

Editorial Page

Gannett Westchester Newspapers/Sunday, April 7, 1991

Golf clubs sub-par in recruiting blacks

So now that three prominent Westchester country clubs have finally admitted their first black members, everything is fine, right? Not by a long shot.

Granted, it's encouraging to see the Westchester Country Club in Harrison, Wykagyl Country Club in New Rochelle, and the Sleepy Hollow Country Club in Scarborough move toward racially integrated membership. But it's important to remember that those clubs, which play host to major professional tournaments over the next several months, faced the prospect of being clobbered with economic sanctions akin to those imposed on apartheid South Africa.

Local civil rights groups also had threatened protest demonstrations that could have proven embarrassing to the clubs. But it's likely that what really got the clubs' attention was the possibility that sponsors would withdraw advertising from their nationally televised golfing tournaments.

Threatened economic sanctions resulted in the Shoal Creek Golf Club, host of the 1990 PGA Championships, admitting its first black member just days before the start of last summer's tournament in Birmingham, Ala. Consequently, the PGA of America wisely announced soon afterward that it would not sanction a tournament at any club that "even raises a question" of discrimination.

So clearly, it's not surprising that local clubs are suddenly and

actively recruiting blacks or members of other ethnic groups that have been victims of exclusionary practices. -

The Westchester Country Club will host the annual Buick Classic in June. Wykagyl is the site for the first LPGA Japan Airlines Big Apple Classic in August, and Sleepy Hollow will host the

NYNEX Golf Digest Commemorative late next month.

These clubs are mistaken, however, if they believe that the admission of a handful of black "associate" members, who are restricted to

weekday-only access to the golf courses, lets them off the race-discrimination hook. It'll take much bigger numbers to get rid of the perception.

Never mind that companies like NYNEX would suggest that having one black member out of 650 members is sufficient. Just listen to what Trish Watson, a NYNEX spokeswoman, had to say after learning that Sleepy Hollow had recently admitted a single black member: "They're in compliance now, and we're very happy. We're going to proceed with the tournament as planned."

It's precisely that kind of attitude that encourages tokenism. Yes, the Westchester clubs flatly deny using such an outdated, transparent tactic. In fact, most of them cite long-time club policies that prohibit racial discrimination. Opening doors wide to blacks and other minorities would speak louder than dusty policies ever could.

First attempts to cure bias appears to be tokenism.

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