tough 18 — 141 and up.

When prices are mentioned, superintendents here emit a cross between a moan and a whistle. Since last fall, herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers have advanced at least 50 percent. Urea, has doubled. Green mowers that could be purchased for \$500 last summer are selling at \$700, and it takes no less than six months for delivery. As far as anyone knows, mowers are hard to come by because they are being sold to the Japanese, who have put several hundred courses into play in the last two years or so. More patched-up mowers, tractors and other equipment are seen on country club estates this year than at any time since the immediate Post-War period. The only real sanity this year is in labor costs. They are up only 10 percent over 1973.

The expected gasoline crisis didn't materialize, because supplies rather miraculously, and suspiciously, loosened up a little more than a month before the courses got back into large-scale consumption of gas this spring. But a price, and a stiff one, had to be paid for the resumption of the flow. It costs 40 or 42 cents a gallon to have gas delivered to a club this year, compared to last year's 22-cent tariff. The average monthly gasoline bill is now between \$250 and \$300 for 18-hole clubs.

At quite a few places, supplementary tanks have been installed. Superintendents are far sighted enough to realize there can be serious shortages again this summer when the heavy vacation travel crunch is on, and so many of them

decided last fall or last winter to put in an extra tank or two — all with locks, incidentally. Right now, ample gas is only a phone call away, but where a two- or four-week supply was considered sufficient last year, it has been increased to four to six weeks.

The same far sightedness that superintendents have shown in increasing gas shortage facilities was exercised last fall when fertilizers, fungicides and herbicides were being ordered for the new season. Just about everybody laid in a full year's supply of these now priceless ingredients. They were contracted for spring delivery at October, 1973, prices. As a result, clubs didn't get shocked by those staggering 50 percent price increases that suppliers were forced to tack on at a single pencil stroke this winter. So 1974 is pretty well taken care of, but now the cry is, "Wait until 1975 — we'll get murdered." However, most superintendents feel that prices have begun to stabilize. They'll pay a lot more for fertilizer this fall than last, but there is a feeling that prices will taper off slightly by the time 1975 orders are placed.

One good thing: club officials are fully alert to those crazy price fluctuations. They know they can't depend on the foresight of their course custodians to keep costs down another year simply because it is impossible for superintendents to place orders more than a year in advance. In 1975, clubs are going to be at the mercy of the market. Budgets for next year are going to be worth approximately the paper they are written on. In fact, those who were prepared for this year's operation have been pretty much circumvented. Although it was possible to avoid those big increases for fertilizer and other soil and turf amendments, due to the placing of orders last fall, many other maintenance costs have gotten out of hand. Some have gone up so fast that it has been impossible to keep control over them. In addition, all that rain in May knocked the labor budget out of square. Poor weather always does. Even if it's possible to squeeze in a lot of maintenance work in spite of adverse conditions, a point is reached when it no longer can be done. That leads to overtime. Overtime is budgeted, of course, but usually never to the ex-

tent it has to be used. So far this year, it has easily exceeded the hours scheduled for it.

One question that is hanging in the air in these inflated times is, "How much maintenance do country clubs really want?" Probably more clubs than not still insist on keeping their courses in the condition the members have become accustomed to over the years. Yet, there is a good deal of grumbling over the high cost of doing so. A few superintendents say they are running into equivocation regarding the degree of excellence in which the club properties are to be kept. It's one of those on again, off again things.

Maybe it is agreed that the roughs will be allowed to grow a little higher than in the past; tees aren't to be mowed quite as often as they used to be; trimming around traps and trees is to be reduced; ditto the weeding of flower beds. It is not an out and out austerity, but corners are to be cut. Sooner or later in some cases the superintendent is criticized because the course doesn't look as well-groomed as it was in years past. There is even a modicum of shabbiness about it. Moreover, longer grass in the roughs slows up play. "What will visitors think of our club?" is a plaint quite often heard.

Cutting back on mowing, trimming, or weeding won't have such a deleterious effect in the summer when growth slows down, but in an extremely wet spring, it shows plainly. Maybe the green chairman comes hurrying down to the maintenance building with word that the order to skimp on maintenance has been rescinded. It requires some overtime to catch up with trimming and weeding of areas that have been partially or fully neglected. In a week or so, though, the countermand has been forgotten; the next thing the superintendent knows, he is being asked to explain why he is spending so much on labor.

It is really not a latter day dilemma. Superintendents have been putting up with this for years, but the current high cost of even starting a motor or taking a trimming tool down from the rack is making everyone keenly aware of how expensive maintaining a golf course is.

The consensus among superintendents is that it is up to each in-

dividual to get a hard and clear decision as to the degree of maintenance his club wants. If it's necessary to go back over all cost figures with the green committee, this should be done. In addition, it's a good idea to get someone up in the clubhouse to outline the new austerity program in writing, if one has been adopted. These clarifications will help protect the superintendent.

EAST

From a Superintendent's viewpoint, East Coast operations halfway through the 1974 season are pretty much on schedule. Planned maintenance programs and special projects too.

Brief delays due to rain, minor disease breakouts and some equipment problems are being taken in stride at most locations. Major construction this season has not been mentioned very often but planned programs for tee enlargement and resurfacing are underway at several courses.

A repeat of last season's rain damage in the North is not expected now that the mid-season mark has been reached without additional heavy rainfall.

Labor problems, other than attracting experienced help, seem to be minimal too. As usual, much reliance is being placed on the college crowd to keep crew levels at peak operating efficiency.

No serious complaints arising out of gasoline shortages were voiced. An occasional late delivery here and there summarizes that category of potential headaches.

Opinions on equipment were universal in announcing few breakdowns but long delays in getting replacement parts. Even some items covered by warranties.

In Rod Karchner's tee enlargement program for the Corning CC in New York, he wisely did one tee first to get a feeling of what the members really wanted before proceeding with the entire operation.

Karchner reported a small amount of Dollar Spot which has since been cleared up, as his only struggle with disease to date. Their preventive spray program got under way in late June at Corning.

Karchner commented on a slight delay because of downpours in May and June with about a week's delay resulting by the end of June.

He runs his fairway vehicles on diesel and has had no side effects from the gasoline shortage.

Karchner's six-man crew does five to ten hours overtime each week and, of course, he does close to about eighty hours a week himself.

Commenting on labor, Karchner had this to say recently, "It's getting pretty damn hard to compete with the industries around here as far as hourly rates go. I've lost four good guys I'd planned on having come back this year."

Bill Blackert at Turf Valley in Ellicott City, Maryland, claims he's ahead of schedule. A relatively dry Spring in his area gave him the opportunity to get a good jump on 1974.

"We thought we'd have a problem in January and February with gasoline shortages," Blackert said recently, "but it never happened." Separate tanks for the course and clubhouse areas were kept full enough to permit pumping from one to the other when necessary, which only happened once. Turf Valley's supplier, Mobil, did an outstanding job for them, according to Blackert, even giving some extra fuel because they missed one shipment.

In two separate plans some heavy face lifting is set for this season. Blackert reports a move into a tree planting program starting with the purchase of liners that are being sent to a nursery and the rebuilding of some of the 36 tees. He plans to sod the fronts and seed the backs. The course bunkers are in for an overhaul as well in a Rototiller operation. Ambitious programs but typical of a given season at Turf Valley.

Little disease is reported by Blackert. Small amounts of Brown Patch have been eliminated.

"Replacement parts are a real problem and the costs associated with them are astronomical now too," Blackert voiced his most serious consideration this season.

At Pine Tree in Kennesaw, Georgia, North of Atlanta, Paul Petrie is also in to a tee rebuilding program. All his men's tees will be resodded this year.

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Petrie's maintenance plans are right on schedule with very little disease reported. Of course, in the Atlanta area there is no general rainfall, rain takes the form of thunder-showers, so Petrie doesn't have to share the concerns of his Northern brethren. However, there is the heat. It can be tremendous in Georgia. Petrie reports Pine Tree's Bent greens are doing well this season, in spite of the heat.

Parts are hard to get down South too and anything sent out for repair is very slow getting back, according to Petrie.

After a slow start caused by wet weather, Terry Wueschinski's program is back on schedule at the CC of York, Pa.

Running a couple of diesel tractors has helped alleviate any potential gasoline shortage problem at York. Wueschinski cleared up a strain of Dollar Spot with Daconil in the latter part of June and reports no further turf problems.

The Pennsylvania State Women's Amateur was contested at the CC of York in July and in anticipation of the event three of the ladies' tees were reconstructed this Spring.

Wueschinski reported minor problems with not being able to get replacement parts but said it wasn't too bad.

It would appear that superintendents in 1974 may not have to face a major crisis such as that growing out of the pending fuel shortage that might have proven disastrous if it had come to pass.

Perhaps even the weatherman may balance his early season outpourings over the Northeast with more gentle showers during the rest of the season. It is hoped that he too may have forgotten 1973!

Disease and blight, not apparent to any great degree at mid-season, may well be a sometime thing this year.

The parts replacement problem, with no ready solution in sight, will probably continue to plague superintendents.

Most East Coast superintendents, looking forward to a good season in their own inimitable style, will no doubt willingly exchange the minor annoyances currently being expressed for the relative peace of a season without major strain.

club managers

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bers are entertaining more. Dinner business was 10 percent over last year, which was as good as any we ever had. On the top of this, the club, which caters only members' parties and weddings, is booked solidly until Labor Day."

A dozen other club managers who were queried weren't, with the exception of Biltmore's Bill Blackwood, quite as enthusiastic as Norman Norman in describing their clubs' business in the early weeks. Most estimated they were doing better than last year, but because the weather in April and early May kept going from rain to cold and back to rain almost continuously, the consensus was that things hadn't really opened up. Still, there was general agreement that food and drink volume so far in 1974 was possibly 10 percent better than it had been a year ago.

For reasons not fully explained except that it has a young and hardy membership, Biltmore got rather exceptional play from mid-April on. Courses at other clubs, except for Easter Sunday, which was relatively clement, were largely deserted in the early weeks, but even Biltmore is located in the northern section of the Chicago District, it was getting at least an average quota of play from April 1 on. This, coupled with expensive renovation of two grills and the addition of a dining room, completed last fall, was responsible for keeping members pouring in. Blackwood's early statistics were just about as glowing as those reported for Flossmoor.

The general increase in club patronage was, of course, attributed to gas rationing. It was being referred to in mid-May as the "late crisis," because by then gas hadn't been in short supply for six or eight weeks. But many people were wary that the crisis might re-surface during the July vacation crush, and even more were disgruntled by the huge increase in the price of gas. Consequently, the mood was to greatly curtail vacation-taking this year and choose recreation and entertainment close to home. Country clubs started profiting from this attitude

immediately upon reopening this spring. What was Florida's loss was their gain, judging from the spring report.

One club manager, while acknowledging that the oil companies had driven people to the haven of club-houses and other near-at-hand entertainment, suggested that there is a new attitude abroad regarding spending. He wasn't sure if it was fatalistic or because people have unbounded confidence in the economy. "They've been more relaxed about money this year than they have been in a long time," this man said. "I wonder if it is because people are figuring you might as well spend while you have it, or because the threatened 1974 recession isn't turning out to be as severe as expected. Anyway, there is optimism in the air, but it could be false."

It is dimmed, of course, when people start thinking about prices. Menu prices at practically all clubs in the Chicago District have been increased around 10 percent, although in a few cases the increases are selective. Most managers say they have held the line on meat, but for the most part, it stops there. Norman Norman, who can quote the Cost of Living index without reference to props or to notes, along with a few other managers thinks that club-house prices should be up a minimum of 15 percent. However, the non-profit nature of the dining room operation doesn't make it imperative that cost increases be immediately recovered in their entirety. If a deficit is incurred at the end of the year, it can be easily adjusted by that great equalizer, the assessment. Anyway, most members feel better paying lower prices, even if they know there is to be an accounting later on.

In a way, it is kind of a miracle that country clubs have restricted dining increases to no more than 10 percent. Norman points out that in the last year there have been eight increases in dairy products, amounting

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CONVENIENT SHOPPING

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to at least 50 percent. Coffee and bakery goods have gone up five different times; potato prices have doubled; some clubs are avoiding garnishing sandwiches and fruit plates with lettuce. As for the salad dieters, they are benefiting doubly — from the non-caloric content of the lettuce and the fact that portions have been reduced.

On top of these no-so-healthy food price increases, the clubs have the added burden of paying higher wages to waitresses, bus boys and other help, as the result of the recent increase in the minimum wage.

To try to play to scratch with ballooning costs, most clubs are making no bones about cutting back on service. It has brought about some grumbling on the part of the partons, but most managers say that when members grasp what the management is trying to do, they accept it. At one club the waitress staff reduces by one, and each waitress was assigned one more table than normally. This resulted in more than a slight delay between courses, at which no diner took umbrage. At Flossmoor CC, all noon meals are being served buffet style and more evening dinners are being served the same way. The latter is not the most popular innovation the club ever has introduced, but it is not being challenged by boycott. Another nicety that clubs are being forced to give up or reduce are gourmet dinners. Most managers really don't like to see this. It does away with an elegance that sets a club apart. As one manager says, "I always enjoyed getting ready for and serving a gourmet dinner. We didn't make much money on it, but the whole staff liked the idea of doing something different."

The economies that came in last fall — switching off lights and cutting back on heat — were still in effect this spring largely because they had become habit forming. A few clubs postponed buying new furnishings this year and some deferred renovation programs, but three of the 12 managers who were interviewed revealed that their clubhouses were extensively remodeled. One of these was Biltmore. Butter-

field made some improvements to its clubhouse and built a new pool and tennis courts as part of a continuing program that has gone on for five or six years. Glen Oak spent nearly \$200,000 in re-doing a lounge and dining room, overhauled its landscaping and, in addition, put \$220,000 into an automatic watering system, something that would have cost \$175,000 if it had been done two or three years ago. Some managers say there is no point in delaying improvements. Where costs of remodeling and additions, such as irrigation systems, used to go up 4 or 5 percent a year, they are now skyrocketing by thrice that. Along with Butterfield, three clubs added from two to four courts to their tennis facilities, and one built a new pro shop for the tennis pro.

There has been no widespread increase in dues this year. Of the two clubs that reported doing so, one upped its fee by \$10 a month and the other added a \$200 a year extra charge. According to one manager, the new idea seems to be wait until the end of the year and make the necessary assessments to wipe out any deficits that are incurred. If the club's cash flow is large enough to take care of current bills, wages and so on, and money doesn't have to be borrowed at present high interest rates, this policy makes it easy on everyone. But if a fairly large amount of money has to be borrowed, the interest paid on it may cause the member to pay a surcharge on an assessment. One manager suggested that putting assessments on a semiannual rather than annual basis might ease the financial strain at many clubs and, at the same time, make it easier on the member. Regardless of the status of dues and assessments, club memberships at Chicago area clubs are at quota strength and most have waiting lists.

About two out of three managers agreed that they had less trouble in finding clubhouse employees this spring than at any time in the past. One reason for this is that a large nucleus of most club staffs is being given 10 or 11 months employment a year. More and more, managers are attempting to recruit within families in the vicinity of their clubs. If a mother is working as a waitress, she is encouraged to try to persuade her daughter to come to work at the

club. A few clubs are paying their employees referral bonuses as an incentive to help out in the recruiting program. Practically all are providing one-way or two-way transportation for women who work in dining rooms or kitchens.

And there isn't any doubt that the inside or clubhouse labor situation was eased this spring when the minimum hourly wage was increased from \$1.60 to \$2. Women who were reluctant to work at the old rate gave the matter a second thought when the minimum scale was raised 25 percent. The additional cushion plus the prospect of earning good tips proved to be the needed incentive in quite a few cases.

If there were doubts about 1974 business before the season began, they were quickly dispelled as soon as the clubhouse doors were reopened this spring. It rained on 13 of the first 20 days in May, almost completely knocking out golf, but still the members came out. That caused the club managers to wonder where they were going to put them as soon as the weather got straightened out.

EAST

"Better this year than it has been for the past few years," Turf Valley CC, Ellicott City, Maryland.

"Business wise we're doing real well. Membership, we're holding our own," Cypress Lake CC, Ft. Myers, Florida.

"We've got about a 20% increase this year. A fantastic April, May and June," Whitmarsh Valley CC, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In these and other typical commentaries the Management third along the East Coast has added its voice to the anticipations for an excellent season.

Variances in membership numbers, occasionally dropping below previous totals, have been offset by more active members. More people seem to be playing golf, according to Dick Welch at the Turf Valley CC. He said recently, "We've set a goal of 400 A members, 450 B members and 250 Social members. Every year our A memberships stay within 20 of the 400, the B's always fill up but this year we find our social memberships have dropped off."

Vanderpohl at Whitmarsh

Valley, in spite of a raise in dues on the first of the year to \$1,000 and an initiation fee of \$5,000 that resulted in a loss of 75 members, has already picked up 40 new members.

Tom Raber, club president and management spokesman at Cypress Lake CC in Ft. Myers, reports a minimum waiting list with membership virtually up to capacity. This season stock was raised but the 350 membership capacity has not been affected.

As Joe Makara indicates in the spread on the pros, more active members have replaced those less active at the Manchester CC in New Hampshire, too.

Dining room and bar revenues are 20% higher than last year at Cypress Lake, according to Raber, and Vanderpohl at Whitmarsh Valley reports, "I've had the best dining room and bar operation that the club has ever had."

At Whitmarsh Valley in particular it is felt a continuation of the gasoline shortage would probably have helped business. The club has many affluent members who go off on trips who might have stayed closer to home if the embargo had not been lifted. Conversely, the gasoline shortage affected banquet business for Dick Welch at Turf Valley. Several large functions were cancelled in February and March and splintered into smaller, local area gatherings. Regardless, Welch still maintains he'll do his best year in the seven he's seen at Turf Valley.

At Turf Valley an extensive pool renovation costing \$48,000 was undertaken this spring. The state's largest pool at 50 meters is 14 years old and seam separation due to settlement threatened its usage. Relining and crack repairs cost \$22,000, \$18,000 was spent for concrete and another \$8,000 for plumbing and electricity.

The mood is decidedly up among those we were able to talk with. The only "trend" apparent in mid-season might be the recruiting of active members to replace those less active. If the trend proves to be true and if it continues management may have every right to expect a near record year.

Active golfers usually make active customers. The trick will be to spot the trend and be prepared to handle the increased business.

professionals

(from page 12)

looks very much like the area's golf shop proprietors are going to play to a standoff. Not bad, considering that as late as the first week of June everyone was wondering if the rain ever was going to stop and if anyone ever was going to get the chance to play golf again.

There were 22 days of rain in May. The weather continued perverse through the first ten days of June. Over this 40-day span, from five to eight playing days were completely lost, and as many as half of them kept all except the most determined golfers off the courses. Clubs in the northern section of the Chicago district suffered a little more than Westside and Southside clubs, losing two or three more full days on the average than the latter, and probably not enjoying as many days in which there was at least partial play.

The pattern of sales pluses and minuses in comparing 1974 with '73 is fairly definitely defined where the weather was poorest. Shops in the Waukegan, Arlington Heights, Barrington Hills sector apparently didn't fare as well as those in the Oak Park-Riverside and farther South section. Yet, a blanket statement can't be made that business wasn't as good at all clubs in the north as in the west and south due to the drainage situation at different clubs and also because of varying golf car policies. At several locations, restrictions on the use of golf cars when turf is suited for not much more than foot traffic, have been loosened in the last two or three years.

At clubs where volume was off, practically all of the loss was attributed to irretrievable glove and ball sales. To give an idea of how weather curtailed play, only 1,850 caddy rounds were recorded at Glen Oak through May 25th when normally 3,000 would be expected. And, Glen Oak probably wasn't as hard hit as clubs farther north. At Skokie, a Northside club, there were only five days in May suitable for lesson giving. Still, the distress flags weren't flying over more than one-third or one-fourth of the shops. The reason was that capital equipment — clubs,

bags, shoes, sportswear, etc. — was selling about as well as it ever did.

What saved the pros on the heavy goods was the enormous amount of traffic in the clubhouse during the spring, heavier this year than ever before. Due, of course, to the fact that so many club members aren't planning on travelling this summer as much as they did in the past. The windfall due to the cutback rebounded to the club restaurants and bars and to a lesser extent to the pro shops. A lot of people bought playing equipment in anticipation of the rain and cold weather eventually abating.

The situation from the standpoint of weather, and that is about all that preoccupied the pros until the early part of June, is well summed up by Bill Heald of the Riverside Club. "I'm about as confused by my business this year as I have ever been," he says. "On the basis of weather we should be having an awfully lean season. But since the latter part of April people have been milling around the club. Sooner or later they strayed into the shop and started buying. As a result, our business this year is as good or a little better than it was in 1973." Another thing that has made the current season profitable for Heald is that none of his big events has been rained out.

Paul Lemke of Oak Park estimates that his volume is close to 15 percent higher than it was last year. Possibly half of the increase is due to inflated prices. Sales at Oak Park were only fair until the end of May but they picked up noticeably at Memorial Day and continued strong through June. The ball and glove business he lost due to rained-out rounds was more than compensated for by other items. One thing that has helped the Oak Park pro is that his club's policy on golf cars is not as stringent as elsewhere. Club officials have decided that damage done to turf by the cars is easily repairable and there is no point in being over fastidious as to their use. Of course, it takes cooperation from members in making this policy valid. They have to use good judgment in deciding where they can drive on rainy or soggy days.

Possibly the only club that is outdoing Lemke in volume increase is Medinah. Business has never been better than it is at this location, which has a 'supermarket' pro shop.

The reason for the surge, estimated at nearly 20 percent over 1973, is that Medinah is going to play host to the U.S. Open in 1975 and people are clamoring to join the club. It now has a full membership, whereas a year ago it was down more than 10 percent. Around 1900 bags are stored at Medinah, which has three courses. If the range ball count can be accepted as a business barometer, volume has blown off the roof of the pro shop. The inventory this year is 9,000 versus 4,000 in 1973 and since just before Memorial Day the practice area has been teeming. Medinah's range is rather inconveniently located in relation to the clubhouse and pro shop complex, but as the pro, John Marschall, observes, when early season playing dates are wiped out and the desire to play becomes pent-up, golfers will go to the moon, if necessary, to get their games in shape. Since lesson business goes hand in hand with range exercise it is not surprising that Medinah's teaching pros were simultaneously eating and teaching all during June.

If you wonder what the top selling items are at a big club like Medinah, here is a rundown furnished by Gene Moore, the No. 1 assistant: Wilson and Lynx have been Nos. 1 and 2 among the clubs; Wilson LD and Titleist DT pushed by the TopFlite are the best selling balls; and the Izod brand is the sportswear leader. Contrary to experience at most clubs, there is fairly strong demand for the graphite shaft at Medinah. At other places, only the pros who are clubmakers are doing much with graphite. At most clubs, five or six graphite shafted drivers are made available to players for practice or testing and sales are contingent on reaction to the club. So far, it hasn't been enthusiastic, with only occasional sales being made. The consensus is that graphite either isn't helping the average player's game to any great extent or he is waiting until that \$125 price per club comes down.

At Olympia Fields, Medinah's big club counterpart on Chicago's Southside and always a criteria for measuring golf shop business in the area, genial John Spiropolous after prefatory allusions to all the rain he had seen this spring, conceded that he had no kicks. For him, it was the year for selling clubs and golf bags, which means there will be something of a famine in these items in 1975. It's that two-year cycle

phenomenon. But what John stored up on the heavy equipment side was tempered by lost ball and glove sales due, by his count, to 13 days in May when little or no golf was played. Soft goods sales to men at Olympia have been excellent this year, but only fair among the women patrons. Lesson business boomed after the weather gave way, keeping three men busy on the teaching tee all through June. The Wilson LD ball has edged TopFlite and Acushnet's two leading balls.

Some general impressions gleaned from Golfdom's spring survey of pro shop business: This is definitely not a year of change... There is nothing that is daringly innovative in the design of balls, clubs or sportswear... But in the estimation of most pros, what can be done?... Add dimples or subtract them?... The Hogan Director model club offered a weight toward the toe selling point, but it was hardly original... Still, pros who handle the Hogan line, are high on the Director.

In sportswear, there was a strong trend away from double-knits in favor of a lighter woven polyester-cotton combinations... Also cotton and rayon... Cotton has made a strong comeback this season... There is no in-between in slacks fashions... They're either wildly pastel or somber... Several pros beat inflation by stocking predominantly in \$23-30 slacks and cutting back on \$35-40 models... Cardigans seem to be going out, replaced by pullovers.

Women's wear still presents a dilemma... About one out of three shops find its sale are from fair to good, but the others are dragging... Most frequently mentioned brands are Mulligan, Voyager and Hadley... There is a lot of brand switching as pros search for the line that will catch women's fancy in the individual shop... Their conclusion is that designers become pretty patented in their approach, but most pros agree that probably everything imaginable has been tried in fashioning shirts, blouses, shorts, slacks, etc.

The Burton lightweight bag, which retails for \$32.50, caught on in a rather big way at three or four of the 15 shops surveyed... Men as well as women are buying them... They had an especially big sale at Glen Oak, where girl caddies were introduced for the first time... If you're curious about this, 65 girls

from 14 to 16 were signed up and at least 25 show up every day... One of the club's 14 caddies certified for the Western Open was a girl, but she didn't make it... In the opinion of the Glen Oak caddiemaster, the young ladies are doing a fine job... Quick to learn and paragons of courtesy.

Getting back to inflation... Increases in golf ball prices have been pretty minimal... One manufacturer raised his price per dozen only 25 cents and another suggested a \$16.95 per dozen retail price versus \$16.00 last year... Proving that in a highly competitive field, prices have to be held down even though there is a terrific squeeze due to higher wages and material costs... Increases in club prices seem to have bounced all over the lot in the 3 to 10 percent range, but pros agree that this is holding the line about as well as is being done in any industry... Generally, the fact that overall price increases in pro shops haven't been higher have left most players pleasantly surprised... Undoubtedly this is the reason why, in spite of prolonged poor spring weather, as many as two out of three pros are doing as well this year as they ever did.

EAST

Optimism is the prevailing mood in East Coast pro shops in mid-1974. In spite of a slow May and June in the Northeast due to wet weather, the professionals fully expect to catch up before the end of this season. Their Southern cousins, ranging South from Maryland, are even more optimistic. There are already indications of percentage increases over last year. Inevitably, however, comparisons are being drawn against 1973's almost disastrous washout. Particularly in the Northeast. 1974 profit margins will have to show extremely healthy figures to offset 1973's deficits. Most professionals feel financial solvency will be a reality this year. Depending, of course, on the vagaries of the weather.

Ladies soft goods are generally slow up North. The gals were still in slacks through most of June. Graphite clubs are moving slower than anticipated and the consensus seems to be that their high cost was keeping purchases down. Customer desire to experiment with the new clubs is apparently not strong enough

to offset the high prices. Most pros feel some of their golfers will swing to graphite but only if there is a substantial price reduction, which they don't see happening this season.

Some gambles on ordering last fall have failed to pay off as the season gets into full swing, mostly in the elusive soft goods "guessing game" of what may or may not move in the Spring. Even so, spirits are not dampened.

The gasoline shortage, now fading into a grim, dim image, may have had a reverse effect on pro shop business. More golfers did less long range traveling and more spending at home courses than in prior years. Tony Evans at Highland CC, Fayetteville, No. Car., guesstimates a 10% increase over last year that he can trace to members staying at home.

Evans reports about 5 or 6 percent of his membership playing Shakespeare or Aldila graphite but says, "Graphite is doing fairly well. It hasn't overwhelmed us." He feels price is definitely the factor that needs to change and is confident it will. Evans is doing well in the shoe line in spite of the fact that he doesn't stock a great many styles. He said recently, "I don't stock a great number of shoes but about three styles and a pretty good run in sizes in men's and one style in ladies' and then I do most of my other shoe business by special order." Evans avoids buying "one shot" items like real heavy style changes and high fashion offerings, tending rather to stick to basics. "We are what you might call a conservative club. Conservative in dress too. More so than many other clubs," he offered as an explanation.

Joe Makara at the Manchester, New Hampshire CC reports heavy traffic following a sketchy beginning this year. Rain, felt throughout the Northeast, did not seriously affect play at this 51-year-old Donald Ross layout. "We used to be on the quiet side but we've picked up some new members to replace those who were never very active. Our membership isn't any bigger but it's more active," Makara said recently.

By and large Makara feels he has been successful in gauging his clients

needs. Misjudgement, at this time, would appear to be only in women's apparel. Makara said, "They're always changing styles. We used to go into certain dresses and then there is no call for them later on. Of course we haven't had the weather for the women, they've been wearing slacks up until a few weeks ago. And of course you can't get replacements, you have to order in October. Partial stuff comes in even though you've ordered in October. It seems silly but that's the way they operate." Makara adopts a philosophical attitude which he sums up this way, "It's a different business today and you've got to keep up with it."

Seven years ago the old Griswold Hotel in Groton, Conn., a famed watering place dating back to the turn of the century, was sold to the Pfizer Chemical Co. and its equally famed golf course, Shennecosett, became a municipal layout. A typical seaside links bordering on Long Island Sound, Shennecosett was designed by Donald Ross and opened in 1898.

Walt Chaney, Professional and Manager at Shennecosett, like his counterparts up and down the coast, is optimistic. "We hope to overcome May and June deficits by the end of the season and I think we will," he said recently. Chaney also reported a drop of 30% in soft goods, attributable to the bad weather in May and June.

Green fee traffic was heavy the last weekend in June, according to Chaney, which he felt might be the beginning of the good Summer he looks forward to. "We've had several outings and I hope to encourage more groups during midweek when we're not so busy," Chaney said. "We rely on a big tourist trade in this area and if our weather holds now we'll see one of our best seasons."

As far as the gasoline shortage goes, it apparently fizzled out at Shennecosett. The club switched to gas cars last season and has had no problems to date.

Sports Director and Host Professional Larry Wheeler is enjoying one of his biggest Springs ever at the Golden Horseshoe, Williamsburg, Va. "We're up about 20% over last year," he recently reported. Wheeler handles all sports activity including tennis and the pool at the famed tourist mecca. Business is booming

and he and his two assistants, Gary Smith and Ralph Johnston, are kept hustling.

Wheeler commented on his involvement with graphite. "The clubs are not moving too well but we have done a lot of shaft replacement. We do a big business in club repair and we're currently using the Skeptor shaft from California which at \$40 is half of last years Aldila price."

The direction at the Golden Horseshoe is forward. Wheeler fully expects a record year with a minimum of problems.

Frank Moxon, Professional and owner at the Pontoosuc Lake GC on the Northern outskirts of Pittsfield, Mass., is moving ahead with all his plans. This in spite of a slow start this season. "May was so darn wet that we're really behind but it's slowly coming into its own. Play has been pretty good. We didn't raise our prices this year, we managed to keep them down, so I'm still getting a good play," Moxon explained. Limited memberships are up to capacity too but transient play is a big factor in this prime vacation territory.

Recent innovations have included beefing up the car fleet by eight new vehicles and the continuance of a program started a few years ago to lift the old flat greens. This fall Moxon plans on regrassing his tees through seeding.

Before shutting down last season in November all the underground tanks were filled so going into Spring operations this year caused little concern about fuel shortages.

Frank and his brother Bruce, who runs the grounds end at Pontoosuc Lake, inherited the course from their father, Charles, who was a fifty-year member in the Eastern New York Golf Association of the PGA.

The mood is decidedly optimistic along the East Coast. Upward sales trends are predicted. Perhaps they may be slightly erratic at this mid-season juncture but by season's end the optimism may have paid off.

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