

feature



Greg Lecker of Canoe Brook, seen here after winning the PGA Merchandiser of the Year Award in 2000, operates one of the Met Area's most successful pro shops.

As the summer buying season gets into gear, we sat down with five Met Area club pros whose shops are highly regarded to gain insight into how they run their businesses. As we learned, it's often what you don't see that has the largest impact on the success of a shop. Our pro panel also gave us their takes on which products they expect to fly off the shelves this year. Happy Shopping!

The Panel:

Jim Bender, Ardsley CC, Ardsley-on-Hudson, N.Y.

Charlie Bolling, Fresh Meadow CC, Lake Success, N.Y.

Greg Lecker, Canoe Brook CC, Summit, N.J.

Doug Steffen, Baltusrol GC, Springfield, N.J.

Rick Vershure, Quaker Ridge GC, Scarsdale, N.Y.

TMG: What are the elements that make up a successful pro shop?

Bender: The main thing is to have a service-oriented pro shop that tends to your membership. Personal service is more of an interaction where you meet and greet the person – it's knowing their needs and wants. From that, you're going to know what they'd like to see in the shop. We're tending to 300 members and their guests, as well as outing guests. You want to make sure you have the right mix in terms of numbers and quantities. You want to have the right mix of fashion. With golf equipment, you have to be well versed in how to fit somebody. Nobody buys a club off the rack anymore.

Steffen: It's a combination of a lot of reasons, not in any particular order. It's the aesthetics of the pro shop. The quality of the merchandise. The quality of staff that you have. The personal service that you give the customers. Probably more than anything, successful merchandising has a lot to do with personal relationships, which is what our business is all about. You treat people the way you would like to be treated.

Lecker: It starts with a knowledgeable staff. Our overall mission statement is that whoever walks in the golf shop has a good experience. It's very important that we say hello to everyone and we treat people like they're

Shop Talk

Met Area pro shops are sources of both pride and revenue. We talk to five area club pros for hints on what to buy in 2007

BY THE EDITORS

Walk into the pro shop at your home course and what do you see? Clubs, shirts, hats and golf balls, for starters. Maybe some training aids, books or collectibles? Sure, those too. Each pro shop offers a little something different, but there are common ingredients shared by all successful shops.

ROBERT WALKER

family. One of the things that separates the good golf shops from the better golf shops is having accessories from women's hand bags to watches to glassware to all those little things around the shop. That allows people to use the golf shop as a gift store for birthdays and all kinds of holidays. They know they can come there and get something else besides golf-related items.

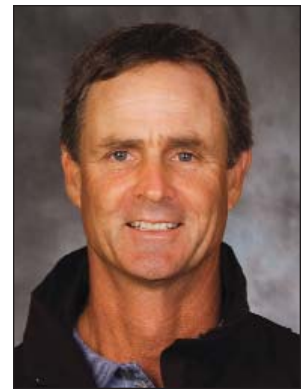
Vershure: It's got to be attractive and it's got to satisfy the wants and needs of the membership. I have a small audience but at the same time, I don't want them to have to go down the road to find what they need. We make sure the member knows when we place the order and when it's expected to be here. If that deviates we make sure we call them and then we call them when it comes in. We stay on top of it to let them know we value their business.

Bolling: Knowing what your customer

wants and getting it for them. It's as simple as that. Shopping can be a hobby for a lot of people. If you offer the right product at the right price, they're going to spend their money in your shop rather than spending it elsewhere. People don't support golf shops out of sympathy. It's very important to get in touch with your better customers and find out what they want.

TMG: How often do you change the look and organization in your pro shop, and what do you do to change it?

Vershure: Weekly. My wife is really good at making the shop attractive. I also have Polo people who come in here and help us and then I have Ann Sprinkle, the golf shop merchandiser, whose full-time job is to make it look nice. We try to keep rotating stuff, especially changing the clothes to fit the spring,



Rick Vershure, Quaker Ridge GC

The annual PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando is a prime opportunity for Met Area club pros to sample the latest equipment and apparel.



THE PGA OF AMERICA



Charlie Bolling and his pro shop at Fresh Meadow.

then late spring/early summer, then fall lines to keep a fresh look in here. When we've got our Quaker Ridge logo shirts stacked in piles all those little Quaker men are standing right on top of each other directly in line with each other. We try to keep the shop looking very orderly and use color to show off the merchandise.



Lecker: We're constantly changing the layout of the shop and moving around product to give it a fresh look. That area near the counter where people will tend to stop and have a moment, or that area from the door to the counter, I consider that beachfront property. I try to catch their eye in those spots. We're always moving things in and out of those spots.

Bolling: Every week. There are different spots in the shop that move faster. We get new inventory in all the time. Sometimes inventory can be in the shop but if it's not in the right spot, then nobody's seeing it.

"People don't support golf shops out of sympathy. It's very important to get in touch with your better customers and find out what they want."

—Charlie Bolling

Bender: About every 2-3 weeks. Every month I bring in new lines of men's and women's clothing. I don't bring in the whole line of one style in the beginning of the season and try to sell it through. They're offering 3-5 different groupings and I bring each grouping in, one each month, so it gives a whole new look to the golf shop every month.

Steffen: We change it just about every two weeks. Depending upon what events or outings we have going on at the club, whenever we have an opportunity, we change our mannequins and we change the displays. We rotate merchandise on a regular basis. We actually look forward to a rainy day every once in a while so we can get caught up.

TMG: How much influence do your members have over what you stock in the pro shop?

Lecker: A great deal. I pay attention to what they're wearing. I try to stay on top of the trends and try to offer the members the latest in clothing. When you're buying for a membership there are people ranging from 75 years old to 10 years old. You've got to be aware and try to fit their needs as to what they like.

Bolling: We talk to members all the time about it. I would never stock my golf shop by committee, though. It's one thing to listen to your customers, but it's another thing to know who really are your customers. We all have 20 percent of the customers doing 80 percent of the business, so if you're not catering to that 20 percent then you're crazy. That said, the other 80 percent are still very important.

Steffen: We get feedback from the membership on certain items, and that's very important. But one of the things you have to realize is that I have something that people want, and that's a logo. They want to buy a hat or a shirt or they want something with the Baltusrol logo on it so they can take it away and say they've played here or have some sort of memorabilia from the club when they were here. We have a variety of price points so that we're not all high end. We try to be fair in our pricing so we can meet the demands of everybody that walks into the shop. That benefits members as well as guests.

Vershure: A lot. Everything we put in there is in anticipation of what we think they're going to want. We have a merchandising committee at the club. Our members helped us buy. They helped us place orders in the fall with some committee oversight.

Bender: I take the suggestions my members give me. I then go out and try to find what products they are referring to and determine if those items are going to be right for the entire membership or if it's going to be right for one or two people. I can special order those couple of pieces for one person. If I have to open an account with a company just to get in a few pieces, I will because it will make that member happy.

TMG: How often do you interact with apparel and equipment manufacturers to discuss products?

Steffen: On a regular basis. One of the fortunate things we have is the accessibility to New

York City. We do a lot of our apparel buying in the city and we're constantly in contact with the vendors. I consult with some of the companies as far as what's popular and what people are asking for and what we're selling and not selling. As for hard goods, we rely a lot on the salesmen as far as what product is going to be coming out six months ahead of time.

Bender: Probably about three times a year in terms of seeing the lines that are coming out for spring/summer and then summer/fall and then even holiday. At the PGA Merchandise Show I interact with some of the vendors and people that are selling different things and make suggestions about how they could make their product better for me and the things they could do for my shop and my members. I'm on the advisory committee for Callaway Golf as a Master Staff professional, and I go to Carlsbad, California three times a year and go over products that they plan to introduce in the future.

Lecker: I'm involved in a lot of ways. I try to give all the apparel companies feedback as

to what I think is good and bad. It comes back to customer service.

TMG: What are your picks for the top sellers of 2007?

Bender: One of the hottest things I have is the adidas shirt and the Under Armour shirt. I've put in the Callaway apparel. If you're not on board with high tech materials, you're missing the boat. In the equipment side it's the drivers: the FT-5 driver from Callaway, the Super Quad from TaylorMade.

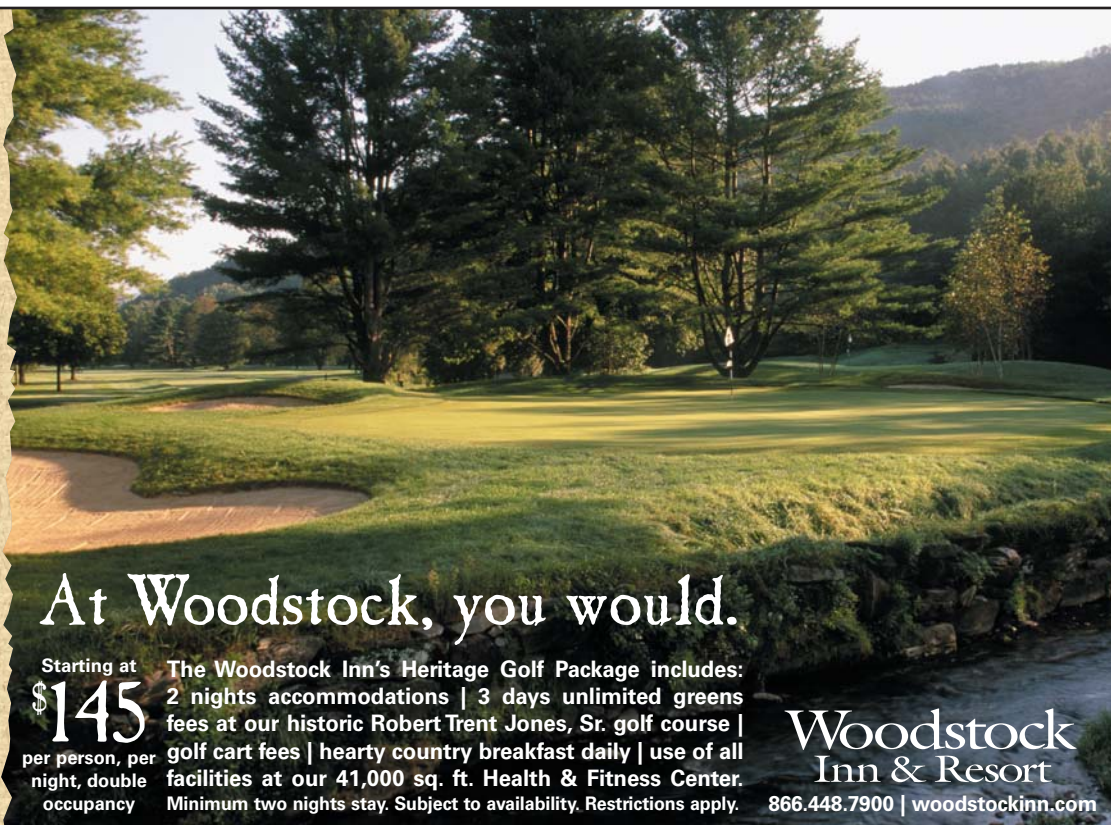
Bolling: In hard goods the Burner line from TaylorMade is hot. The FT-*i* from Callaway is doing very well. Hybrids are good for everybody. We've got the new X-20 irons from Callaway and the r7 irons from TaylorMade. We've got the new fitting carts from TaylorMade and Callaway and it's been a big improvement on how we sell golf equipment because it's much easier to give the customer a lot of options.

Lecker: In hard goods we've had a great deal of success this year with TaylorMade. I like the new FT-*i* driver from Callaway. The



Doug Steffen, Baltusrol GC

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FOR ALL THE RIGHT SEASONS.



Jim Bender, Ardsley CC

Cleveland HiBore driver, too. Quietly, Cobra is having a great year. They make a solid product for the average player. In soft goods, we've had a lot of success with Fairway & Greene. The adidas ClimaCool shirts have been a big seller in men's and women's. Polo always plays a big part in the golf shop here. The new Peter Millar line has also done well.

Steffen: There's a lot of interest in the square drivers. That doesn't mean they're going to be hot sellers, but they are a new product and people want to see them. Cobra is one of the few companies that concentrates on the women's market. That seems to be very important as more and more women are playing the game. We're doing extremely well with women's clubs. We deal basically with club fittings here. In soft goods, Peter Millar

is taking over a big portion of the business. The quality of their product is excellent. We're doing extremely well with the bright colors and stripes. We're doing very well with adidas as far as the tech fabric is concerned. Fairway & Greene and Polo are still strong sellers for us.

Vershure: In hard goods Callaway has stepped to the forefront. There's a big buzz with their FT-5 and FT-*i* drivers. In golf balls Titleist with the Pro V1 and V1x is still king of the hill. They've got four or five other balls. Callaway has a great ball, the HX Tour. In soft goods, for women we do well with Bobby Jones, EP Pro and Polo. In men's, again it's Ralph Lauren. We have a new line in here, Peter Millar. Bobby Jones has been a long-time hit at the club. ■



Some of our pros' top picks (clockwise from top): the TaylorMade Burner, the Callaway FT-*i*, the new Titleist Pro V1, a Peter Millar jacket, vest and shirt ensemble, and Under Armour golf shirts.