

Handle With

Care

ClubCorp's chief outlines his company's approach to meeting and exceeding golfer expectations

By Robert H. Dedman Jr.

A favorite pastime of golfers is judging the merits of their club's course. For some, the evaluation has a direct correlation to the day's scores. For better or worse, it's likely to be the course superintendent who is the target of the blame or praise. But the perception of a golf course is a major factor in its success and community image. That's why a superintendent is a vital link in its success.

From ClubCorp's start in 1957 with 54 holes at Brookhaven CC near Dallas, the company has approached golf as it has every facet of its business — with an unwavering goal of exceeding members' and guests' expectations. The key to success isn't a secret; it's member service.

At ClubCorp, we have a culture called STAR Service that works equally well on the golf course and in the dining room. We keep STAR Service on course in golf operations by creating Pride in Belonging. P-R-I-D-E. means:

Personalized service We treat every member the same by treating every member differently. This is especially important because golf is a repeat-business industry. We know the golf experience begins in the parking lot and extends to the course. Through personalized service, we strive to make every round memorable.

Recognition and acceptance We call members by name and know their individual preferences. We make sure they receive warm welcomes and fond farewells and, in between, become connected to activities at their clubs. This includes showing respect for the little things and paying attention to details.

Involvement and communication Member satisfaction surveys help keep lines of communication open among superintendents, members and greens committees. Most clubs have regular columns written by superintendents in their member newsletters. Superintendents attend golf committee meetings to keep members apprised of maintenance schedules and other factors that affect playability.

To enhance this communication, we've made it easier for superintendents to receive and exchange information by the use of e-mail and the Internet. We have made an investment to network our clubs, using PCs in each superintendent's office.

Developing relationships Earlier this year, ClubCorp entered into a new six-year agreement with The Toro Co. This and other partnerships help produce well-maintained courses for our members.

When it comes to course maintenance, we're not just talking lawn mowers. We're talking about the people who implement the detailed maintenance practices. Perhaps there is no better example within the company than Pinehurst No. 2, site of the 1999 U.S. Open. This layout required the best golfers in the world to hit every club in the bag and even held up during wet weather. Those facts not only are a tribute to the genius of Donald Ross, but to the agronomic skills of Pinehurst's maintenance staff and the USGA.

We also value protecting and maintaining the ecology foundation of a golf course. About three-quarters of our clubs are members of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

Education and growth The company pays for certification, continuing education, attendance at GCSAA conferences and other types of training for all employee partners. We want good people to come in and not just do the job, but to be motivated to do the job better every day. Each assistant, head, and regional superintendent candidate is tested not only on technical agronomy skills, but also on personality traits. We search for employee partners who will stay and grow with us.

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