

CLUBHOUSE

Help Wanted! A Sign of the Times

CLUB MANAGERS CAN MAXIMIZE EFFICIENCY AND PROVIDE POSITIVE MARGINS

By H. J. Chris

In today's economy, the biggest problem facing private clubs is the scarcity of quality labor.

According to a recent survey by the National Club Association, "competition for a shrinking labor force was rated as important to very important by 70 percent of the responding clubs. Clubs located in the central Midwest and Southeast rated this issue higher than clubs located in other areas of the coun-

try." Simply put, clubs need a qualified, trained labor force to properly meet the expectations of club members.

Clubs designed 20 or more years ago, when labor was available and costs were low, were notoriously labor intensive in design. To make matters worse, most club boards are populated by members who have not recognized the fundamental shift in club economics.

A growing economic problem facing

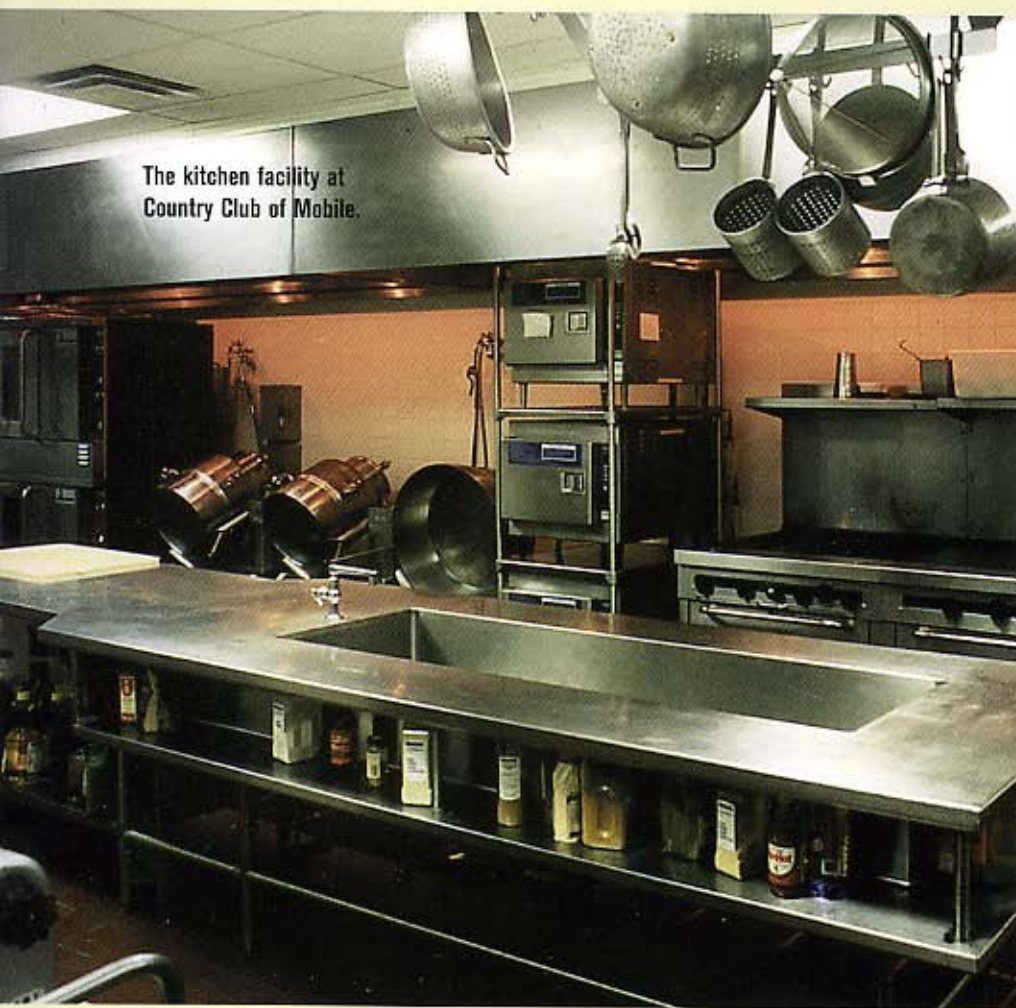
clubs today is the nation-wide shift toward increased casual and informal dining. Membership surveys across the country confirm that over 80 percent of members prefer casual dining. Unfortunately, casual dining results in a lower cost per food item, which in turn results in a lower margin for the club.

Boards across the country spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to discover why club members are not utilizing the "main dining room." The answer is simple. The board is trying to sell something the members are not buying - formal dining. Today, banquet business is the only food and beverage component with a margin high enough to allow a food and beverage operation to break even.

In the past, formal dining, banquets, and low volume in the grill combined with lower labor cost made food and beverage operations reasonable. Today, we have low volumes in formal dining, undeveloped banquet use and high volume in the grill. In other words, low margins with high labor cost - not a recipe for success!

Remember, in the food and beverage operation, there are two main variables: Food cost and labor cost. Food cost affects quality - even the best chef can't make a bad piece of meat taste good. Labor cost, on the other hand, is the function management has the most control over. Through proper planning, management can save big dollars in labor and provide positive margins for the club.

Management must also recognize that clubs, by their very nature, have a limited, defined number of members. Average spending per member is within



The kitchen facility at
Country Club of Mobile.

a rather narrow range, which can be obtained from your own club records or the publications of several national accounting firms. Therefore, it follows that with a rather defined range of member spending, for a food and beverage operation to break even, increasing labor cost must be kept in line! How can this be done while still providing excellent service to the members?

Strategic positioning

If at all possible, a club should have one central kitchen serving all member dining areas in the main clubhouse. The main kitchen should be located to provide direct service to the casual dining rooms, main dining room and the banquet room, in that order. This way, a kitchen staff of seven or so can prepare food for all member areas.

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Contrast this with the older style club which has a main kitchen on one floor, a banquet kitchen on another and a 19th hole kitchen for the grill/snack bar. By placing dining areas adjacent to each other, service staff can easily be moved from one to the other to meet member demands and efficiently utilize available wait staff.

Bar service is also an area subject to labor efficiency by good planning. Whenever possible a bar should be able



The men's bar lounge at Gleneagles Country Club.

to service more than one room, by being located on a common wall. For example, place a bar on the wall between the mixed grill and the men's and ladies locker room lounge. The bartender from one area can cover all these rooms. Careful planning will enable you to minimize bar staff.

Administrative staff can be subject to labor efficiency. Locate the office adjacent to the main entrance of the club. A receptionist can then also be used as office staff to do typing etc. in slack time.

All entrances to the club should be under visual control of a member of the staff. Locating the Pro Shop with a view of the golfing entrance can provide excellent security. A Pro's counter with a view of #1 tee and #10 tee can eliminate the need for a starter during the week. Golf carts located adjacent to the Pro Shop eliminates the labor of moving the carts back and forth from a remote location.

When planning a new club or remodeling an existing club, keep an eye on how the layout affects your labor cost. All functions in a clubhouse should be planned to obtain maximum efficiency from available staff. This approach will go a long way toward increasing member satisfaction and providing services at reasonable prices and dues. Keep an eye on the number of staff and maybe you won't need the "Help Wanted" sign. Good luck! BR

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