

*"Effective Clubhouse Design -  
Using a Club Operational Specialist"  
by Jerry N. McCoy, MCM*

Many architects today are faced with the task of designing a golf or recreational clubhouse. Developers continue to plan communities that include golf courses and other recreational amenities. Private clubs are renovating existing facilities and building new ones. Entrepreneurs are opening semi-private and public golf facilities to operate for a profit. In each of these cases, architects are being asked to design aesthetically pleasing buildings that meet the needs of the owners.

The operations that take place in these facilities after they are completed can vary drastically from project to project. Building requirements are uniquely individual to the owners or members that will operate them upon completion. Successful clubhouse design is maximizing both the aesthetic aspects of the building and its functionality.

For a project to be successful, it must offer the owners the opportunity to accomplish their specific goals. Architects are not normally operations people. In most projects, effective planning requires the architect to examine the uses of the building, and design in the program elements, necessary to insure the building functions well for the owner.

In many cases, the owner does not have a total understanding of all important program elements. The owner may expect the architect to possess an understanding of what is needed. To secure the project, the architect may have to insure to the developer that they have the resources and experience necessary to understand the subtleties of this unique business. Now it's the architect's job to deliver on the expectations of the owner.

There is extensive case law to support the fact that "by accepting the work for a design job, a designer in effect represents that he has sufficient skill and training to carry out a suitable design for the project." (Desk Book of Contract Law--with forms, 1981, p. 78). In a 1994 survey of club planners, HGHB, an architect, planning and design firm in Monterey, California, stated, "There are inevitable gray areas in dealing with club construction...Many architects learn only too late - - at the club's expense -- just how complex these facilities are, what a careful balancing of functional and technical issues is required."

Building a proper team during the design and document development phase is critical in addressing operational issues. Many owners, developers and design firms believe they have the operational expertise to handle the functionality question. However, many lack a real depth of direct operation experience. This is why some of even the most experienced club designers are adding a Club Operational Specialist to the team.

## **The Value of a Club Operational Specialist**

A Club Operational Specialist (COS) brings to the team the ability to deliver the functional aspects of the building that will insure a successful project. The COS has the ability to evaluate the program elements at a very basic level and match them to the uniquely individual needs of each owner. By asking the right questions and offering valuable operational expertise during the planning phase, the COS can be sure key program elements will be included in the layout.

The COS also can differentiate between the subtle changes to service delivery necessary to satisfy members of private, semiprivate, and public clubs. The COS can have an impact on marketing issues, image enhancement, technology issues and pro forma assessment.

In the 1994 club planners survey, all respondents stated that they prepared the complete contract document package. The survey then asked them to identify, if any, the role of the owner. Chris Consultants, a design firm located in Irving, Texas, stated that "the owner and his representative should be actively involved in the development of the documents." Other answers indicated that the owner should:

- add objectives
- give operational criteria input
- establish program elements
- be involved in up-front programming

In many cases, the owner cannot fulfill this responsibility due to lack of expertise. This is where the COS can plan a vital role.

In a 1990 Club Management article "Making the Pieces Fit," the term "futuristic visualization" was introduced. This is the concept of visualizing a newly designed space as if it was completed and operating. Consider all the possible functions that can occur in that space. Identify through plans and specifications, during the document development phase, all the possible uses of the space to insure that all details are included that are necessary to deliver the services required. Some architects and planning firms are turning out cookie cutter clubhouse designs. A search of the Internet shows companies offering a series of designs and suggesting that an owner can just pick one that appears suitable.

Owners wish to maximize profit centers, deliver unique services or sell equity investments. Slight mistakes in design can substantially hamper long-term profitability. For total success, these facilities must be personalized. The COS can be the critical element in that development.

Several very competent architects and planners regularly share their expertise on clubhouse design. Richard J. Diedrich, FAIA, of Diedrich NBA in Atlanta, has designed over 50 clubs worldwide. Kenneth DeMay, FAIA, a principal of Sasaki Associates, Inc. of Watertown, Massachusetts, has been the principal-in-charge of many golf/residential projects. Diedrich and DeMay have taught clubhouse design at Harvard University Graduate School of Design for several years.

Architects from around the world flock to courses like this to learn clubhouse design and layout.

Operational issues take priority during the discussion sessions. However, it is unrealistic to expect that even the most astute student can become a club operational specialist. If anything is learned from these training sessions, it is that a COS should be included in the planning team.

### **What You Should Expect from Your COS**

The architect/planner and the owner/developer should expect that the COS possess the following characteristics:

- A solid operational background
- Broad-based understanding of the needs of private, semiprivate, and public facilities.
- Experience in new club construction and the renovation of existing facilities.
- An understanding of the design process.
- Experience in document development and specification review.
- An ability to communicate the benefits of your firm to the client during negotiations.

The COS should be actively involved in site planning and layout, profit center and service analysis, operational efficiencies and value engineering. When the architect planner is involved with master planning for private clubs, the COS should be able to assist in the following areas:

1. Generic and customized surveys
2. As a long-range planning facilitator
3. As a focus group leader
4. In analyzing financing alternatives
5. In pro forma development

As well as the operational and program elements, the COS should be able to effectively relate to existing management and club leadership, establishing confidence and develop a level of trust between the principals necessary for a smooth project.

With a knowledgeable COS on the team, the club should expect the planner to effectively address operating system issues such as security, sound systems, phone systems, audiovisual requirements, and management information systems layout. These system applications, and their long-term effect on operations, are as broad as the complexity of the facility itself.

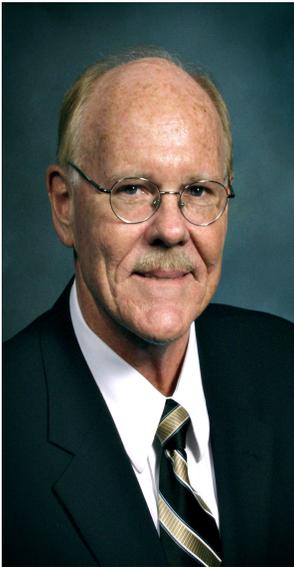
### **The Bottom Line**

An architect planner has short and long-term goals attached to every project. The short-term goals include maximizing the firm's profitability and delivering a quality building that can enhance one's reputation. Long-term goals include developing a relationship with the client for future work, enhancing the image of the firm's competence in the field, and building future business with other clients through

the success of the existing project. The potential for accomplishing all of these goals can be substantially enhanced by adding a Club Operational Specialist to the team.

The services of a COS can be procured from several independent sources. Experienced club planning firms, with a COS on staff, may sell COS services to project architects. Club management firms may be employed to act as the COS. The most important issue for the architect planner is to insure the COS has the appropriate credentials.

**Remember that the club business is unique. It is rare that hotel/restaurant experts, kitchen designers, or other professionals can deliver COS services.**



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