



TOURISM BUREAU IS HERE TO HELP STATE GOLF, AND WE NEED IT

By Rob Schultz

Want a treat? Call the public affairs department of the Kohler Company and ask for information about Blackwolf Run.

Every golf course in the state should have such a group backing it. Kohler's public affairs people have an 800 number set up for advance registration, they have weekend get-away packages—albeit expensive—to lure golfers from the urban areas of Chicago and Milwaukee, and they are friendly. Call it marketing extraordinaire.

Forget the expense, forget the drive. After talking to these people, you can't wait to play Pete Dye's new golf course.

Even though Blackwolf Run hasn't fully matured, it will be extremely difficult and outrageously expensive (\$51 for 18 holes, \$11 more for half a cart) for conservative Wisconsin tastes, it will draw droves of people this summer because it's new. But it also will draw because of its marketing program.

Hopefully the rest of the state's golf courses will watch this scenario closely and pick up some needed tips. Maybe then everyone connected with golf courses and their associations in this state will get out of the dark ages and join the big-time, too.

Wisconsin used to be the home of the Progressive Party. But this state has been regressive politically, socially and economically for years. Need examples? Just ask Chrysler workers in Kenosha what their politicians were doing when Lee Iacocca snowed them into thinking they'd build Omnis into the Horizon. Just ask your neighbor, as he belches up a beer while chewing on some sausage, what he thinks about the state's ranking as the second-most obese state in the nation. And just ask yourself—especially if you're a Dink (double income, no kids)—what the state has done for you next year when you pay more state taxes.

The same situation plagues golf in this state. Few know how many wonderful courses we have. And there could be, and should be, more of them.

Talk golf to most golf course architects and they'll tell you Wisconsin's environment is perfect for building golf courses. We have just about anything a course needs, except the know-how to produce, manage and market it on a large scale.

As far as golf is concerned, a glimmer of hope rests with the Kohlers, Lake Arrowheads, Lawsonias and other golf courses that seem to be on the ball. It also rests with the state division of tourism and anybody who has an idea and is connected with a state golf course association.

This month's *Sports Page* phone call was dialed in the direction of Winfield McDonald, the state division of tourism's advertising manager.

For the first time in its history, the tourism bureau is trying to pump up added interest in golf in Wisconsin. Taking a page from the Michigan tourism bureau's phenomenal success, the Wisconsin bureau connected with *Par Excellence Magazine* and Marshfield's Chip Acker of the state's Golf Course Association to drum up business.

"I think there is a great future in it," said McDonald. "To be quite truthful, these are our initial stages. We've had them in books before, but as far as getting into the promotional and advertising part and getting something to hand out, we haven't done it before. This is our first step."

The tourism bureau can promote golf now that its budget has increased dramatically. Two years ago, the bureau had a \$1.25 million budget for promotion and advertising. Now it's \$5 million.

"Before, all we had to do was take a shotgun, generic approach (for everything). Now we're starting to focus in on specific activities, also specific target markets and our customers," McDonald said.

But that doesn't mean the tourism bureau has money to burn and is looking for new business. That's why it's

important for all the golf courses and its state associations to unify and present a marketing and advertising plan for the tourism bureau.

"It's important to start a relationship and keep it going," McDonald said. "We're pulled about 8,000 different directions."

"Groups are the key. If we can do it on a group basis it would make it a lot easier for us instead of just one golf course. That would be the best. Then you've got somewhat of a responsibility to help them. Otherwise it's piecemeal and you can't help them all."

McDonald said golf courses should get together and try to present a package deal that will lure golfers from all over the state and its surrounding areas. Basically, his advice is exactly what the folks at Kohler are doing with Blackwolf Run. At Kohler, however, the package deal is all within the same company. It has a hotel and a total recreational package on its grounds. But that doesn't mean other courses without such amenities can't create a package just as attractive.

"It's real critical to package," McDonald said. "If they can get together with local hotels, motels, restaurants, anything, that would be good. Anytime you can take as many of the unknowns and the hassles out of your customers' decision to come as well as the experience once they are there, you're all going to be a lot better off."

"If I was in a golf course association, I'd think about having an 800 number to call, too, and have one clearing house for reservations."

There is no reason why the state's golf courses shouldn't grow in popularity. But it all boils down to the approach that you have to spend a little money now to make more of it later.

Think of it. Michigan's golf courses have been successful by sending promotions to its one main drawing card: the Detroit area. They also promote nationally, but the Motor City is where they get the most golfers.

Wisconsin has a much larger drawing area. Golfers from Chicago, Milwaukee, Iowa, Minnesota and Indiana will make the drive if they think it's worthwhile. All golfers need is someone to tell them it is worthwhile. The state tourism bureau is waiting for you to call.