

BALMORAL WOODS COUNTRY CLUB
Celebrating 30 Years of Great Golf

By Cheryl Justak

AN EXCITING MILESTONE

This year marks the 30-year anniversary of Balmoral Woods Country Club, one of the truly great family-owned public golf courses in the Chicagoland area today. Opened in 1975, Balmoral Woods has been home to the well-known Mortell family, one of Illinois' most respected names in the golf industry. Located roughly 40 minutes south of Chicago's Loop in Crete, Illinois, this 18-hole championship layout has welcomed many local golf events over the years, including the 1986 Chicago Open, the 1991 U.S. Open Qualifier, both the 2002 and 2003 Illinois Senior Open events, and since 1984, the annual home of the Will County Amateur.

I had the pleasure of talking with David Mortell, the 39-year-old General Manager of Balmoral Woods Country Club, about this exciting milestone and what it means for him and his family. The youngest son of seven children, David was introduced to golf at the age of 5 by his parents, Don and Margi Mortell – both avid, excellent golfers. Mirroring his dad's passion and energy for the game and the golf business in general, David got more excited as we viewed old photos of the course and clubhouse during the days of construction. Looking back at the beginning, David reminisced about the exciting growth period of the industry, when the golf course business was at its peak in the late '80s to mid '90s. We also discussed the challenges golf course owners experienced weathering the industry's economic ups and downs during past recent years. **“There are very few family-owned golf course operations still in existence today; you can literally count them on one-hand,”** David expressed.

THE CUSTOMER IS AT THE CORE

I asked David what Balmoral's secret to success has been over these past 30 years. Balmoral's recipe for success is very simple. He stated, **“Golfers don't expect too much when they come out to play a round of golf. But before they come, it's critical that you take the time to plan for success by determining your target markets based on the course quality and level of play you are offering to your customers. This step is important in order to set pricing and develop your image and reputation over the long term. Once that's done, then you must continue to grow your customer base by delivering the basics consistently: giving your golfers a well-maintained, quality golf course; delivering excellent customer service and superior food at a good value; adding the human touch by getting to know your customers on a personal level; and, lastly, rewarding customer loyalty by offering value-added extras, such as a Player Rewards Program.”**

On most days, you will find David and David's father, Don Mortell walking through the facility greeting folks and talking with new and long-time customers. **“Customer interaction and relationship-building is a dying art,”** David adds. In our high-tech, fast-paced world of cell phones, PDAs and voice mail, which certainly has not escaped the golf industry with on-line tee time reservations, and the myriad of voice prompts to get to the right department, David feels strongly that his family's unwavering focus on personalized service and human interaction have been the key ingredients to Balmoral's past success over the last 30 years.