



Public facilities can thrive by creating a fun atmosphere and camaraderie among golfers.

ing it tough to justify making that kind of long-term commitment vs. paying for a day of playing golf at a daily-fee course when you want to play. Private clubs also rely on revenue streams like food and beverage, banquets, catering and corporate memberships, and all of those areas are sailing into the wind.

“In a lot of ways, it’s a perfect storm right now for private courses. But a well-positioned public facility is in a good place to prosper.”

Private facilities moving into public play

Further evidence of the relative health of public facilities is the effort by some for-profit private clubs to remake themselves as semi-private facilities. A number of for-profit private clubs across the country have opened their doors to limited public

play. Some are doing so quietly, by increasing their pursuit of non-member outings and groups or by offering public tee times during traditionally slow periods of the week. Others are being more aggressive, advertising their accessibility in newspapers and other media.

The reason for this shift in strategy is the search for revenue. In the face of smaller membership roles and declining corporate play, private clubs are looking to an influx of public play as a short-term way to stimulate revenue until the economy recovers and memberships begin to sell again. For some private clubs, this strategy is seen as a way to keep the facility afloat during the downturn.

A dramatic example is Superstition Mountain Golf & Country Club outside Phoenix, Ariz. The 11-year-old private club with more than 300 members has a pair of Jack Nicklaus-designed courses and has hosted Champions Tour and LPGA Tour events. The club needs more members, which is a tall order in today’s economy.

As a result, OB Sports Golf Management – which manages Superstition Mountain and 29 other golf facilities – decided to make some dramatic short-term changes to attract new members and increase revenue. The largest was the decision to open one of the club’s two courses to public play each day. PGA Professional Doc Belitz, the vice president of OB Sports, says the daily-fee effort is a work in progress, but it is already showing positive returns.

“We had to do something big at Superstition Mountain, and we worked very closely with the members to come up with a plan that suited everyone. Going public was the best way we could start bringing in new revenue,” Belitz says. “It’s a strategy that will need to be massaged as we go along, but so far it’s been very successful. The goal is to

Get Golf Ready catches on at public courses

In this month’s cover story, PGA Past President M.G. Orender says PGA Professionals at public facilities need to get out in the community and really start selling their course. Get Golf Ready, which first kicked off in 2009, proved in its inaugural year that the program is fully capable of helping PGA Professionals at public courses accomplish just that – not to mention bringing in more golfers and more dollars.

“It seems like just a short while ago that business was so good and many of us didn’t have to work so hard on creating those beginner golfers, but now we do,” says Rick Saxon, PGA general manager at Briarwood Golf Club in York, Pa., a 36-hole public facility. “In challenging times, it’s nice to have support on the national level. Even though the state of the business was shaky at best in 2009, we had a good year in terms of lessons and group clinics. I’d like to think Get Golf Ready contributed to that.”

Statistics from 2009 reveal a nationwide 84-percent retention rate for those who completed the Get Golf Ready program –

meaning that they returned to practice at the range, played a round of golf and/or purchased golf equipment. And they didn’t just stop at one round of golf; each person that completed Get Golf Ready averaged 9.5 rounds of golf at the rate of \$30. In addition, 87 percent of Get Golf Ready graduates purchased equipment at an average spend of \$310, and the average Get Golf Ready participant spent a combined \$806 on golf-related purchases after completing the program.

Saxon also provides a little incentive for his Get Golf Ready graduates as insurance that they will return. “We give them a free nine holes with golf car and a few free buckets on the range to keep them coming back,” says Saxon. “We count on people having a positive experience at Briarwood and then telling their friends about us; word-of-mouth is the best advertising you can get. Next thing you know, they’re



coming back and booking tee times with their buddy or their spouse.”

Saxon also contends that the success of Get Golf Ready at the local level stems from promoting the initiative on a national scale.

“It’s great for people to see Get Golf Ready on TV, the program is a strong representation of what we do as PGA Professionals,” he says. “You potentially reach so many more people that way.”

The success of Get Golf Ready in its inaugural year places the industry-wide player development program in prime position for continued success throughout 2010. In a time where generating rounds is becoming increasingly difficult, who couldn’t use a helping hand? If you’re not on board with Get Golf Ready, check out more information on the program at PlayGolfAmerica.com/ggr and find out how your facility can host the program this year.