

WHEN GOLF MEANS BUSINESS

Golf & The Long Island Executive

BY MAUREN TRAXLER

Golf History

Controversy exists about how golf started. Roman emperors apparently played a relaxing game, using a bent stick to drive a soft, feather-stuffed ball. Over the next five centuries, several European countries had similar stick-and-ball games. In the Netherlands, the game was called het koloen, and it was played in the American colonies as early as 1657. The Scots made a singular improvement to the games: they dug a hole in the ground, and made getting the ball into that hole the object of the game. The Scottish game, called golfe, is credited as the direct ancestor of the modern game. And, the first formal golf club, the Company of Gentlemen Golfers, was established in Edinburgh in 1744, where the game's official rules were codified.

Businessmen have long used the game of golf as a networking tool. Perhaps it's in a man's nature," ponders KeySpan chairman and Chief Executive Officer Robert Catell.

"Men grew up playing sports," Catell notes, clarifying his statement by saying, "maybe that was true more so in days past" because today many women play sports. "From that competitive standpoint, though, men like the competition, both competing with ourselves and with the people we're playing with." Today, many women in business are quite competitive, too.

"Golf, like most sports, draws out people's personalities," comments North Fork Bank chairman and CEO John Adam Kanas. "Spending four or five hours on the course, you see a side of their personality you might not ordinarily see." He elaborates: "Temperament. Patience. Do they cheat? Do they play the ball where it lies? This tells you something about their underlying personalities, and in that respect, it's a worthwhile investment in time."

"A golfer can play every Monday from April to November," says Rich Kruse, founder and president of Execuleaders (The Executive Leadership Forum for Sales and Marketing). "There are an incredible number of outings on Long Island." That fact led *Networking Magazine* to ask: Does the golf outing drive the networking experience, or does the need to

network drive the outings? Catell believes it's a little of both. Most outings are charitable events, and the outings give KeySpan and other companies an opportunity to network with the business community and share interests, and he adds, participating in outings supports "KeySpan's goal of supporting the community we serve." That participation and the networking opportunities "contribute to KeySpan's success in business."

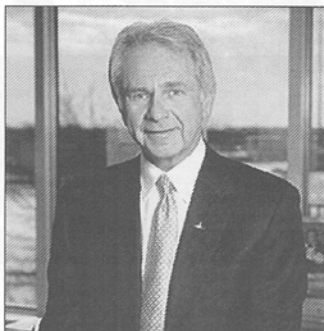
Kanas notes that North Fork Bank, too, supports many local charities, and he says, that many employees enjoy being involved. "There's lots of business done on the golf course on Long Island."

Commerce Bank Championship Tournament director Brian Kemp calls golf "the sport of all business, a common denominator. For business, it's a platform that allows for sponsorships and bringing clients to outings – time away from the board room – to build relationships. There's an excitement; it puts you in an environment where you can share a common interest. Long Island is like a small community, so many people know each other. At the outings, you see business associates as you walk around."

The Commerce Bank Championship (June 27-July 3, Eisenhower Park Red Course), formerly Lightpath's Long Island Champion Tour, has been a community event for 19 years. Kemp says Commerce Bank's sponsorship represents "a significant investment on our part, and an opportunity as well." In the sports marketing arena, the golf outing is a main



Robert Catell, chairman and chief executive officer, KeySpan



John Kanas, chairman, president and chief executive officer, North Fork Bank

"Businessmen have long used the game of golf as a networking tool. Perhaps it's in a man's nature."

exposure for business building opportunities.

At Bank of America, Long Island Market president Robert Isaksen points out that "the advantage of playing golf is that you are able to have an individual's attention for the better time of the day, get to know the person, and develop a relationship." The dividend comes later, he adds, when "it becomes easier to get their attention in more formal settings to discuss products and services."

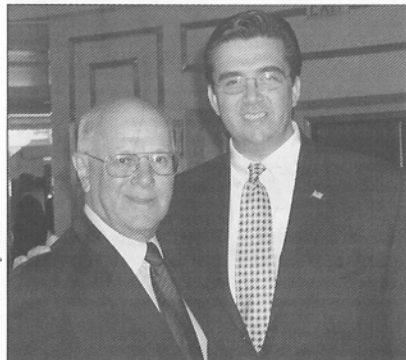
Isaksen adds that Bank of America's philosophy and goals on the Island are to support certain activities. "We look to help organizations raise funds, whether as foursomes at an outing or as individuals from the company."

The newly formed nonprofit Execuleaders will hold its second golf outing at The Links at Shirley, Tuesday, July 12, and, Kruse says, its golf chairpeople will use Execuleaders' well-known "facilitators" technique in the networking process. Instead of the usual welcome table, Execuleaders will have 10 registration tables, take-home bags filled with items from their sponsors, Islanders caps and Liquid Ice energy drinks. "We want to make it an event, not just a golf outing. People know that with our facilitators, and golf together, there's going to be business all around."

Although there's a golf season, Steve Schwimmer, senior sales at Renaissance Merchant Services, notes that the many golf committees that organize the outings work 12 months a year, and he adds that the committees, too, serve as networking events. Schwimmer serves on the Syosset Chamber of Commerce and EAC golf committees.

Kruse says he gets 50 people at committee meetings. "They know there will be new people to meet, and meeting new people is key." At Bank of America, Isaksen adds, employees are encouraged to "be involved on committees getting outings off the ground."

Schwimmer notes that there are other ways to participate in the networking that occurs at outings, other than on the course. Organizers look for sponsors, dinner honorees and donations from retailers. Volunteers are also welcome to help handle many jobs, like manning booths and escorting guests. He encourages volunteers to think of creative ways to be seen – another networking opportunity – for instance, wearing a corporate or nonprofit identifying shirt.



Steve Schwimmer, senior sales, Renaissance Merchant Services and Rich Kruse, founder and president, Execuleaders (The Executive Leadership Forum for Sales and Marketing)

80 NETWORKING May 2005

Continuation of article . . .

"Although it's important to be out with the right people making contacts," Isaksen comments, "the magic of the golf outing is the opportunity for the bank, and bank clients, to profit from the power of Bank of America's services and products."

Kruse adds, "Long Island is the networking capital of the world. To people who know, it's a whole other world out there at the golf outing."

The next time you're looking for a way to get the attention of a prospective client – one you know is a golfer – Schwimmer suggests an ice breaker. Send him [or her] a golf-related gift (like a dozen golf balls) with a card that reads: I'd like to swing by and meet you. ■



Robert Isaksen, president, LI Market, Bank of America



Brian Kemp, director, Commerce Bank Championship Tournament

Schwimmer's Suggestions for Success

Prepare for networking on the green:

1. Watch Sunday golf; have an understanding of the game, the big players and the Pro Tournaments.
2. Sign up for lessons.
3. When learning, start right on the green, not the driving range.
4. Work your way back to practicing on the tee.
5. On the putting green, don't come between a ball and the hole.
6. Don't talk on tee off.
7. Have fun, but don't slow down play.
8. Even at the 19th hole, it's wise to wait for your guest to want to talk business.
9. Target outings where you'll meet the people you wish to contact.