

## Elevate the Niceties:

Toad Valley's golf receptionist offers high-touch distinction

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### QUICK TIP

#### Kids Play

The Oak Grove Golf Club in New Boston, Texas, gives junior and beginners a place of their own with small tee boxes located on the edge of each fairway. The tees average 500 square feet to 600 square feet and are elevated about 2 feet. Distances range from 100 yards to 130 yards on par 3s, 150 yards to 180 yards on par 4s, and 180 yards to 230 yards on par 5s. Tees were built in-house with no additional maintenance costs.

**The personal touch of Toad Valley's golf receptionist creates more repeat golfers and generates better wallet share.**

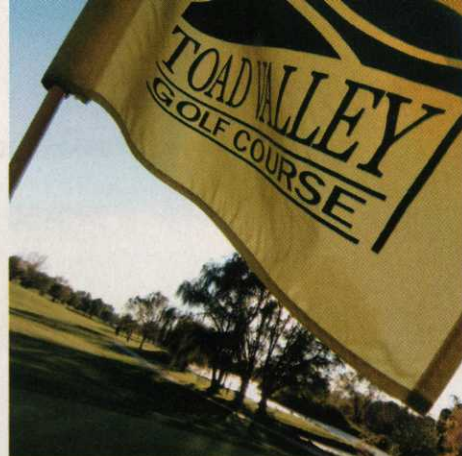
**T**he simplest ideas are often the best. In a departure from current corporate trends, managers of the family-owned Toad Valley Golf Course in Pleasant Hill, Iowa, sought to improve business by hiring a generalist instead of a specialist. By simply creating a golf receptionist position, customer relations and office efficiency has improved greatly.

General Manager Allison George says the Des Moines-area course recently hired a market research firm to gauge golfer satisfaction in the area. The company surveyed 2,000 golfers who had played the public course and 5,000 others in the area.

"We found that many times people feel neglected on the phone," she says. "So this is where the concept of getting a receptionist came to be."

Realizing that staff members in a busy and often noisy pro shop have little time to tend to phone etiquette, receptionist Kassie Underwood, who was hired in April, has been stationed in offices tucked away from the crowds. She works Friday through Sunday, on Tuesdays when the men's club descends on the course, and one other day of the week at her choosing to create a full-time schedule.

Away from the pro shop hubbub, she politely conducts telephone business and patiently gathers information for the e-mail and traditional mail databases. During down times, among other duties, she looks up player addresses in the phone book to add to the list.



"She's doubled our e-mail database and quadrupled our mailing database," George says.

Underwood also calls a few random golfers who played Toad Valley the previous day — mixing morning, midday and late afternoon players — to thank them for playing and to ask for feedback. George says this simple gesture has led to an increase in rounds played by repeat golfers. In fact, when George calls those who have risen from one or two rounds in a season to 10 or more to learn why they're now regulars, they often say, "We really appreciated that phone call back."

With revenues up about 12 percent during the first three quarters of 2007, George calls the hire a success. In truth, Underwood is more an assistant to the general manager than a receptionist. George, for example, designs Web sites for each outing, where golfers can sign up, pay and gather information online. With Underwood available to manage the flow of data on those sites, George is free to move on to creating more of them. Toad Valley has increased group rounds by more than 1,000 this year.

Underwood also helps with two other promotions: Ladies Night Out and Tadpoles. The night for ladies, most of them career women, includes instruction on etiquette, scorekeeping and shotmaking geared toward beginners; the Tadpoles program introduces juniors to the game.

"All of these people call in to sign up or sign up online," George says. "Kassie organizes all of it. She makes them all schedules and hands them out, checks them in and organizes them into groups. It's amazing customer service and frees up more time for me."

"There are over 20 courses within 20 minutes of us. It's extremely competitive, so we do things to try to differentiate ourselves."

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