

“THE PRO IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CARD OF EACH FACILITY, THEY ARE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR MEMBERS AND EVERYBODY WHO IS INTERESTED IN THE GAME... THEY ARE A VITAL PART OF

– Alexander Baron Von Spoercken, President, European Golf Course Owners Association

Having taken office as the President of the European Golf Course Owners Association last year, Alexander Baron Von Spoercken is leading the organisation using his 25 years of experience in the industry.

His beginning came from developing his own course in the North of Germany near Hamburg, and went on from there to develop, buy and sell other courses. His group today own and operate four golf courses in Germany.

The EGCOA protects and nurtures the interests of owners and operators throughout Europe, from 9-hole facilities to the owners of multiple golf courses, and represents around 180 facilities and around 950 associated golf courses.

Something that is a key feature in the majority of those clubs is the PGA Professional. Here Alexander details why professionals are central to clubs and golf facilities, and how they should be aware of the changing trends to clubs as we move into the future...

In your time as an owner you will have worked with PGAs and many of their Professionals in a club environment – what in your mind as an owner is their role? I’ve worked together with the PGA of Germany and I’ve always been a fan of the PGA and PGAs of Europe organisations and the training that is given to the pros. I think now we have to recognise, and I can talk specifically about Germany in this context, the role of the pro has changed during the last 25-30 years.

I remember when we started off we had to pay our pros a retainer, a monthly fixed sum, and today the balance between supply and demand has shifted to such an extent that generally speaking the pros have to pay the facility that they are working at. So there’s been a major shift and we just have to recognise that and integrate it into the daily operations of a club.

First of all the game has changed and the consumer’s expectations have changed, and along with that the role of the golf professional

CALLING THE PROFES SIONALS IN THE GOLF CLUB...”

Pros Association

is changing. There's a move away from the ambition to learn to play golf really well and to play in tournaments, and become a good golfer – now the customer wants to have a good time nowadays away from a tournament as he has a tournament in his office everyday of the week! So there is a shift away from, for want of a better expression, 'serious' golf towards more 'leisure' golf, and I think we have to recognise that.

So what does that mean for the golf professional? I think it means it's important to continue their role as being the first port of call and point of contact for any aspiring golfer and anyone interested in golf. They are the people that have the trust, and the person that needs to bring people into the game and then, something that is equally as important, keep them in the game.

We have to make sure our professionals continue to be quality 'professionals'. The game is turning into a sort of 'entertainment' like



many other sports, which it wasn't before. Before it was a serious sport, and for many their handicap was incredibly important to them, whereas now it is turning away slightly from that and becoming more a fun leisure activity – we have to make sure we keep the quality of the pros and not have the pros suddenly become entertainers – they need to balance entertainment/leisure with continuing to convey the spirit and essence of the sport.