

Golf courses must focus
on several variables
– from improved
customer service
to proper course
setup – to attract
more female players

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Welcome, Women

For weeks Sharon Murray had wanted to play the new golf course, which had received stellar reviews. The Ohio woman finally got the chance on her 53rd birthday. Murray, who enjoys golf as much as any dad-in-Nike-gear-from-head-to-toe male golfer, was excited about the outing.

But by the time her 18-hole round had ended, Murray wanted to forget about her golf experience, which was disappointing. It's not that Murray shot a 140 and lost a dozen golf balls to the drink. Murray was upset because the course's staff treated her and three friends inferiorly because they are women.

Murray says the foursome was rushed to complete their round. At the turn, the women were hurried to complete bathroom breaks (one stall) and consume their lunches. On the back nine, a ranger ordered the women to pick up their golf balls because he said they were delaying other players.

"We weren't holding up anybody," Murray contends.

Murray, who tees it up several times a month, says she's usually treated well wherever she plays.

"Most courses are accommodating to us," she says. "But this was just a bad experience."

Murray's ordeal may reflect where the golf industry stands today with women. While the industry is not as discriminating to women as it once was, it still needs to advance in making more women feel accepted to the game.

In fact, golf courses would be doing themselves a favor by throwing roses at the feet of women walking in their clubhouse doors. With rounds and revenues flat to down in many regions and competition for new players steep, golf courses need women players more than ever from an economic standpoint. But to attract more women to their tranquil settings, golf courses must focus on several variables, from improved customer service to proper course setup.

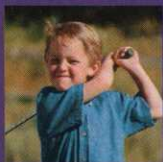
The good news is there's more emphasis on growing the game with women than ever before, says Mike Tinkey, deputy executive director of the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA). "There's a more concerted effort on national and local levels than there has ever been," he adds. "Are we there yet?"

Continued on page 36

[ABOUT THIS SERIES] "Growing the Game," a four-part series appearing in *Golfdom* throughout 2006, will focus on how the golf industry can attract more new players and create more rounds from four distinct groups: **disabled people; women; children;** and **minorities**, including African-Americans and Hispanics. *Golfdom* will speak with representatives from people representing each of these segments to get their views on what the golf industry needs to do to attract more players from their segments. Then we'll speak with golf

industry representatives to see what the industry is doing and what plans it has to grow the game within these segments.

◀ Part four of the series, on children, runs in November.





Install Confidence.
Install Rain Bird®
EAGLE® 351B
Rotors.

Find out how this
golf-quality short
throw rotor solves
irrigation challenges.

Visit www.rainbird.com/eagle351b.

RAIN BIRD

Continued from page 35

No. Are we on our way? I think so."

The percentage of women players among all players has hovered between 22 percent and 24 percent (about 6.57 million) the last few years, according to the National Golf Foundation (NGF). At the same time, however, the NGF reports that millions of women have left the sport because "the entry barriers were too high."

Still, there are signs that more women are playing the game. While the number of core women golfers (playing at least eight rounds per year) has hovered between 2 million and 2.5 million for several years, there has been a clear increase in the number of occasional female golfers (one to seven rounds per year) — an increase of 10.7 percent in the last five years, according to NGF. Tinkey says the push to attract more women has been aided greatly by American Express, the sponsor of Women's Golf Week, a grassroots player development program spearheaded by several industry organizations, including the NGCOA, the LPGA, the PGA Tour, the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the Executive Women's Golf Association.

"This shows that a major brand, American Express, recognizes that women are a vital force," Tinkey says.

The mainstream media is also helping to add more women to Sunday tee-time sheets. Of course, it helps that there are young women professional golfers like Michelle Wie and Paula Creamer, not to mention veterans like Annika Sorenstam, who have captured headlines with their fine play. Tinkey says a new magazine, "Golf for Women," sends the message that "it's cool" for a woman to play golf.

Industry organizations and programs have also formed to attract more women

to golf. Organizations such as the Executive Women's Golf Association (EWGA) — formed in 1991 "to provide opportunities for women to learn, play and enjoy the game of golf for business and for life" — are expanding and attracting more women to the game. Karen Davis, the EWGA's director of golf education and player development, says more women are taking up the game because their careers demand that they play it.

The NGCOA is trying to recruit more girls to the game through its annual "Take Your Daughter to the Course Week." The

program, which debuted in 2000, introduces junior girls to the game and encourages family interaction on the course. More than 1,000 courses and 32,000 junior girls participated in the event in 2005.

There's no doubt these programs are excellent ways to attract more women golfers. But courses must do their individual parts as well to draw more women.

The "make-women-feel-at-ease factor" is vital to attract more women to the game. Course personnel must be more customer friendly with women, Tinkey says.

"What golf courses can do — and what the best courses do — is greet people," Tinkey says. "They make you feel at home."

Amelia Rorer, the LPGA director of instruction at RiverCrest Golf Club & Preserve in Oaks, Pa., says course employees must make women feel more comfortable. They must do this not just by being cordial, but also by making women feel like they belong. At RiverCrest, "we want to do everything for them," Rorer says.

RiverCrest offers three sets of tees for women. The club also hosts forums and focus groups for women to solicit their ideas and concerns.

Rorer says women, more than men,



**"There are a lot
of myths about
women golfers."**

KAREN DAVIS

DIRECTOR OF GOLF EDUCATION
EWGA



Dan Lejeune, CEO of RiverCrest, and Amelia Rorer, the club's director of instruction, stand at the front doors of the golf house, which feature glass-pane designs of male and female golfers. "I want people to realize that if they come in here they are of equal status," Lejeune says.

RiverCrest Golf Club Rolls Out the Welcome Mat for Women Players

By Larry Aylward, Editor In Chief

Dan Lejeune, CEO of RiverCrest Golf Club & Preserve in Oaks, Pa., is an advocate of getting more women to play golf. Lejeune, who has been a real estate developer for more than 35 years, built RiverCrest specifically to attract women to play. While RiverCrest honors the traditional country club atmosphere that attracts men, Lejeune says the club recognizes the importance of offering an inviting atmosphere to women, a growing segment of the golfing population.

Lejeune was a member of a private club for 20 years and saw that women were treated unfairly on various levels. He wanted to do something about it, so he built RiverCrest.

While planning the club, Lejeune says he conducted focus groups of women who were members from eight prominent Philadelphia-area clubs. Lejeune says he heard story after story of how poorly they were treated.

"Some of the stories were just horrific," he says. "They were discriminatory."

RiverCrest, which opened in 2004, offers six sets of tees, three of them designed for women, ranging from 4,541 yards to 6,869 yards. The club also offers equal membership status for women. Club rules allow daily play for women with no restrictions. The women's locker-room facilities and amenities are comparable to the men's.

RiverCrest, which has about 70 women members, also has a women's golf committee and a full women's tournament schedule. In addition, the club offers babysitting services so busy moms can play.

Lejeune says men have reacted well to RiverCrest's open-arms policy toward women. In fact, many men enjoy playing golf with their wives and daughters and making the game a family affair.

"I can't tell you how many male members have come up to me and said, 'Dan, my wife and I are playing golf together and we're having a marvelous time,'" Lejeune says.

want and need to feel comfortable in their surroundings, whether it's at a golf course or a shopping mall. "Women will not go somewhere to play golf if they're not comfortable or the surroundings don't look comfortable," Rorer says.

As a teacher, Rorer says she strives to offer comfort by helping women realize their own abilities and not be intimidated by the game. If women are comfortable playing the game, they will stick with it. "And they will become loyal participants," she adds.

Course setup is another issue that directly involves comfortability. Golf courses must be friendlier from a playability standpoint to appease women players, says Andrea Bakalyar, superintendent of two municipal golf courses in Knoxville, Tenn.

This is not to say that women are second-rate players to men, she adds. Most women are less-powerful hitters than men simply because they have less physical strength. Also, there are more beginner

Continued on page 39



TURF TIP

Are your bunker surrounds looking a little weak, are they covered in sand? Spreading Milorganite over these weak areas will give your turf the nutrients it needs to overcome everyday wear and tear



06-061-2

Continued from page 37

women players than ever, another reason to make courses less penal for them. And according to NGF, the average female handicap is 23 vs. 15 for men.

Besides, Bakalyar notes that less than 10 percent of all golfers are good enough to break 80, and those individuals shouldn't dictate how courses are set up.

"That doesn't mean we don't make golf courses fun for them," she says. "It just means we have to think about the fact that they're not the only people playing. We have to make the field fun for everybody regardless of level of play."

Tinkey says the industry has made strides in this area, but still needs to improve. For instance, the forward tees are not as forward as they should be for some women players, who are more comfortable teeing off closer to a green, Tinkey says.

"That's not to say there aren't any women who can't beat any men," he adds. "But for speed of play and ease of play, we need to implement more forward tees or family tees, which are about 150 yards out."

Most women prefer to play from the first set of tees, Bakalyar says. The distance from a forward tee to the beginning of a fairway should be about 25 yards to the rough. Then golfers have a better chance of landing their drives in the fairway.

The cost to maintain a tee closer to a fairway is slight, Bakalyar adds. It's a matter of mowing the area for an extra five to

10 minutes, a minimal task considering it could keep golfers returning.

Bakalyar also says that maintenance on forward tees shouldn't be neglected. It's sometimes mistakenly assumed the front tees don't get as much play as the back tees.

Proper setup also pertains to hazards. For instance, bunkers shouldn't be built 120 yards out in a fairway from a tee. Such placement only penalizes the shorter-hitting players. In the same regard these players shouldn't be expected to clear 90 yards of water from a tee. "A tee should be placed on the other side of the pond to make it fair for them," Bakalyar says.

Not to say that women can't handle fast greens, but Bakalyar says most golf courses are better off having green speeds measuring 10 feet to 11 feet on the Stimpmeter to appease all golfers.

"A course shouldn't have 10 different speeds," Bakalyar says. "They should be consistent."

Courses also must offer women an improved choice of times to play, says Karen Davis, the EWGA's director of golf education and player development. A women's league shouldn't be scheduled at 10 a.m. on a Tuesday morning. By doing that, a course assumes that many women don't work, which is a fallacy.

On the topic of time, Davis says more golf courses need to implement programs for women to play nine holes or less.

Continued on page 40

Professional. Organized. Superior.



"SG Express has by far the most professional and organized team around. When you measure a company by quality of goods, promptness of shipments and customer service skills, SG Express is superior to all others in the golf course accessories industry."

— Kevin Garber
Legendary Turf • Mesa, AZ

When SG Express members place their orders, they are immediately processed. In-stock items are shipped within 48 hours, and billing comes through the Standard Golf Distributor of their choice.

Experience our service for yourself.

1-866-SG-EXPRESS

(1-866-743-9773)

www.standardgolf.com

**STANDARD
GOLF COMPANY**

We've Got It All.

Women and Golf

♀ Women are more likely to be occasional golfers or to use practice facilities to enjoy the game.

♀ 53 percent of women said they would prefer a non-embarrassing learning situation. Twenty-eight percent of men said that.

♀ 48 percent of women said they want to learn with other beginners. Thirty-six percent of men said that.

Source: National Golf Foundation

Continued from page 39

"That's really important to grow the game for women because of their time constraints," she adds.

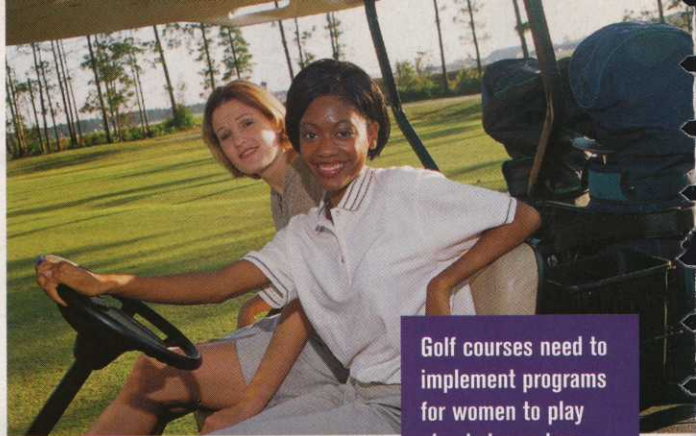
Inside the clubhouse, Tinkey advises clubs to market pro shops more toward women. They shouldn't bury women's attire in the back of the facility. Women account for 24 percent of all golf purchases (clubs, balls, soft goods and green fees), according to the PGA of America. But the association's research reveals that the best women customers, who spend as much or more than many men, are largely ignored by golf course marketers.

Equipment and attire manufacturers need to dedicate more of their base to women, Rorer contends. "There's a lot of retail opportunity there for them."

Golf course employees also need to get past the stereotypes placed on women golfers, ala Murray and her friends. Women are stereotyped as slow players, a stigma that's not deserved, Bakalyar says. "We all have to worry about the pace of play," she adds.

Women have also been labeled as high-maintenance players. Not so, says Bakalyar, adding that just as many men complain about fast greens as anyone.

Male chauvinism in the golf industry is still prevalent, says Rorer, who has taught golf for 23 years and spent seven years on the LPGA Tour. "But it has gotten better," she adds. "I grew up



Golf courses need to implement programs for women to play nine holes or less.

in the era when women and kids were poo-pooed on golf courses. But we've fought through that."

Public courses are more receptive of women players than they were 10 years ago, Davis says. But she says she can't say the same for many private courses: "I don't know that the attitude has changed as much there."

One item that needs to change across the board is that golf courses need to get rid of the term "ladies' tee," Bakalyar says. The front tees on a golf course should be called the forward tees.

"I cringe when people say, 'ladies' tee,'" Bakalyar says. "We're trying to get away from that lingo. We can't assume the people playing forward tees are always women."

Just the same, the back tees shouldn't be called the "men's tee" anymore. Truth is, some women can wallop the ball as far or farther than some men. ■

**golf
construction**
news.com

"The Source for New Golf Project Information"

golfconstructionnews.com (GCN) is an online report containing the most current and in-depth information on golf projects in the U.S. GCN keeps tabs on thousands of projects a year to provide the most up-to-date, comprehensive details as they become available. Reports can be ordered for up to eight regions of the U.S. to fit any-sized business.

Features include:

- Access to project updates 24/7 via secure, password-protected access
- Project tracking from conception to completion, with its status regularly updated
- Full details for New & Proposed Projects, Remodels to Existing Courses & Recent Openings
- State-of-the-art click-through contact access with developers, course designers and construction companies (if selected), and related parties
- Sortable project database – including by state, development phase, type and opening date

Subscribe online now! It's as easy as visiting www.golfconstructionnews.com. Review regularly updated sample projects on the home page and see the power of GCN for yourself.

For additional information, call toll-free 866-640-7170.