

March-April 2009

JOIN THE CLUB... Concerned about the state of economic affairs at your club? If so, rest assured that you are not alone. Executives attending the recent Golf Industry Show in New Orleans shared a sense of cautious optimism.

Many of the club professionals we spoke with told us they were committed to doing whatever was necessary during this difficult time; staying focused on serving their members, keeping their club facilities in good condition, and sustaining employment for themselves and as many other staff members as possible.

While the overall tone of this year's conference was somewhat somber, energized club professionals in almost every session we attended brought fresh perspectives and innovative solutions to the table, embracing the idea that in a down market, every new challenge provides virtually limitless opportunities for improvement.

Upcoming issues of the *PCA* and *PCA Plus* will relate in detail some of the long-range strategies clubs are using to navigate the shaky economic times. Meanwhile, here are some simple ideas shared by conference attendees:

- **Lesser of the two:** Hesitant to eliminate employee extras such as staff outings and recognition events? Impact on morale may be lessened if you emphasize that the steps are temporary and make it clear that the cutbacks are in lieu of a layoff.
- **Keep an eye on energy:** If you run electric golf cars, for example, confirm they are being recharged at the lowest possible rates during the utility company's off-peak hours.
- **Dry up (a little):** Take a hard look at water consumption for the golf course and consider

a trial period of using slightly less water for a week or two. Many professional agronomists are suggesting that maintaining grass "on the drier side" may provide better play and lead to healthier grass in addition to reducing costs.

- **Don't let staff dictate management:** Now is the time to be sure staff schedules are built to satisfy the club's needs rather than the employees' preferences. A food service consultant said he is frequently surprised when visiting clubs at how many work schedules are not tuned to the club's busy times and slow times but instead focused on how many hours the club must provide to keep employees happy.

Like it or not, city club executives report some major luxury hotels in their communities have begun shifting staff to four-day work weeks, at least for the next several months.

- **Waste not:** Conduct periodic "garbage can management," watching what is being thrown away in the kitchen. The practice can help uncover wasteful food preparation and excessively large portions, as well as revealing what side items may not be appealing to diners.

- **Play hardball with vendors:** Take a good hard look at invoices. With oil prices down, it doesn't make sense to keep paying fuel surcharges. Many clubs are actively pursuing new vendor contracts with improved pricing and better terms. Shop around enough to let your vendors know you don't have all your eggs in one basket.

PUT MEMBERS ON THE MAP... What do you really know about your members? Maybe what they like to drink and how many times they play

golf in a given month, but probably not much about how they spend their time and money when they are away from the club. In a conference session on marketing, we learned of a ground-breaking technology newly available to clubs that goes a long way toward making the concept of data mining for clubs not only relevant, but achievable.

Marketing consultant Beth Meister explained that GEMS (Global Enterprise Marketing Systems and Solutions) captures key information about your members' lifestyles—their consumer DNA if you will—and uses data profiling, predictive analysis and market modeling to show you trends and affinities within that group. A partnership with GEMS for Golf allows Meister to overlay that information on an extensive database of qualified golfers to identify like-minded prospects with lifestyles that mirror existing members.

We were also excited to learn about a Microsoft program called Streets and Trips, available “off-the-shelf” for less than \$50, which can translate Excel files (for example, your membership list and the prospect list produced by GEMS) into a full color map with push-pin icons indicating the locations of primary residences, businesses, or even vacation homes. Color-coding the pins reveals where prospects are located in relation to members.

BRING ON FRESH TALENT... A consultant with a broad background in the food service industry says right now is the time to sift through the staff and build a team of winners so you are at the top of your game when the recovery eventually rolls around. Michael Holtzman advised managers to “go grab those really great people now while they are out there actively hunting.”

Holtzman is a fan of the free website Craigslist for posting employment opportunities and said clubs should always accept applications since you never know when a potential star employee will come knocking at your door.

He said managers should decide before they start the interview process what issues are simply non-negotiable. Examples might include tattoos, tardiness or a history of job-hopping. He suggested that

it might be helpful to make a note—mental or on a post-it, but never on the application itself—of your very first impression before the interview begins.

In another conference session, club general managers and university students interested in learning more about internship opportunities in the private club industry shared an equal measure of positive and negative experiences. Communication, or lack thereof, was the recurring theme, and audience members shared some ideas for improvement.

One suggestion we found particularly interesting came from a club interested in attracting a new technology driven generation of employees. A special website (separate from the club's public and member pages) outlines the club's employment culture and provides interested recruits with basic information about the club and its history.

Attendees generally agreed that though there is plenty of work to be done, internship is certainly a bridge worth building. An evolving set of materials on private club internship, including templates for establishing a program, are available through the Club Managers Association at www.cmaa.org.

H-2B VISA PROGRAM UPDATE... According to a release from the National Club Association, the Department of Labor (DOL) has streamlined the temporary labor certification application process employers go through prior to filing for an H-2B visa. Effective immediately, the new “employer attestation and audit process” will be handled through DOL and online applications will be submitted to DOL's Chicago National Processing Center rather than a State Workforce Agency.

The good news is that the process should be faster. Although an employer still has to have recruitment or other documentation traditionally required when applying for labor certification, those materials no longer need to be submitted.

Employers should be aware that the DOL now has the right to conduct a random audit, before or after a labor certification has been granted, to ensure all requirements would have been satisfied had the original documentation been submitted with the

application. As a precaution, employers are advised to retain all of their recruitment documents in an audit file for a minimum of five years.

An employer could face fines up to \$10,000 and debarment from the program for up to three years if a DOL audit reveals a “willful” failure to meet the conditions of an H-2B labor certification application, a “willful misrepresentation” of a material fact on the application or a failure to cooperate with a DOL audit or investigation.

DOL’s new rules are expected to improve the process, but new requirements from the Department of Homeland Security may not be as helpful:

- Employers select H-2B workers from a list of designated countries established by DHS and published annually in the Federal Register.
- Employers may not file for an H-2B petition unless they have actually received their labor certification from DOL.
- Employers may not change the start date of an H-2B worker and must attest that there will be no changes to the H-2B worker’s duties, place of employment or other aspects of employment after filing the petition.
- Employers and recruiters are prohibited from charging the worker a recruitment or similar employment service charge or fee. If an employer charges a fee or knows that a recruiter has done so, the employer’s petition may be denied or revoked. The worker must be reimbursed before the employer can become eligible to use the program again.

Employers are required to notify DHS within two work days if: the H-2B worker fails to report for work within five days of the employment start date, the work the H-2B worker was hired for is completed more than 30 days before the end date on the petition, or the worker is fired or leaves the work site prior to the completion of the job.

IMAGE IS EVERYTHING... Going “green” garners plenty of positive attention these days, except maybe when it comes to golf courses. On issues such as water use and environmental practices on

Brainstorms

One of the must-see events at the annual World Conference on Club Management is the Idea Fair, where clubs share innovations that have been particularly helpful in their operations. Following are capsules of some 2009 entries:

Transition Manual for New Managers...

One way or the other, every general manager will eventually leave his or her club at some point. Take some pressure off your successor by providing a detailed manual for traditional activities conducted during each season of the year. Department heads could provide additional insight by building a comprehensive calendar of critical activities and related notes.

Course Maintenance Updates...

Post regular updates on upcoming and completed golf course maintenance projects in a private section of the club’s website as a way to keep both members and staff in the loop and aware of progress being made.

Board Document Access...

As they struggle to lead their own corporations in this tenuous economy, consider making life a little easier for busy board members by creating a private, password-only website where they can retrieve and review important messages and governance documents.

Spring Cleaning Tip...

Move or adjust room-sized area rugs with less strain and a smaller crew. One club implements two or three industrial blowers (commonly used as floor dryers) aimed under the rug to create a small air cushion. Reducing the friction makes even heavy carpets much easier to maneuver.

The ideas in this column come to us via club newsletters, email, and phone calls. If you have inspired programs or procedures you would like to share with other readers in our “Brainstorms” column, please contact us by phone at 636-527-2387, email terifinan@privateclubadvisor.com, or mail club newsletters and correspondence to:

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golf courses, the news media have been known to provide information that is inaccurate and/or misleading. The golf industry has struggled to respond effectively due to limited, incomplete environmental data that was neither uniform nor centralized.

Since 2006, the Golf Course Superintendents of Association (GCSAA) has been working with the National Golf Foundation to remedy the problem. The result is a series of surveys called the Golf Course Environmental Profile project designed to create an environmental profile of golf courses.

GCSAA said the information gathered will provide baseline data for documenting changes in environmental practices over time and help to set priorities for education, research, member services and other environmental programs. The data will also help the industry provide a better response to governmental inquiries and the public's questions about environmental issues.

This spring, GCSAA plans to launch number five in the series, the Energy Use and Environmental Practices Survey, to gather information regarding energy use such as electricity and gasoline used for the entire golf facility on golf courses throughout the United States.

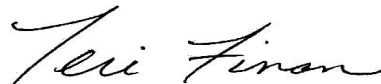
All superintendents, including GCSAA members and non-members are encouraged to participate to ensure that future results will provide a complete picture of efforts being made. To learn more, visit

www.gcsaa.org or www.eifg.org. Results from those earlier surveys including the most recent study on water use and conservation will be reported in future issues of *PCA Plus*.

CONGRATULATIONS... Our hat is off to the 2009 slate of CMAA officers and directors, and to their respective clubs for supporting their managers' participation in this important service. The association's newly elected leaders include: President, Michael Leemhuis, Congressional Country Club, Bethesda, MD; Vice President, Allan Lum, Waialae Country Club, Honolulu, HI; Secretary/Treasurer Kevin Carroll, the Loxahatchee Club, Jupiter, FL; and Directors, Richard Bayliss, Jr., the Lost Tree Club, North Palm Beach, FL; Jill Philmon, Columbia Country Club, Blythewood, SC; Randall Ruder, Beach Point Club, Mamaroneck, NY, and David Stieglitz, Jacksonville Golf & Country Club, Jacksonville, FL.

The CMAA also paid tribute at its opening business session to Mr. Horace Duncan who died last year. Duncan was executive director of the association during the 1970s and 1980s after a successful career as a club manager and president of the CMAA National Board in 1967.

Take care,



Teri Finan
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