

The girls just wanted to have fun. But they couldn't — not with the Riverview Country Club's golf course maintenance staff in the way of their play.

At least, that's what some of the women golfers believed back in the summer of 2002. The women, who were participating in a Tuesday night league at the Appleton, Wis.-based nine-hole private club, were convinced the golf course maintenance staff conspired to fire up its equipment to groom the course every time the women took to the course to play. Come Tuesday night the women claimed they could count on hearing the drone of mowers and the whirring of string trimmers in full force.

"They thought we made that a high maintenance time and that it interfered with their golf," Riverview superintendent Dan Williams said.

The women also thought they were playing second fiddle to the male golfers. They charged that Williams and his crew would never perform such maintenance during men's play.

Williams pleaded no contest. While he understood their complaints, he assured the women there was no bias against them.

The seasoned superintendent, who just finished his 26th season at Riverview, was smart enough not to debate the issue. The women were right, Williams reasoned, because the customer, as the saying goes, is always right.

So Williams opted to do something to close the can of worms that had been opened. He invited members of the women's league on a tour of the maintenance facility and to a seminar dealing with the ins and outs of the crew's operation. The two-hour workshop, which also included hands-on equipment demonstrations, concluded with a reception featuring free beer, wine and hors d'oeuvres.

It wasn't Williams' prerogative to show up the women by educating them and, hence, sending them a message that their views were wide of the mark. Rather, Williams wanted to make the point to the women that he and his staff were their allies, not their adversaries.

Williams wanted them to see up close the

A Classic Case of Customer Service

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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equipment creating all the noise. He wanted them to hear about his philosophy regarding certain maintenance procedures and why they must be performed.

Williams talked to the women about mowing, drainage and cup cutting, among other topics. He showed them the course's pump house and how the course's irrigation system functioned.

Williams also let the women operate some of the maintenance equipment, including a rough mower, front loader, bunker rake and utility vehicle.

"We wanted to make it a special time for them," Williams says.

It was just that.

"It was very educational and a lot of fun," asserts Anne Wiegman, who has belonged to the club for 17 years and is a member of the course's green committee. "We learned about the maintenance that needs to be done on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. I think the women were satisfied. They saw that a lot had to be done and there are only so many hours to do it."

The tour also allowed the women to meet, greet and get to know Williams' staff members, whom they perceived as sweaty working stiffs who rode mowers and raked bunkers all day.

"They got to see that we're human, too," Williams says.

That was Wiegman's favorite part of the tour. "Most everybody knew Dan, but not many people knew the guys who worked for him," she says.

The course conducted the tour again in 2004. With women members coming and going, Williams figures he'll hold the workshop every two years, including next summer. "It doesn't cost much to do," he notes.

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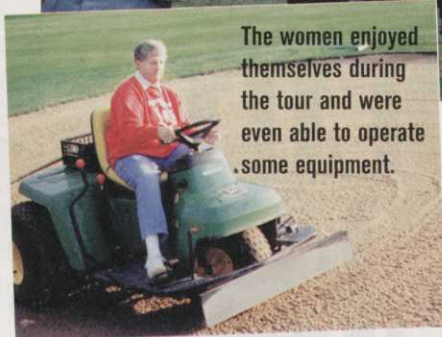
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It's a small price to pay for getting along with a vital segment of your customer base. The golf industry needs more women players, and it's integral the industry reach out to them and welcome them, especially if they're feeling slighted.

Now when the women golfers see Williams and his staff on the golf course, they smile and wave to them rather than frown and complain. Many of the women and maintenance staff members are on a first-name basis. Because the women now understand the golf course's maintenance operation, they've taken more ownership in the course. Last but not least, they've come to appreciate the hard job that is working on a golf course.

These days a superintendent must know much more than agronomics to achieve success. A superintendent's



The women enjoyed themselves during the tour and were even able to operate some equipment.

duties now involve economics, politics, psychology, public relations and of course, customer service.

"We're never going to be best friends," Williams says of golfers in general. "But when the chips are down,

I want those people on my side."

Credit Williams for acting proactively in a situation when others might have acted reactively.

The girls playing golf at Riverview Country Club just want to have fun. And they are — thanks to Riverview's golf course maintenance staff making way for their play.

Larry Aylward, editor in chief of Golfdom, can be reached at 440-891-2770 or larryward@advanstar.com.

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