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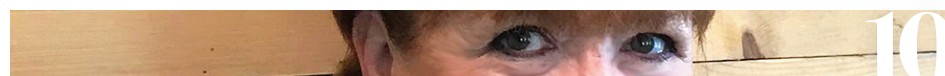


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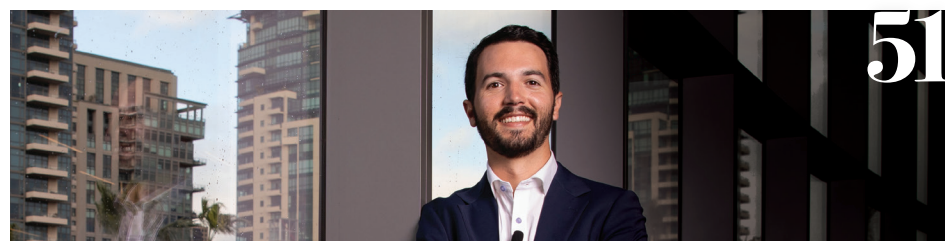
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From the CEO Vantage Point

By Jay Karen
CEO
NGCOA

The Case for Diversity

In today's America, it's hard to escape the topic of how demographics are changing. I'm always thinking about how these greater societal, economic and political issues – specifically changing demographics – relate to golf.

I think there are two ways to look at the prospect of diversity and inclusion in the golf industry: passionately or dispassionately. When I say dispassionately, I mean looking through the spectrum of cold facts and numbers. The passionate perspective may derive from feelings of right and wrong or justice and injustice, and wanting to do something about it. Whichever path you choose, I believe there is a strong case to be made for extending the invitation to audiences that traditionally have been left out or left behind by our industry.

If you take the dispassionate approach, you could sympathize with the position that marketing consultant Andrew Wood takes in his advice to his social media audience: going after “ghetto kids” (his words) is a waste of time. Instead, he proclaims course operators should invite back the bread-and-butter demographic (middle-aged white guys) who have money to spend and their old clubs hanging up in the garage. Because, well, young minority boys and girls aren't going to give your business a game-changing lift next quarter or next year. If you look at the facts, he's not wrong about the short-term. The chasm is too far to achieve transformative and widespread change overnight (although I think at the local level, one could see change pretty quickly with the right approach). Yet, if you look at the facts of where demographics are going in America, it won't even be one generation until there are more non-white than white people in our country. If you're in a business that has culturally been tied to a shrinking demographic, at a minimum you'd better consider the facts.

Then there is the passionate case for diversity and inclusion. Simply put, golf has a checkered history of cultural exclusion. For generations, golf clubs had white-only and men-only policies. The pendulum was inextricably stuck on one side, and many leaders in our industry believe we should push the pendulum in the opposite direction. There's a feeling we have a chance to get this right, and several organizations are doing very good work. We would do well to remember the opposite of exclusion is inclusion, and by inclusion I do not mean the door to your business is open to anyone who may want to pay for a tee time. It's about getting out of your comfort zone and going into the world to seek out women and ethnic minorities, and literally invite them to come.

Knowing small business owners and operators as I do, it's not always practical to think about about 20 or 30 years from now. You're rightfully concerned with how the business will do next week or next month. It may not always seem practical to spend time, energy and money on diversity work, when the “pay off” may not be seen for a very long time. But I believe inviting the “old guys” back to the course, who gave up the game 10 years ago, and reaching out to the underrepresented gender and ethnicities are not mutually exclusive.

I'm reminded of that old saying, “Save money like you're going to live forever, but buy life insurance like you may die today.” It's possible to simultaneously take care of today AND look out for the future. It's our job as association leaders, who run organizations that presumably will exist in perpetuity, to look at the next quarter and the next half-century. Ignoring the diverse future would be passionately, dispassionately and irresponsibly wrong.

When faced with the opportunity to invest time, energy and money to create a more inclusive reality in golf, we should look at the facts and listen to the better angels of our nature.

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A View From the Industry My Take

By Boots Gifford
Editor in Chief
Golf Business magazine

25 Years and Counting

As we prepare to close out the year with the November/December issue of Golf Business magazine, we're well under-way in planning for a very special 2020.

Having published its first issue in 1995, next year will be Golf Business magazine's 25th anniversary. And with that silver anniversary mile-marker, we have some new features in store for our readers.

In each issue throughout 2020, Golf Business will take a look back at stories in past issues, and revisit the people, trends, business issues or controversies featured. This will be an opportunity to review the road the golf industry has taken as we prepare for the path ahead and the game of the future.

Two new features will join our regular lineup for 2020.

For a look at the increasing importance of the food and beverage industry's impact on golf course operations, we'll talk with

those people who have found success and share their tips and "secret sauce" in *What's Cooking?*

As the golf retail market changes with more focus on technology as well as fashion and equipment, along with forays into performance gear and supplements, we will be sharing the inside story from golf shop operators implementing the latest trends in *Shop Talk*.

Special reports on the Golf Business magazine calendar include Labor & Staffing, Food & Beverage, Women in Golf, Finance and the third annual Technology Issue. We will continue to tell the tales of golf course operators who have made an impact, and how our readers can take a page from their books, while stretching our wings with the Golf Business podcast and future digital products.

As we prepare for this special 25th anniversary year, we also want to hear from readers about what they'd like to see. Send your thoughts to bgifford@ngcoa.org.

Golf Business magazine looks forward to seeing what the future holds for all of us.

Correction

In the October 2019 issue of Golf Business, in the cover story titled "Survival Tactics," the name of Andrew Peterson of the Municipal Golf Association San Antonio, also known as the Alamo City Golf Trail, was misspelled.

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Addressing The Issues

By Ronnie Miles
Director of Advocacy
NGCOA

Water Rule Repealed, What's Next?

On Sept 12, the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Army published a final rule to repeal the 2015 Clean Water Rule: Definition of "Waters of the United States." In its official public notice, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler stated, "Today's Step 1 action fulfills a key promise of President Trump and sets the stage for Step 2 - a new WOTUS definition that will provide greater regulatory certainty for farmers, landowners, home builders, and developers nationwide."

During his comments, Assistant Secretary of the Army of Civil Work added, "The final rule repeals the 2015 Rule and restores the previous regulatory regime exactly how it existed prior to finalization of the 2015 Rule."

The next step in the two-step process intended to review and revise the definition of "Waters of the United States" consistent with the Executive Order signed on Feb. 28, 2017, "Restoring the Rule of Law, Federalism and Economic Growth by the Reviewing the "Waters of the United States" federally regulated under the Act. On Feb. 14, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Army (Army) proposed a revised definition of "waters of the United States," which would delineate the scope of federal regulatory authority under the Clean Water Act in a clear and understandable way.

The golf industry supports the CWA, opposed the 2015 rules and supports efforts by the EPA and the Corps to replace it with a rule that both protects the principles of cooperative federalism and enables industry/responsible parties to proactively apply sound science practices to their land management activities that protect the environment without impacting business, jobs

and communities. Our industry has long-standing support through university-based agronomic and environmental research that has developed best management practices for design, construction and golf course management.

On April 15, NGCOA along with GCSAA, PGA, CMAA, NCA, ASGCA and GCBAA under the We Are Golf banner, shared our comments with the administration supporting the proposed rule. We shared our belief that golf courses are designed as a water conveyance system in order to best manage surface water flow from stormwater, flood or irrigation flow through either natural or man-made conveyances. These waters are conveyed, stored and/or utilized for irrigation or filtering purposes. They also are designed to collect runoff from adjacent properties for flood control and pollution prevention. Courses use this runoff as an irrigation source as well. They also use reclaimed water to help water purveyors manage excess recycled water. The course irrigates with this water providing filtration and an economical solution for disposal of reclaimed water.

Water will remain a critical issue for our industry. Many, especially in the media, have the perception that this new policy is being developed to benefit our president's golf course properties. This issue is much greater than the few courses he owns. But hopefully, during this process, we have educated many on the benefits our industry provides in protecting our waters and the greater environment. We encourage members to help share this message within your communities. We support sound environmental management policies but they must be clear and support the needs of both the business community and the public.

It is expected that a new WOTUS Rule will be finalized before the end of the year. Until then owners and operators across the United States have a common regulation to follow, the Clean Water Act.

GOLF INDUSTRY Calendar

2019

November 17-19
GolfBusiness Canada
Niagara Falls, Ontario
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2020

January 20-22
GolfBusiness Conference
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January 21-24
PGA Merchandise Show
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January 25-30
Golf Industry Show
Orange County
Convention Center
Orlando, Florida
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May 5-6
National Golf Day
Washington, D.C.
wearegolf.org/national-golf-day/

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**Coalition
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By Jared Williams
Managing Director
GOLF USA TEE TIME COALITION

(Tee) Time is Money

The old adage has always been that time is money. Time is one of the most valuable commodities, largely because we all have a finite amount of it. The same can be said of golf courses. In fact, it's probably a bit hackneyed now to reiterate that your tee times have actual value in a dollar amount – real money.

As such, we've constantly advocated that golf courses analyze the opportunity costs associated with any barter agreement, where the actual value you give (in tee times) and receive in return (software and services) may not be equitable.

Aside from the equitability factors, which we have discussed ad nauseam, lay the questions around taxability of barter sales and transactions. Which party bears the responsibility of reporting the sales data?

Back in the early part of 2017, we sought to tackle this question and provide the industry with an in-depth analysis of the tax obligations each party has when entering into a barter agreement. After spending a good bit of time – and money – we were left only more perplexed. Largely because no state or federal tax authority had even broached the issue.

That changed on Sept. 16, when the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts' three-year audit of an online tee time agency resulted in an administrative law judge finding that the OTTA was not entitled to a sales tax waiver on reservation fees because those taxes were never assessed.

Additionally, the court found the barter transactions made by the OTTA are taxable as data processing services. The OTTA did not collect any sales tax on the reservation fees from the barter transactions that took

place during the audit period (April 1, 2011 to September 30, 2014).

There's certainly a lot to unpack in this 11-page opinion. But rest assured we are working diligently to help you understand exactly what this means for you and your facility.

Two things have always worried me about this.

If the industry as a whole is unsure about the tax obligations for those entering into barter transactions, how will tax authorities view this?

Even if golf courses have an obligation to report some of the barter sales data, realistically, how can they? The major OTTAs aren't going to disclose full and transparent barter sales data (number of times sold and rate at which each sold). It'd be too much like the right thing to do. And it would allow for courses to more easily determine whether a barter agreement is sensible for their facility.

And the actual dollar amount in green fees the OTTA charged golfers was indeed the tax basis for which the auditor found barter transactions as taxable data processing. The result: a \$1 million assessment liability for the OTTA and a 10 percent penalty for late filing periods and interest.

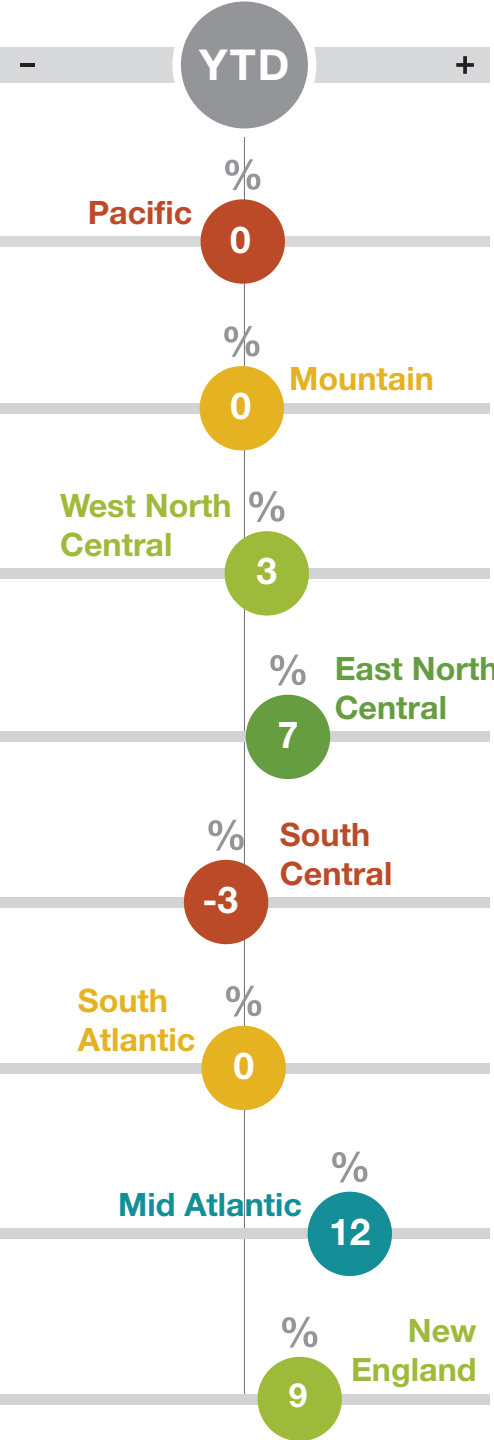
In Texas, taxable items include services, and here the court identified a golf green fee as a taxable amusement service (sale price of an amusement service includes fee charged for admission – in this case, green fees).

Every state is different and you need to find out what the relevant law is in your state. But one statement in the court's opinion should stick with all of us:

"The business records petitioner provided were scant and did not establish details about what golf courses received in the barter transaction. Based on the evidence presented, it does not appear that petitioner gave any thought to sales tax consideration when it was characterizing the revenue at issue."

Rounds Played

August 2019
Data percentage compared to same period last year.



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Sherea Malcolm
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THE START

NEWS & VIEWS TO PROPEL YOUR BUSINESS

Reynolds Lake Oconee held a holiday sale, logging no less than \$59,000 in sales over a three-day period.

Getting Into the Holiday Spirit

Eat, drink & be merry — and how about a little golf, too

This is the time of year to think about ways in which the holiday season can and should overlap with your golf operation. The motivation for doing so could be add-on revenue, member appreciation, community outreach, a charitable event or just a feel-good opportunity to celebrate with those around you.

By David Gould

At a public facility in Lopatcong, New Jersey, called The Architects Golf Club, they get a real jump on the season by hosting a Thanksgiving Day dinner with a full-field golf tournament preceding it. The idea is based on the traditional Thanksgiving dinner served in the facility's manorial clubhouse. Since people need something to do in the early part of the day besides watching high school football, an 8 a.m. shotgun tournament was added, priced at \$49 per player. Turnout is weather-dependent, but in the Northeast it's surprising how often fine weather comes along for Turkey Day.

The great thing about holiday planning for golf courses and clubs is the "accordion" factor – you can go all-out with black-tie, 10-course dinners on New Year's or simply do a special merchandise event in the golf shop for December. You can go it alone or you can connect with others in the golf community to organize a bigger event. In Myrtle Beach, where golf operators team up to do all sorts of things, they use their combined resources to promote golf plus holiday fun in the region. On the myrtlebeachgolf.com website there's a push every year to sell golf packages as Christmas gifts, with detailed plans for how to ring in your visit. No opportunity is missed to tout Shadrack's Christmas Wonderland, an iconic Grand Strand show of lights, music and other Yuletide enjoyment.

Part of finding holiday opportunities

for your golf business is tracking the changeable consumer habits around shopping and celebrating. The line of thought at Williamsburg (Virginia) Golf Club is that Black Friday mall-crawling – though eagerly awaited by many – isn't something its members are keen on. Instead they and their guests are invited for an 8:30 a.m. breakfast, a 10 a.m. shotgun tournament and a sale in the golf shop offering the greatest merchandise discounts of the year.

If there's concern about staffing and customer turnout for a holiday activity that's scheduled deep into December, you can always create a Christmas-theme event and host it prior to the holiday season – that's often the only practical way to run a Toys-for-Tots charity outing, since collecting the funds and then purchasing and distributing gifts requires a few weeks to execute.

Some of these events start off modest-

ly and then grow to become juggernauts. An event that's been hosted in recent years by 36-hole Bonita Bay Naples (Florida) the Christmas Golf Tournament and Dinner put on by the Everglades Golf Course Superintendents Association, has a 176-player field and a full day and evening of golf, dining, awards receptions, raffles, speeches and the works. The beneficiaries of the event are many, starting with the Children's Home Society of Florida and extending to a families-in-need food program, support for the disabled and several other causes.

The advantages of scale also were apparent last year when Reynolds Lake Oconee (Georgia) staged an epic holiday sale, spread out across one of its expansive golf shops and into an adjacent conference room, just after Thanksgiving. Consolidating older merchandise from its six golf shops, the community's combined golf staffs managed crowd



Reynolds Lake Oconee combined merchandise from its six golf shops just after Thanksgiving to create one big holiday golf sale.



control and worked in teams to run the registers, work the gift-wrap stations and restock product on the sale tables. Freshly baked cookies and hot chocolate accompanied by Christmas music got shoppers in the mood – many of



There is a proven connection between the arrival of the New Year and lessons, range plans, clinics and the like.

them having waited in line 30 minutes before the sale began on opening day. More than 1,000 shoppers completed transactions. From a revenue standpoint, the sale was a grand success, logging no less than \$59,000 in sales over a three-day period.


If your resources are considerably more limited, a merchandising dive into the holiday season can be small-scale but still creative. Just check the bulk golf ball wholesaling websites and you'll find endless seasonal logos including Santa Claus, snowmen, Hanukkah dreidels, menorahs and probably the Three Wise Men looking for one more to make a foursome.

And while you probably don't associate the golf instruction facet of your operation with holiday time, there is a proven connection between the arrival of the New Year and lessons, range plans, clinics and the like. Golfers who are improvement-oriented or generally frustrated act a lot like those folks looking to "get back to the gym" – they adopt a this-is-my-year mindset and are extremely open to suggestion when it comes to teaching and training. All the big academies market New-Year, new-you lesson and practice packages – no reason not to try it yourself.


David Gould is a Massachusetts-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Golf Business.

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By Steve Eubanks

November and December can be perfect golf months in many parts of the country. But a lot of areas in the Southeast, Southwest and Midwest deal with frost delays, even on days that warm into beautiful afternoons.

What do you do operationally to be proactive on days when you anticipate frost?

Carr Crowe: Because of the way our course is laid out, we really can't go with shotgun starts on those days. But we know frost days are coming. Throughout most of November and December, we get frost almost every morning when it's not overcast, so we pay close attention to the forecast and don't book tee times before about 10 a.m. There's just no reason to book a time when you know you likely can't get people out. They might have other time commitments where pushing them back is not an option. We'd rather leave those times open and then, if it



Carr Crowe

HEAD GOLF PROFESSIONAL
SEQUOIA NATIONAL GOLF CLUB
CHEROKEE, NORTH CAROLINA



Jeff Williams

DIRECTOR OF GOLF
BRICKYARD CROSSING
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA



looks like the weather will be better and we can get them out earlier, we'll open up some times between 9:30 and 10:00, last minute, and work back from there.

Jeff Williams: The best practice is to communicate early and often, which we do. When someone books at time that we think will probably be affected by frost, we let them know, up front, that there is a good possibility of a frost delay and that, if that happens, those times will be pushed back. We've found that people are very understanding as long as you are up front and in constant communication with them.

What do you do with the players who do show up on days when you have a longer frost delay than expected?

Crow: Obviously, if there's frost, it's cold. So we do things like offer some free coffee to people who are delayed and we make sure there are plenty of food options for them. We also might offer a 20 percent discount on all outerwear that morning as a gesture of goodwill, to let them know that we understand their frustration.

Williams: We make sure there is food and coffee and all the things that players want. But we also educate people on why we can't open with frost. Most people don't realize that if the ground itself is frozen you really can't hurt it, but frost freezes the blades of grass. If you step on them, they'll shatter and die. Once you explain that to people and let them know what the plan is for getting them out as soon as possible, we find that they're very understanding.

Innovation Insights

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

GPS Guides Golf Gift Giving

When it comes to great technological advances for the game of golf, arguably one of the most popular innovations of the 21st century was the introduction of GPS-powered technology.

Indeed, when the satellite-based Global Positioning System was pioneered by ProLink Inc. founder and CEO Douglas Lecker 25 years ago and subsequently adopted by golf-car manufacturer E-Z-Go, the everyday golf course experience changed forever.

At least for those owners and players who saw value in these cutting-edge cars. Today, of course, many of the industry's golf-car fleets feature some type of GPS-powered technology. And modern-day golfers can't seem to live without their GPS yardage-marker guidance.

When Lecker was featured 17 years ago in a New York Times article, the former Boeing engineer/Arizona entrepreneur said once GPS technology became less expensive and more widely available in the mid-1990s, he realized its pinpoint accuracy was a natural fit for a guessing game like golf. At the time, Lecker envisioned golf cars one day delivering stock quotes, business news and having other business and consumer-oriented benefits.

To be sure, that day has arrived with golfers getting a lot more out of those ubiquitous roof-mounted screens than just distances for their next shot.

In fact, GPS has become so popular that the number of gadgets offering this



Garmin International Inc. formed a partnership with Hall of Fame golfer Greg Norman to be a global brand ambassador.

type of precision technology is seemingly endless thanks to the advances that now allow GPS to be integrated in things that can fit on the wrist or in palm of one's hand.

In honor of the holiday gift-giving season, here are a couple of GPS-powered devices helping golfers at all levels drill down the ultimate in distance measurement and swing data statistics.

SkyCaddie SX500 - This new GPS handheld, made by Ridgeland, Mississippi-based SkyGolf, is becoming one of the most trusted rangefinders in the game after Englishman David Shacklady touted the hand-held, 5-inch, full HD touch-screen device after his victory last September at the Staysture Tour Sinclair Invitational. It was actually the third win on the U.K. pro tour this year by golfers using the device preloaded with more than 35,000 of SkyGolf's "ground-verified, error-corrected maps for unmatched accuracy."

One of the newer innovative features of the SX500's powerful processor is "Dynamic HoleVue," which automatically re-orientates the entire golf hole from your position to the green as you progress from the tee. So, by leveraging SkyCaddie's patented IntelliGreen technology, golfers can now see the entire hole from their point-of-view to quickly acquire distances to avoid intervening hazards to plot the best strategy for every shot.

Garmin Approach S40 - This stylish stainless-steel GPS golf smart watch preloaded

with 41,000-plus international courses not only looks the part on and off the course, but also delivers some compelling features. Not the least of which is a color display built with a higher resolution so the device is sunlight-readable in high-glare situations and streamlined to present all relevant information right when you need it.

For instance, the Approach S40 automatically records each shot along the fairway and records distances for post-game analysis on Garmin Connect. Other newer features: The watch will automatically update courses you frequently play when synced with Garmin Connect; monitor steps and sleeping, with dedicated modes for running and cycling; and synch with smartphones to allow notifications for incoming calls or texts.

To give the brand more cachet, Garmin International Inc., a unit of publicly traded Garmin Ltd., announced last August a new partnership with Hall of Fame golfer Greg Norman to be a global brand ambassador.

"Having used many different products over the years, I can say with conviction that Garmin offers the most precise and advanced GPS technology for the course and has truly helped me improve my game," Norman said. "I wear my Garmin fenix watch almost every day. It's sleek, lightweight and water resistant, so it can go everywhere I go - from the golf course to the boat and beyond."

Scott Kauffman is a golf business writer and the managing director of Aloha Media Group, and is regular technology columnist for Golf Business. You can contact him with tech news at iwritegol@gmail.com.

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Survival Tactics

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WHAT'S HOT In My Shop



Jim Schouler Jr. • PGA Head Golf Professional
Abenaki Country Club • Rye Beach, New Hampshire



Sunfish Custom Headcovers

Using the state logo combined with the club logo has appealed to a broader audience. Also, the perceived value of the Sunfish brand has helped increase margins.



Stache Mugs

Being able to customize the artwork on the insulated mugs has helped keep the inventory fresh and evolving. I was able to take a picture of our entrance sign with the Atlantic Ocean in the background and Stache Mugs was able to make a high-quality mug with that image. Stache has low minimums and allows us to be flexible and creative.



Imperial Headwear

Showing state pride and the club logo have provided new fashions in headwear. We still sell the simple, understated classic hat, but also now have some broader choices. Just as fancy print shirts have been hot, fancy print hats will continue that trend.

What's Hot In My Shop is produced in cooperation with the Association of Golf Merchandisers (agmgolf.org)

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Tim Dunlap, left, and Steve Paris, right, formed Regent Golf as a boutique firm with a specific niche.

“Look, growth is a heck of a drug.”

- TIM DUNLAP

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More Not Necessarily Merrier

Regent Golf Values Relationships Over Growth

By Steve Eubanks

he most luring intoxicant in management is scalability. The infrastructure needed to run two clubs – administration, marketing, insurance – is not twice as expensive as what’s needed to manage one. But your fee income from doing a second management deal doubles. Add a third and fourth property and the gap between fees and fixed expenses widens even further. By the 10th or 11th, you’ve got national purchasing power and a name in the marketplace. Bump that number up close to triple digits and you’re one of the top 10 executives in the industry – someone who gets wine and dined at conferences and has no trouble being invited to all the right events.

“Our business is not transactional, it’s relational.”

- TIM DUNLAP

But every high has its crash, every party its hangover. And while you might gain all the trappings of being an industry giant when you grow to a certain scale, you lose the thing your clients and partners need and value most. You lose your relationships.

That’s why a relatively new partnership called Regent Golf in Georgia is taking the opposite approach in its growth strategy.

“Our business is not transactional, it’s relational,” said Tim Dunlap, who, along with Steve Paris, formed Regent Golf as a boutique firm with a specific niche.

According to Paris, “We are going to be very selective about the kinds of clients we do and do not do business with. For example we shouldn’t be butting heads with companies like Troon on properties that are next to Starwood Hotels. That’s not who we are. We’re not going to do that. Our ideal property is owned by a family or an individual. Maybe it’s not their primary interest or means of income; maybe the kids are involved in it now and they’re trying to keep the legacy alive; maybe they’re trying to protect their assets and their property. We can relate to that owner. And we can create more than a business relationship between them. We’re very good at that. But our goal has never been to have 50 clubs.”

It’s easy for someone who has never managed 50 clubs to say that he has no aspirations of getting there. But Paris and Dunlap came from the go-go-growth world of golf. They have seen the upside and lived the downside firsthand.

When Paris left American Golf, he was chief operating officer, overseeing 135

properties in 21 states. Dunlap also is an American Golf and ClubCorp alum. He also was the chief operating officer of Sequoia Golf, which owned and managed 55

golf properties around the country. They have seen large-scale, transactional golf management. And they don’t want to be part of that again.

“We really like the 14-club rule,” Dunlap said, referencing the Rule of Golf as analogous to Regent’s rules governing effective golf management.

“Look, growth is a heck of a drug,” Dunlap said. “But with a small number of clubs and a select group of club owners, our time and attention can be devoted to developing and maintaining those relationships. Three-year management agreements where you’re in and out, that’s not relational. That’s strictly a transaction. ...The brand we’re building isn’t our brand; it’s the brands of the clubs we manage; the brands of the owners whose legacies we’re invested in protecting. That’s what we care about.”

“Other management companies are using cookie cutters. They bring in the same systems one club after another, whether or not the next club needs that same cookie. That’s a growth strategy but not a long-term operational strategy. That’s not a strategy that’s good for the owners; not a strategy that’s good for the relationship they have with their members and not a good strategy for us as a management company.”

Paris and Dunlap have identified 4,200 active private clubs in America. Of those, 800 are owned by individuals or families. They want to cultivate relationships with slightly less than two percent of those. And they want those relationships to be personal.

When they were with the larger companies, both flew in private jets. Dunlap now pulls an Airstream camper behind

an SUV and stays by the maintenance sheds of the clubs they manage.

“Look, in essence, this is new brand – 99 people out of 100 are going to say, ‘Never heard of you guys,’ Paris said. “But we know what we’re doing. The first thing we talk to owners about is the ‘current member experience.’ What’s that like?”

“So, when we first come into an operation, even if they haven’t hired us, we always recommend two things: The first is a member survey and the second is a complete operational audit where we go through every single department and see how the sausage is made. We look at the last three years of their financials, their rounds, their member growth; check under the hood of everything they have going on.

“Then we write a report that merges the two together. We tell them: ‘Here’s what we found, here’s what we think you can do better, and here’s how we think you can solve your problems.’ But in some cases we have to say: ‘Your club is in the wrong place, there’s no growth, and you might continue to bleed money for a long time.’ Those instances are very rare, but they do happen.

“What we’ve found is that when you give the owners your comprehensive report, a lot of times they say, ‘Gee that sounds great. We don’t have any idea how to do this.’ And that’s when you say, ‘We do.’ Management flows naturally from that.”

Regent has two courses under management – one club in California (owned by a woman who inherited the property from her father) that was on the verge of closing but is now thriving – and the second in North Carolina where Regent has taken over from one of the largest management companies in the industry. Two more are expected to be online by the end of the year.

But Paris and Dunlap are in no rush. Lasting relationships take time. **RB**

Steve Eubanks is an Atlanta-based freelance writer and New York Times bestselling author.

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Winter Haven Seeks Success on Road Less Traveled

BY STEVE EUBANKS

Great golf isn't always enough, especially once the pavement ends, literally.

When most of the country thinks of Florida they either imagine beachfront condos, tower upon gleaming tower from Jacksonville to Miami, or Disney World and other assorted attractions. The idea that a golf course capable of hosting a Florida State Open, one of the larger Symetra Tour events and a couple of mini-tours could be so remote that the road narrows to one lane of sand and shale before you get there seems farfetched.

But that's what it's like to visit the Country Club of Winter Haven on a lonely stretch of the Sunshine State between Orlando and Tampa, south of nowhere and miles from the nearest Burger King. The course is a gem with a long history. It dates back to the 1920s when the area, as the name suggests, was a winter haven for wealthy northerners who needed a quiet place to escape, close enough to the gulf coast to keep civilization in reach but far enough away to still have panthers, bears and alligators longer than Cadillacs.

As golf exploded in more populated areas of the state, Country Club of Winter Haven needed a facelift. In 2011, Bill Bergin redesigned the course to rave reviews.

"We were incredibly lucky to have such a classic piece of land and to be given free rein to create something special," Bergin said. "I'm incredibly proud of what we did because you now have a golf course that challenges the best players in the world – those players from the Symetra Tour love it but none of them tear it up – but is also playable and fun for the members."

Retirees who live on both coasts have joined Winter Haven as a second club because of the caliber of Bergin's work. But it's still in the middle of nowhere. In those cases – and there are plenty of them throughout the U.S. – professional management is the only answer.

Winter Haven has brought in Kemper Sports to market the club as something other than a great golf course with little around.



"We're excited to welcome the Country Club of Winter Haven to the Kemper Sports family," the company's CEO Steve Skinner said. "We look forward to working with the members and staff to elevate the experience and introduce a new generation of members to everything the club has to offer."

Places like Streamsong can get away with being remote. There are a hotel, multiple courses and topography that makes you think of a hundred places other than Florida. But with the exception of Streamsong, Bandon Dunes and Sand Valley, the "Field of Dreams" adage rarely works in golf. If you build it, they won't always come. Country Club of Winter Haven is a perfect example.

According to club president Mike Mahalek, "Through this new partnership, we will be tapping into Kemper Sports's private club expertise to ensure Winter Haven is well-positioned to meet the needs of our members."

Steve Eubanks is an Atlanta-based freelance writer and New York Times bestselling author.

Brown Golf Management Takes Back Control

By Steve Eubanks

The trap is simple, but like the frog in the slowly heating pot of water, golf course owners fail to jump out because they don't realize they're boiling until it's too late.

Third-party tee-time companies suck you in with attractive offers of technology and tee-sheet management, website construction, even social media engagement. For an owner who is worried about the sprinkler box on 12 or the leaky hydraulic line on his two-years-too-old greens mower, it's an enticing proposition. They will handle everything. All the outfit wants in return is a few tee times, marginal ones in off-peak hours that would probably sit unused anyway. For that, they promise you the world.

And before you know it, you're stuck. You've lost control of your tee sheet; lost control of your rate; lost control of your margins, your income and your messaging. Your course and your brand are worth what a third-party facilitator in a far-distant place says it's worth.

In the meantime, your expenses – payroll, insurance, chemicals, fertilizer, equipment, capital improvements – increase at an unyielding pace.

"That's the trap we see every day," said Todd Brown, who, along with the brother, John, formed Brown Golf Management in 2011. "Owners lose control of their revenue, in essence giving control of their rate to another party while keeping the responsibility for their expenses that just go up and up."

The Browns stepped into the management and ownership business in 2011. In eight years they have acquired,

leased or signed management agreements with 20 facilities encompassing 28 courses in seven states, a remarkable growth curve built on one simple principle: "We take back control of revenue and we use technology to grow that revenue," Brown said.

To many, the technology seems space-aged, even though it is becoming more common by the day. Players can book and pay for tee times with their Alexa devices. Player profiles are automatically uploaded and specialized merchandise offers are texted to players before they arrive for their times. You can request and receive tee times via text or email. And you have reciprocity with no up-charges to any Brown-managed facility in the country.

"If you're a member of one of our clubs you can travel to some of our destination locations and play," Brown said. "It's about \$45 in season and out of season, it's like \$35. We don't charge you an add-on. We have properties in Pinehurst, Orlando, Jacksonville, Hilton Head, and you can go play those courses with ease if you're taking a trip with your family."

The Browns's timing was perfect. Golf was still reeling in 2011. It was a buyer's market and they were ready to buy. "We had a fortunate start," Todd Brown said. "We got hooked up with a capital investor. One thing led to another. We bought a few courses, leased a few and managed some. Do that and before you know it, you're pretty sizable. But we put a lot of assets into getting our message out there."

The message is simple: Anything a third-party discounter tells you they can do, Brown can do better, in house, so that control remains within the club.

"Our optimum club is semi-private where, when we come in, they do a minimum of \$1.5 million in revenue but they need more direction and control over that revenue," Brown said. "Those are things that we've done

really well. Then you control the expenses. So many of the properties we see today the expenses have morphed out of control while the owners no longer have 100% control of their revenue."

The Browns own or lease 60 percent of the clubs in their portfolio. The rest are third-party management contracts. Some, like Tanglewood in North Carolina, are partial management and consulting contracts, but those are rarities. The company's differentiating philosophy is capturing data and controlling revenue. Partial deals don't fit that mold.

"Even a company my size, I'm able to buy things at the same pricing discount as someone who has 200 clubs," Brown said. "You reach a cap with purchasing discounts, so that adding more clubs doesn't give you incrementally greater savings. There aren't any excess discounts. But with 28 properties,



I can still visit every one of them every year. If I had 200, I couldn't see them or have a personal impact on them every year."

Still, Brown hopes to get to 45 or 50 clubs in the coming years. There are certainly that many owners who have lost control of their revenue – frogs slowly boiling, with only one way out.

"It's a sad fact of the business," Brown said. "Third party tee time operators sell your times for less than you could command on your own. We take back control of the revenue while providing personalized service. It's worked pretty well so far."

Ted and Joni Smith (on the couch) are the new owners of Milledgeville County Club. They have partnered with Jason Medders, a local restaurateur, to establish a popular eatery at the club.



By Scott Kauffman

Community Investment

Milledgeville Country Club's legacy lives on

There are various reasons why people want to own golf courses. Some high-net worth individuals simply do it for the prestige. Other people invest in courses because the unique nature of these leisure real estate assets represent sound business strategies for both short- and long-term situations.

For Joni and Ted Smith, who purchased struggling Milledgeville County Club three years ago in central Georgia, it was personal. Not because they have a certain affinity to the game or business. It was personal because the Smiths are from the area and they happened to be members of the club going back to the 1980s.

“It was just being good business stewards here in Milledgeville and helping our community grow.”

-JONI SMITH

Interestingly, Ted Smith, 63, doesn't even play golf. According to Ted's wife, Joni Smith, her husband's passion is deep-sea fishing. Yet, it was still a major investment that just had to be made because they couldn't let this historic property go out of business in their proud, modest town that once served as the capital of Georgia from, 1804-1868.

To be sure, the Smiths have always been longtime benefactors to the local Milledgeville-Baldwin County community, having closed on philanthropic land deals over the years to help local churches and schools. Now it was time to save another local institution that opened in 1957 and once had 600 members in its heyday.

“It was just being good business stewards here in Milledgeville and helping our community grow,” Joni Smith, 59, explains. “When we saw the club just taking such a nosedive. ... To attract businesses, we feel like this is one of the integral parts of having a successful community. To have a private club, a restaurant and golf course.

“So, we bought it, knowing we weren't going to make our monetary investment back. But the investment we were making in the community, that's what we did it for. We just wanted the club to be able to support itself and pay its own bills.”

The Smiths by no means are making a small fortune in their latest venture, but the club operated in the black in its first year of operations after closing for a year and being completely transformed and rebranded as The Club at Lake Sinclair under the guidance of longtime club operator Mike Kelly. Not a bad start for the Smiths, considering Kelly advised them to expect a couple years

of likely operating at a loss after renovating the clubhouse with newly expanded dining and banquet venues and building a resort-style pool complex with separate family-friendly and adult sections.

“God's blessed us, and really the community has

blessed us with their support,” says Joni Smith, who has nearly doubled the club's membership to approximately 360 members after investing upwards of \$5 million in other re-imagined recreational and hospitality-related amenities designed by Atlanta-based Kuo Diedrich Chi Architects.

Kelly, who handed over the club reins to general manager Jeffery Allbright in June 2018 after the club exceeded its membership goals of 350 by 2021, credits the club's turnaround not only to the Smiths' capital commitment, but to their vision to reposition the club into a multi-functional, family-friendly setting that matches the formula at numerous other successfully recapitalized private clubs throughout America.

It also helped that the Smiths delivered a “world-class private club experience at Milledgeville prices.” For instance, the Club at Lake Sinclair's initiation fee for a full-golf membership is just \$900, \$550 for a social membership – just a fraction of the cost for a similar private club membership at nearby Reynolds Plantation.

Another significant factor in the club's early success was the unique decision to outsource the club's entire food and beverage operations to local restaurateur Jason Medders and highlight – for the first time – the natural beauty and recreational potential of Lake Sinclair. Medders, who operated the highly popular Aubri Lane's restaurant for 10-plus years in a more intimate downtown Milledgeville location, also is exceeding his wildest expectations under the same signature brand named after his daughter and son, respectively.

In the first two years of operations at the club, Medders, who also controls all

catered club events to members and non-members, is close to almost doubling his business after evolving from a fine-dining experience to one that is now described as “casual elegance” where patrons can come several times a week and not feel like they're “breaking the bank,” as Joni Smith describes it.

“We always wanted to grow our business and we felt like we had maximized our location downtown because it was such a small footprint,” says Medders, who moved back to Milledgeville with his family in 2008 after working in Atlanta. “When Ted and Joni purchased the club and approached us with the idea about moving, this was the larger footprint we'd been looking for and a good opportunity to expand our business. We also loved it being on the lake.”

Medders, a self-described people person, also enjoys the “larger more diverse group of people” he now gets to serve, not to mention a much larger food and beverage footprint that encompasses a 140-seat signature restaurant, main bar with four large-screen televisions, members-only lounge, private dining room called The Wine Room, outdoor covered porch and a ballroom with capacity for 250 guests.

All of the unique hospitality spaces come with sweeping scenic views of Lake Sinclair and the 18-hole course, and future plans are in the works for a “tiki-style, cabana pool bar/kitchen situation” at the pool, which Medders says should further enhance the member experience “in a positive way.”

“When I first came up with the concept of Aubri Lane's, something to offer people the type of food and atmosphere Atlanta restaurants provide, it was a restaurant I always wanted to be on the lake,” Medders adds. “So being able to be out here on the water and maximize business out here in the summertime was something we were always looking for.”

Apparently, it also was something nearly 400 other Milledgeville-Baldwin County resident members were looking for in a place they now call their new private club. 

Scott Kauffman is a golf business writer and the managing director of Aloha Media Group.

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Skidaway transforms for more inclusive demographic

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

When The Landings Club was being developed in the early 1970s on Skidaway Island, Georgia, the original plan called for a private community of upscale homes situated among 27 holes of Arnold Palmer-designed golf in the pristine maritime forest 12 miles from Savannah.

After the developer started acquiring additional land, The Landings quickly expanded to 36 holes by 1979, and now offers 108 holes at six championship courses designed by some of the industry's top course designers. For decades, The Landings was considered the consummate private golf club community.

Today, The Landings still holds the distinction of being one of the largest single-site, master-planned golf communities in America, but it's certainly become a lot more than just golf. Indeed, fueled by the club's ambitious \$26 million multi-phase capital improvements plan started in 2017, The Landings is nothing like its former self some 40 years ago.

In many respects, as the member-owned club wraps up the final stages of reimagining the flagship Marshwood clubhouse and introducing more family-friendly aquatic complexes and distinctive new dining venues, this community of 4,400 households is now the quintessential private club of the future.

Leave it up to a person like Landings Executive Director Steven Freund, who came from a non-golf hotel and resort hospitality background, to lead this transformation encompassing destination dining,



top-notch aquatic and wellness facilities, and a host of other family and lifestyle-centric amenities one would expect at world-class resorts.

"I was fortunate that I came to The Landings with no club experience except from a user's perspective," says Freund, who previously worked for Marriott's Ritz-Carlton brand among other hoteliers. "I came from hotels and resorts, so I think I looked at the club with fresh eyes. What I saw is we had four full-service clubhouses and restaurants with a similar identity.

"They were all serving a pasta and a steak, and piece of fish and a burger. But there was nothing to distinguish them from one another. I thought that was crazy because what I witnessed was members might come once a week (to eat), but the rest of the week they were streaming off the island to go to restaurants with identity (in nearby Savannah)."

So, one of the first new anchor amenities planned for the club was the family-friendly Franklin Creek campus that debuted in December 2018 and featured The Landings' first fast-casual dining venue, The Deck, and various aquatic amenities designed for members of all ages. It was a vast upgrade from the previous venue featuring a nondescript poolside snack bar and nearby café for tennis members.

When it was initially proposed, members rejected the concept of one dining outlet serving all community constituents. After further design consultations with the board and a second attempt at selling the members on the vision of something more in tune with food and beverage trends at many clubs today, not to mention society as a whole, The Landings membership bought into the new plan spearheaded by Atlanta-based Kuo Diedrich Chi Architects.

According to Freund, the club is reaping huge dividends at the come-as-you-are Franklin Creek campus, with revenues likely doubling the original \$1.5 million forecast. Meanwhile, the club's new Marshwood clubhouse now under renovation also will be designed for multi-generational use with a more "sophisticated resort-style setting" in both the dining and aquatic facilities, according to Freund.

"As we were thinking about the development of this new clubhouse we had to think about the changes in our membership," Freund notes. "When the community was coming out of the ground (in the early '70s) it was oriented largely to northeastern retirees, but now we're a multi-generational community with nearly 800 children who are an integral part and vibe of our club. So, when we looked at the facility and the new amenities being designed ... it needed to be inviting and embracing. With an edge of timelessness without being overly formal. A place that's welcoming and warm to all generations of members."



Executive Director Steven Freund and architect Howard Kuo were part of the team overseeing the Skidaway makeover.

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BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

Kingsway Embarks on Next Leg of its Journey

One year after acquiring Kingsway Country Club in southwest Florida, Las Vegas-based airline Allegiant is going all in as a new golf course owner with a recently announced multi-million-dollar complete renovation of the semi-private, 18-hole facility.

Situated in Lake Suzy, a relatively quiet town tucked near Charlotte Harbor between Fort Myers and Sarasota, Kingsway lies just six miles from Allegiant's planned \$420 million luxury resort and about 10 miles to Punta Gorda Airport, where Allegiant happens to be the only carrier.

With Allegiant's new Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor already under construction, it's now time for Kingsway to undergo a complete renovation. According to Allegiant, Kingsway is expected to close for its major transformation in April 2020 and be ready for golfers eight months later under the new Sunseeker Resorts brand.

Golf architect Kipp Schul-

ties was picked to lead the course renovation. A veteran of more than 60 course design projects, Schulties is perhaps best known for his work on Boca Raton Resort & Club and Quail Lodge Resort & Club, two highly acclaimed 27 resorts in South Florida and northern California, respectively. Over the past two decades, Schulties and partners have redesigned dozens of high-profile clubs in South Florida, many of which were originally designed by the game's best-known architects.

Kingsway's renovation is slated to include all components of club operations, including full redesign and refurbishment of the par-72 course with replacement of all turfgrass, irrigation and drainage systems; and expansion and enhancements to the club's driving range, putting, chipping and bunker practice areas. Allegiant also plans to relocate maintenance facilities to improve the playability of the course.

Equally as important

for the new look will be the reimaged 18,000-square-foot clubhouse, restaurant and event facilities, so all of the hospitality spaces match the upscale sister Sunseeker Resort being designed along the nearby harbor.

"Kingsway Country Club holds a special place in the community, and this renovation will build on its legacy by transforming it into one of the top-tier golf destinations in the country," said Micah Richins, executive vice president and chief operating officer, Sunseeker Resorts. "With an extraordinary golf course coupled with premier event and dining space, the new club will be an incredible asset to the area, and for the guests joining us at Sunseeker Resort Charlotte Harbor."

Established in 1976, Kingsway was originally designed by Ron Garl. The club was last renovated in 2005 due to damage caused by Hurricane Charley.

Once the new Sunseeker Resorts branded course re-

opens near its new sister resort, both leisure properties mark an important step in Allegiant's evolution as a travel company, offering customers more opportunity for leisure experiences.

"Kingsway Country Club is a special place to many members of the community, and we are pleased and honored to be able to grow its presence," said Richins. "Allegiant has always viewed the communities we serve as part of our extended family, and that philosophy continues with the development of Sunseeker Charlotte Harbor. We look forward to providing members and guests a one-of-a-kind golf experience and premier event site that builds on Kingsway's storied history and tradition."

If anybody can deliver this new Sunseeker-branded hospitality experience it is Richins, a former senior vice president for MGM Resorts International who oversaw \$2 billion in annual revenue across 13 Las Vegas Strip properties prior to being hired by Allegiant.

Marques Miller oversees the Red River Kitchen in Edina, Minnesota, which is located at the Braemar Golf Course.

By David Gould

Find Your Inner Foodie

F&B Partnerships Pump up Profits

Scouting locations for a tavern restaurant he planned to open, Barry Bonner settled on the chalet-style clubhouse at Hillcrest Golf & Country Club in Graettinger, Iowa, population 800. Five years later, Bonner operates a profitable enterprise called Birdie's Burgers and Brews. It draws diners from a 20-mile radius and actually serves more non-golfers than golfers. Looking to open a second Birdie's, he is negotiating with yet another public golf facility.

"The plan was to get word-of-mouth advertising working for us in both directions," says Bonner. "Golfers would tell diners about the restaurant and diners would tell their golfing friends what a nice course Hillcrest is – and that's exactly how it's gone."

As Bonner tells it, golf memberships are up, the facility is packed on weekends and his eatery is self-sustaining for 12 months a year.

A comparable synergy can be found at the Red River Kitchen in Edina, Minnesota, run by Marques Miller in the friendly confines of Braemar Golf Course. In this case a big corporate player is involved, Elio North America via its Lancer Catering subsidiary, which employs Miller and selectively chooses golf facilities as its landlords.

The city of Edina, owner of the award-winning course, wanted a food and beverage operation strong enough to complement its golf amenity. Lancer, which serves meals in the grillroom, caters off-site and does banquets in the Braemar clubhouse, saw strength meeting strength.

“It was obvious we’d need non-golfers to make the numbers work here,” says Miller. “But the public golf environment is attractive, as long as you make non-golfers

feel welcome, which we do.”

Beck’s Prime, a beloved burgers-and-shakes emporium at Memorial Park Golf Course in Houston, is another example of this arrangement. So is Noonan’s Sports Bar & Grill, located at the Golf Course at Heather Ridge in Aurora, Colorado. Noonan’s is an event-happy hangout where comedy nights, karaoke, trivia and UFC fight-night parties play to a packed house.

To some people the model for winners of this type is Eddelmon’s barbeque at Prairie Lakes Golf Course in the Metroplex city of Grand Prairie, Texas. The smoked-meat artistry of Johnny and Joe Eddelmon was known far and wide when Grand Prairie enticed the brothers to relocate to the course some dozen years ago.

“The city even hired a master bricklayer from the island of Tonga to build us a smoker,” recalls Johnny Eddelmon, who fuels his mythical smoker exclusively with pecan wood and sells his famous BBQ brisket sandwich to golfers – at the turn or in the grillroom – for just \$5.50.



“We closed our restaurant in town and signed a non-compete with the city,” says Eddelmon, “but we’re able to cater off-site, which is about 60 percent of our business. We get customers coming to us from all over, even if they don’t play golf. We even get golfers from a course down the street coming here for lunch after they finish 18.”

There’s a significant moral to this story, concerning foot traffic onto golf properties and the invisible barrier that used to keep a course from making lunch and dinner revenue off people who don’t play. The scenarios described above clearly show that barrier breaking down. The sense that an actual green-grass golf facility isn’t someplace non-golfers should trespass

has lost its edge. And the golf industry has become proactive about not walling itself off, through beginner instruction clinics and novelty events like movie nights, public concerts and Frisbee festivals on the driving range, using social media promotion to spread the word.

At the same time, the “eatertainment” trend that’s so big these days in the restaurant industry shines quite a spotlight on golf. The obvious examples are Topgolf and DriveShack, but simulator-only venues like Dewey’s Indoor Golf & Sports Grill also prove the appeal of eat-plus-play experiences that are golf-themed. Datassential, a research firm covering the food industry, found nearly 60 percent of surveyed

consumers expressing interest in visiting an “eatertainment” venue – 30 percent said they had done so already. About 40 percent of those surveyed said they were interested in visiting a so-called arcade bar or a bowling restaurant, while 26 percent said they wanted to visit a golf-format dining venue.

Restaurants like Birdie’s, Red River and Eddelmon’s aren’t tricked out with arcade games and rock-climbing walls, but they do provide great views, a sports atmosphere and a built-in society of sociable people who have a strong fondness for the facility – the golfers.

As Miller put it simply, “The golf environment is attractive.” If you can add a simulator, an after-dinner putting contest or some other golf “touch,” then all the better.

According to one of the industry’s most respected multi-course operators, “you have to bring a brand and a personality to your f&b if you want to get the most out of it.” So says M.G. Orender, president of the

Jacksonville, Florida-based golf management company, Hampton Golf. His company has a 25-facility portfolio split about half and half between public and private.

On the public-golf side of the ledger, according to Orender, branding and programming are particularly relevant. At various Hampton-run courses there are establishments known as Morgan’s Pub, Pete’s Place and the Blue Sky Grill. The latter, although it takes its name from the golf facility where it’s located, is nonetheless loaded with personality and enjoys a rabid following.

“That golf course could be completely closed for maintenance and the Blue Sky Grill would still be packed,” says Orender. Police, fire and USPS personnel, attracted by a discount just for them, are seen in abundance at the restaurant. His company recently added the Elizabethton (Tennessee) Golf Club to its roster, with plans to establish an upstairs eatery there.

“We opened it in September, branded as the Carver Tavern, with a logo that



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Elior North America through its Lancer Catering subsidiary, selectively chooses golf facilities such as Braemar Golf Course as its landlords.

shows a big cutting board and a chef's knife," he adds. "Creating a brand and adding special event-type dining is a natural for public golf f&b operations."

MANAGING THE BOTTOM LINE

On the path to profitability, creative branding and a lively atmosphere address the revenue side of the challenge. To augment these factors and nurture the bottom line through cost control, the Hampton Golf group has pursued an affiliation with the National Golf Course Restaurant Association (NGCRA). Founded in Stockholm, Sweden, the organization had a mission to save golf facilities money without compromising food-service quality. The organization has quietly gained a solid clientele among U.S. courses and clubs with a strong interest in making food and beverage a profit center that truly drives the rest of the business.

"The relationship has done good things for us," says Orender, who describes NGCRA as "a partner rather than a vendor." Among the benefits, he cites an introduction to the mid-sized food supplier Cheney Brothers, which has produced an overall food cost savings of about 3 percent plus an upgraded sustainability factor.

"They'll go shopping for me," says Orender, "and find a Styrofoam cup that is 90 percent biodegradable in four years, at a cost of just six cents each over what we paid for a cup that didn't biodegrade. That matters to our company and



it matters to our golfers."

Through a connection with the Performance Food Group that NGCRA brokered, Hampton Golf can bring its chefs to education forums that drive important menu and preparation innovations.

"Our chefs are talented, but food is so trend-driven these days that you need somebody who's doing the research all the time to keep you current," says Orender.

You can't rightly discuss food-industry trends without some mention of food trucks, which have begun to make their presence felt in golf. According to industry data source IBISWorld, the U.S. food truck industry's total 2019 revenue will touch \$1 billion, representing an annual growth rate of 6.8 percent since 2014.

This year there was a food-truck innovation in high-end private-community niche of golf. It's the "Mountain Chef" food catering truck at 144-hole Desert Mountain in North Scottsdale, Arizona. Desert Mountain launched the truck as another

It was obvious we'd need non-golfers to make the numbers work here."

-Marques Miller

way of creating fun, new experiences for members and homeowners. The truck is flashily decorated vehicle available for members to rent, and serves as the club's chef on wheels, able to serve any item from the 10 restaurants and grills onsite.

The lesson from all this is to avoid anything that seems generic, same-old, out-of-step or that paints your food and beverage operation as a commodity, not something with a bit of spunk and personality. If your only means of doing that is to "outsource by importing," then perhaps it's time to put out feelers in the local restaurant market to attract potential concessionaires.

Of course, before you do that you could brainstorm, spitball, do some research and see about hatching something original on your own. There's a whole world out there that might take a keen interest in what you come up with. **FB**

David Gould is a Massachusetts-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Golf Business.



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When the Snow Flies

By Sally J. Sportsman

Winter Activities Keep Families Engaged Year-Round

Expectations once were that golf courses and clubs in colder climates would be shuttered during the winter, with no reason for players and members to be on property. In recent years, though, some facilities have been offering an abundance of off-season activities in order to retain the interest of families and preserve revenue streams.



Fairways become Nordic ski trails at Teton Pines Country Club near Jackson Hole, Wyoming, each winter.



Photo by Saratoga CC

I've been surprised at their success."

A disc jockey is hired to run the trivia games, which are held in the dining room on Friday nights and usually are attended by 50 or 60 members. Questions are posted on the big-screen television and prizes are awarded. No entry fee is charged, but attendees often dine before, during or after the games, producing food and beverage revenue for the club.

Other winter activities for Saratoga Springs families include ice skating on an 80- x 30-foot rink located between the 9th green and the clubhouse, with a patio and outdoor fireplace; tailgate parties during football season; gingerbread houses for children to decorate in November; breakfast with Santa in December; a family New Year's Eve party; a winter fest in January; and a St. Patrick's Day golf tournament, no matter the weather.

"Our goal is to keep members coming all year long, and to break even during the winter months," Ireland says.

This approach is beneficial for retaining membership, according to Ireland, as there are multiple other private clubs in the vicinity, some of which have limited winter events.

At Pelham Country Club, a private club in Pelham Manor, New York, four bowling lanes in the pub are popular with families, especially for children's parties. Available only on weekends, bowling is complimentary but restricted to certain times during pub hours.

"Our club never really closes," says Timothy W. Cole, general manager and COO of Pelham Country Club.

The fitness center is open all year



Photo courtesy of Pelham

“Our club never really closes.”

long, and except during December, when the greens are out of commission, members and their guests can play golf any time. Tennis and paddle programs run year-round, with two indoor-bubbled tennis courts.

Another New York club, Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville, is known for its “Siwanoy Snobirds.” Founded in 1901, the club has the oldest continual winter golf in the country, according to David Cecil, general manager and COO.

“The Siwanoy Snobirds are a casual group of golfers who play in all weather conditions, wrapping up their competitive play before Christmas,” Cecil says.

Qualifying rounds are in November, and about 30 players qualify for competitive play – usually in the snow. A steak-or-lobster dinner concluding the season is held in January. Temporary greens are prepared in front of the regulation greens in the winter months. The one-time fee to be a Siwanoy Snobird is \$35, whether or not a player qualifies for competitive play. There's an entry fee for each event, “but we give it all back in prizes,” says Cecil. “It's not a revenue source.”

Two of the club's four tennis courts are placed “under a bubble” from October through April, providing year-round tennis. An indoor court fee is charged to offset the cost of the construction of



Photo courtesy of Pelham

the bubble and to allow the club to keep high-quality tennis instructor talent on staff year-round. About 100 members participate in winter tennis, according to Cecil. Clinics and lessons account for a significant portion of the tennis revenue. The club takes a percentage of lesson revenue to offset expenses. Four paddle courts are always open for play; a warming hut with a fireplace creates a social gathering area.

Sled riding is another activity at Siwanoy Country Club. It's informal and provides no dedicated revenue, but constitutes another reason for families to frequent the club in the winter. And duplicate bridge is a popular activity year-round. All these off-season amenities bring in extra food and beverage revenue, Cecil says.

While private clubs may provide winter activities as reasons for members to spend time at their clubs throughout the year, many public facilities and resorts have more of a profit motive for their winter enticements.

White Eagle Golf Club, a semiprivate course in Hudson, Wisconsin, does a brisk business in banquets, company parties and wedding receptions, especially since the clubhouse was renovated last year.

“We sold out every single chef's dinner,” says Scott Landin, PGA general manager at White Eagle. Held once a month, October through March, each dinner is a five-course meal, limited to 60 people. At \$40 per person, the chef's dinners provide steady revenue.

“Our dinners and other activities get us through the winter months,” says Landin, “allowing us to keep paid staff on board throughout the year. We believe that next winter definitely will be a money maker.”

When the clubhouse was renovated, the goal was that within two years, revenue would increase by \$500,000. In



Photo by Saratoga CC

the first year, White Eagle is on pace to be \$400,000 ahead of last year, “so we are close to our goal,” Landin says. Before the clubhouse renovation, the facility closed down every winter. Now eight full-time employees and some hourly staff are kept on throughout the year.

Some golf clubs feature cross-country skiing as a specialized winter amenity. Teton Pines and Country Club in Wilson, Wyoming, in Jackson Hole Valley, is one of a few courses that has evolved with snow recreation in mind from the beginning, according to Jonathan Wiesel, president of Nordic Group, International.

“This very successful public golf course was designed from the get-go for skiing, which helped sell property and make the facility self-sustaining,” Wiesel said. “Most courses which offer snow activities retro-fit them.”

In addition to skiing, Wiesel says, fat-tire biking, snow play, ice fishing, ice skating and snow sledding are popular. The snow is groomed, packed, reworked and compressed with grooming machinery. Some courses use their fairways for skiing; others rope off the fairways as protected areas. Cart paths are not a good area for skiing, according to Wiesel, because snow melts off them quickly. A few facilities have snow making, ensuring uninterrupted availability of winter activities.

Mike Kitchen, general manager and golf course superintendent at Teton Pines, says that skiing is an amenity that attracts not only members who stay around all year, but also resort guests and the public. The ski trails are on the perimeter of the golf course. Everything is staked out, and the golf course has experienced only minimal damage.

“It only takes a few days to transfer from golf to skiing,” Kitchen says. “We get close to 100 people per day wanting to ski.”

Word has gotten out that Teton Pines is one of the few area cross-country centers open to the public. Members don't pay to ski, but a season trail pass costs



Photo by Saratoga CC

\$250 for non-members. About 200 trail passes are sold each year, says Kitchen, along with about 30 daily passes each day at \$12 each. The club has a rental agreement with a concessionaire, which realizes revenue of about \$100,000 annually from Teton Pines.

“We charge them to rent our space,” says Kitchen. “We wouldn't do much more, profit-wise, if we took it on ourselves, with more headaches.”

A ski rental and retail shop, converted in the winter from the golf shop, provides additional revenue. The investment in the program is significant, according to Kitchen, with a capital investment for the club of over \$100,00 for the snow groomer machine, not to mention repairs, fuel and labor. But it's all worth it, according to Kitchen.

“We incentivize resort guests, whose average stay is one week, to ski,” Kitchen says. “They can get a taste of what Jackson Hole has to offer without it being too expensive.”

The ancillary spending of the skiers amounts to about \$250 a day, Kitchen estimates. Telling their friends about their experience results in more skiers each year.

“Last year we had so many skiers that the groomer machine broke because we were pushing so much snow around,” says Kitchen. “The repair cost \$35,000.”

“We are at the mercy of Mother Nature. But we are providing a very popular activity in the winter.

“Many skiers say they didn't even know we have a golf course, so they plan to come back in the spring.” **RB**

Sally J. Sportsman is an Orlando, Florida-based freelance golf writer.



GB Strategies

IDEAS & INSIGHTS FOR GROWTH

By Alexandre Lavoie

Making connections Memberships: How to Generate More Signings and Revenue

Your members represent a critical core segment of your customers. Every year you can rely on most of them to repurchase their memberships and keep coming back to enjoy your golf course and clubhouse.

There are a number of strategies that you can apply to get the most out of your memberships. Here are some ways you can introduce better, more appropriate memberships that appeal to the right market at your golf course.

GOLF COURSE MEMBERSHIP STYLES TO CONSIDER

1 Subscription Style Memberships. This strategy is currently being rolled out by some of the nation's biggest and best operators with some great results. Typically, these memberships allow the purchase of a month-long membership that renews automatically, much like a gym pass. Players can opt-out whenever they want and are not obligated to pay for a yearlong membership for access.

2 Monthly payment memberships. If you don't think the idea of a gym membership-style subscription will work at your golf course, but still want to try out a monthly payment model, you may want to consider introducing yearlong memberships with monthly payments. These memberships reduce the upfront costs that come with standard memberships and instead charge players on a month-to-month basis.

3 Flex Pay Memberships. Taking the monthly payment model a little bit further means looking at how the value of a round at your golf course fluctuates from month to month. It makes sense that in the offseason golf should cost less, and in the high season golf should cost more. Flex pay memberships offer members the option to pay less in the offseason, and more in the high season.

4 Group Memberships. Golf is a sport that people enjoy playing with their friends. Almost no one joins a club without knowing someone who will be there often and want to play with them. Offering

two-for-one memberships or grouped memberships allows groups of friends to join and play with one another.

You may generate less money from the initial sign up, but adding these groups guarantees lots of play on your course, and over time these players will buy gear and visit your restaurant. The goal is to get a small group hooked on your operation, and they will keep coming back to play with one another and enjoy each other's company.

NEED HELP GENERATING MORE MEMBERSHIP REVENUE?

Generating more membership revenue is an excellent way to build reliable customers who consistently spend money at your operation. There are many strategies you can put in place to squeeze additional revenue out of these very loyal customers. Here are a few to consider:

1 No Initiation Fees. If you are struggling to attract new members but still charge an initiation fee, you really need to rethink this one. Why create an extra barrier to generating a long-term, loyal customer?

If you don't want to lose that revenue, raise the price of the membership over the lifetime of the new customer, but don't create an immediate barrier on the first day the new customer signs.

2 VIP Pricing. To premium members, you may want to consider offering special discounts in the restaurant and pro shop. Giving a specific percentage off or providing exclusive deals are handy for making your membership feel special while encouraging patrons to part with their cash.

3 Incentivize referrals. Leverage your current loyal customers by getting

them to spread the word about your course with a membership referral program. Incentivize your members to refer their friends with free cart passes, VIP perks or gift cards when they successfully generate a signing with a referral.

IMPLEMENTING A BETTER MEMBERSHIP STRATEGY WITH TECHNOLOGY

Here's what you should be looking for to help implement these strategies.

1 Subscription Billing. If you want to implement monthly billing or gym-style memberships, you'll need a management platform that can support automatic, monthly billing.

2 Restaurant and Pro Shop POS integrations. Having the ability to consolidate house accounts and member profiles from all sides of the operation is critical for effectively managing member spending and house accounts.

3 Robust Package Management. If you want to implement packaged memberships, you'll need a system that can easily track packages. Ideally, the software you use should allow you to place the appropriate restrictions on any package you sell, such as the times and days of the week the package can be used, or whether rounds can be shared to different players.

4 Customer Loyalty and Referral Software. To incentivize referrals, you need customer loyalty software that offers a referral component. These programs allow you to track referrals easily, so customers are sure to be rewarded for successful referrals, and so that referring customers at the point of sale is easy.

Alex Lavoie is the marketing manager at Chronogolf. You can find an extended version of this article at blog.chronogolf.com.

It makes sense that in the offseason golf should cost less, and in the high season golf should cost more.



Photo by Encore Buffalo

Artist rendering of the new \$30 million entertainment complex along the Buffalo River.

Golf Ball Company Joins Growing Entertainment Market

By Steve Eubanks

OnCore Golf, a Buffalo, New York-based golf ball company that patented the first hollow metal-core golf ball, has just announced its entree into the widening world of golf entertainment.

OnCore Buffalo will be a \$30 million entertainment complex along the Buffalo River that, if the artist renderings are accurate, bears a remarkable resemblance to TopGolf.

The big difference will be the other sports options the company plans to offer, including virtual baseball, basketball and hockey, as well as a wave machine for surfing.

The eight-year-old company boasts of being the first in roughly 100 years to "cause the USGA to rewrite the rules governing golf ball construction,

paving the way for our hollow metal core golf ball to be deemed USGA conforming."

OnCore's initial product, the

ELIXR outperformed expectations as a premium price-point ball.

This venture is a departure for the company, but one that fits its trailblazing culture.

"We're very excited to be able to bring this kind of golf and sports entertainment experience to an urban setting – the result of engineering and technology innovations that have been years in the making," said OnCore Golf co-founder Keith Blakely. "In doing so, we hope to elevate interest in golf among a broad demographic and to enable partnerships with organizations with similar goals."

While the facility, which will be located on seven acres of Kelly Island on the river (about half the footprint of a TopGolf), will have a three-tier driving

range, just like TopGolf, and include radar technology, just like TopGolf, it also will be connected to a 120- to 160-room hotel. In its entirety, OnCore Buffalo is expected to create up to 500 jobs when it opens.

According to the company, virtual reality glasses will be available so that golfers can hit balls at everything from space aliens to Pokemon characters on the range. The First Tee of Western New York will also be housed there at no charge.

The projected opening date is mid-2021, but OnCore already has plans for future facilities in cities like Knoxville, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; Pittsburgh; Las Vegas; Phoenix; New York; Denver and Washington, D.C. With a smaller footprint, they can conceivably get closer to the heart of towns than their competitors (although seven acres in Washington is still a big ask).

"We feel that this facility is going to be one of a kind and a revolutionary standard going forward," Blakely said. "It allows us to build in urban centers rather than far outside city centers."

Final THOUGHTS

Jeremy Poincenot

Inspirational Speaker, Coach, & World Blind Golf Champion
San Diego, California

Photo by McLendon Photography

Jeremy Poincenot is fresh off his eighth national blind golf championship

win in September. In February, he was the inspiration keynote speaker at the Golf Business Conference in San Diego. At 19, Poincenot was your typical college sophomore – friends, sports, fraternity and most importantly, perfect 20/20 vision. Then he suddenly lost central vision in his right eye, followed closely by his left. Poincenot, along with his dad as his guide, went on to win three World Blind Golf Championships and now eight National Championships. Poincenot shared with GBC19 attendees his story about how he learned that with every challenge comes an opportunity for growth.

At GBC19, what was the key message you hope the audience took away with them?

I hope the audience enjoyed our time together and learned that there is something more powerful than independence, and that is INTERDEPENDENCE. Asking others for help and offering to help those around them is valuable to all.

After your presentations, you spent a lot of time visiting with the attendees during the receptions and other gatherings. What did most people want to ask about?

Most people wanted to talk about blind golf, and how I am able to compete as a blind golfer. They were also very interested in learning how their golf courses could better accommodate blind golfers.

You also participated on a panel discussion about golf course accessibility under the American Disabilities Act. What do you think is the biggest misconception golf course owners have about accessibility issues?

My impression is that golf course owners think that they need to make a lot of changes to make their course more accessible, but I believe that even minor adjustments can improve the experience for disabled golfers.

You travel around the world speaking and competing. What do you think is one of the biggest issues facing golf course owners today?

Changing the overall perception of the game of golf. I interact with many people who've never experienced golf, and they often assume it isn't a game for them. I'm thankful that I grew up playing the game and have always had a positive perception of golf, unlike many.

What was the most important take-away for you personally after attending the Golf Business Conference?

That golf course owners care about the game. They're passionate about keeping this wonderful game we love growing and as an avid golfer, I really appreciated "seeing" that!

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News from the National Golf Course Owners Association

NGCOA In Action

NGCOA In Action

EVENTS



REGISTER TODAY for Golf Business Conference 2020 Located at the PGA Merchandise Show January 20-22 at the Orange County Convention Center, Orlando

The Golf Business Conference (GBC) is the largest annual meeting of golf course owners and operators, and beginning this year will be located at the 2020 PGA Merchandise Show. GBC welcomes owners and operators of golf courses of every size and type to register now for this valuable and meaningful event, now in its 40th year.

GBC20 will be held at the **Orange County Convention Center in Orlando from January 20-22** (overlapping the PGA Merchandise Show, January 21-24). Your GBC20 full conference pass will include all GBC20 education and networking activities, **PLUS full admission to the 2020 PGA Merchandise Show's extensive and impressive exhibition hall** where approximately 1,000 leading golf companies and brands will take up nearly one million square feet of interactive exhibit, product demonstration and industry presentation space.

As in years past, Golf Business Conference will cast a bright spotlight on education and networking: multiple tracks comprised of 15+ expertly-led education sessions over 2 days; a pre-conference Master Class; the annual Yamaha Golf Outing; and the annual Celebration & Awards Dinner where NGCOA recognizes the most outstanding members and industry professionals of the past year. **See the agenda and register today at golfbusinessconference.com.**

All GBC20 education sessions will be eligible for continuing education units (CEUs) for Professional Golfers Association of America (PGA), Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), Club Management Association of America (CMAA), and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).



GBC20 Sponsors as of October 2019

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If you're interested in sponsoring, please contact Mike Ketterman, NGCOA's Director of Corporate Partnerships, at mketterman@ngcoa.org or call (843) 471-2718

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AFFILIATE EVENTS



Ohio Golf Course Owners Association



Buckeye Golf Association Annual Conference

November 4-5
Embassy Suites/Muirfield Golf Club
Dublin, OH
Contact Ken Guenther at keng@buckeyegolf.com or 614-563-5551

Golf Course Owners of Wisconsin



GCOW Fall Meeting & Awards Luncheon

November 13
Grand Geneva Resort
Lake Geneva, WI
Contact jeffs@gcow.org

Michigan Golf Course Association



MI Golf Business and Conference and Vendor Fair

December 2-4
Soaring Eagle Resort
Mount Pleasant, MI
Contact info@michingangca.org

Midwest Golf Course Owners Association



23rd Annual Conference and Trade Show

November 19
Brackett's Crossing Golf Club
Lakeville, MN
Contact Curt Walker at mwgoa@aol.com or 952-854-7272

New England Golf Course Owners Association



Annual Meeting and Conference

November 21-22
The International
Bolton, MA
Contact Elaine Gebhardt at egebhardt@negcoa.org or 774-430-9031

National Golf Day 2020

We Are Golf Initiative

May 6, 2020
Capitol Hill, Washington, DC

If you have questions, or would like to join other NGCOA members at this critical event, please email Ronnie Miles, NGCOA's Director of Advocacy at rmiles@ngcoa.org.



COMMUNITY



What are Other NGCOA Members Talking About on Accelerate?

Did you know there are Accelerate Members-Only Communities you can join, based on your interests, needs and engagement with NGCOA? **Visit accelerate.ngcoa.org to read more about and add to the discussion of critical issues in golf business.**

- Accelerate (General) Community for all NGCOA members
- Supplier Community for NGCOA's Corporate Members
- Advocacy Issues & Alerts
- Golf Business RevCon/TechCon and Golf Business Conference for event attendees
- Trading Post where members can buy and sell used equipment

Here is a sample of recent discussions; reply to these, or post your own for member feedback!

Simulator Recommendations

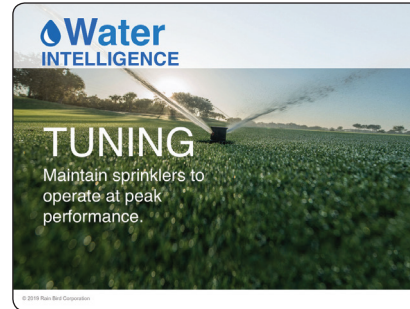
“ We are preparing to remodel our clubhouse to accommodate simulators. Please advise on any lessons you've learned from construction/room design to purchasing a simulator. ”

GolfNow's new G1 POS system

“ Has anyone else been approached by GolfNow about their new G1 POS? It looks good on the surface, but we really have a sour taste left from our last dealings with GolfNow. We are looking for any comments/advice, good or bad. ”

Credit card processor holding funds

“ We switched merchant card processors after changing POS providers... we had one days merchant deposits held for several days... inquiring if others have encountered this? ”



NEW! 4-Part Video Addresses One of Golf's Top Issues

Ask 100 people in golf what the top, long-term issue facing the industry is, and the number one answer will be Water—the cost of it, the competition for it, the hard scrutiny endured by those who use the most of it.

Focusing specifically on a golf course irrigation system, there are four vital areas of efficiency that can dramatically cut water usage: Tuning, Timing, Transporting and Technology. Watch Rain Bird's 4-part video series to learn how to address each one of these areas.

View the first in the series at:
<http://bit.ly/WaterConservationTuning>



PARTNERSHIPS



Feeling Imprisoned by Your Back Office?

Cumbersome administrative duties often mean you spend too much time in the office—and maybe, spend too much money. Struggling with timesheets, benefits, insurance and more leaves you less time to interact with customers and grow your business. NGCOA now partners with industry-leading companies who can not only save you lots of money, but reduce the administrative time, effort and errors—so you can spend more time building your golf business.



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Insurance Offerings from Holmes Murphy

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Flood Risk Protection Solutions from Flood Risk America

- Flood study to determine your risk
- Expert analysis from FRA (it verifies the zone(s) and works with FEMA to update/correct the classification)
- Personalized golf course protection program
- Customized products to mitigate the damage from flood



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GOLF COURSE PROTECTION PROGRAM

- Flood Risk Assessments are performed on Golf Courses to identify specific risks and sources up to a 100 and 500 year storm. Assessments also calculate historical data, land characteristics, and drainage study.
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- FRA customized Flood Panels and Water-filled Flood barriers are used to protect against rising water from entering the course and destroying the greens.

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