

June 7, 2021

“What time do you close?”

"The customer's perception is your reality." - Kate Zabriskie

Forrest Lake Golf & Country Club was founded in 1982 as a getaway for ladies and gentlemen working in The Big Apple. The golf course was designed by A. Smith Hamilton, a well-known golf course architect based out of New York City. When the club was first built, the closest home was 20 miles away. Now, as the city has continued to grow, several large single-family homes line the fairways.

The clubhouse recently reopened after completing a multimillion dollar renovation, including an expansion to the grille room and the indoor/outdoor dining space overlooking the 18th green. A highlight of visiting Forrest Lake is their signature cheeseburger made with fresh local beef. Tuesday, historically a slower day for the club, brought several dining specials, including pairing a pint of local craft beer with a cooked-to-order cheeseburger. During the summer, and with the time change, golfers would tee off late, some finishing their rounds close to sunset.

The posted hours of operation showed the grille closing at 7:00 pm.

The weather forecast wasn't great that day, but we still had 125 on the tee sheet. Being closed on Monday, as most private clubs are, means that Tuesday is a busy day at the club. The course was closed last week, too, for the Men's Invitational. Bobbi, the chairman of the Ladies Golf Group, was eager to play. She booked a tee time that afternoon for 5:15 pm planning to play 9 holes. But due to the forecast, a lot of members cancelled their tee times. When Bobbi made the turn, the back 9 was wide open. She figured she would play a few more holes before grabbing dinner.

On 14 green, Bobbi's stomach started to grumble. She took a sip of water and proceeded to 15 tee. That's when an ad popped on the GPS prompting the burger and beer special in the grille. Bobbi's mouth started to water as she crushed a drive on 15.

Bobbi played well on the back, making birdie on 17 and a closing par. She was smiling ear to ear as she drove her cart to the parking lot to drop off her clubs. She normally stores her clubs here, but had a tee time in the city tomorrow morning. Bobbi tossed her clubs in the truck and headed back to the clubhouse. She couldn't wait to sink her teeth into that cheeseburger!

When she pulled up, there wasn't another cart out front. She again thought about the weather forecast, and assumed a lot of people decided to stay home for dinner. To her surprise, the door was locked. She went around the corner assuming the patio doors would be open. Nope, they were locked, too. She peeked through the window and noticed all the lights were off and there wasn't a soul in sight. What is going on here? Bobbi looked at her watch. It was 6:48 pm. Why are they closed? Still hungry, Bobbi pulled out her phone and sent Tony, the club's General Manager, a quick text.

June 7, 2021

“Good evening. This is Bobbi Daniel.. Sorry to bother you, but I am at the club. Any idea why the grille is closed?” Tony was quick to respond.

“Yes, good evening to you, as well, ma’am. While I am not at the club right now, the grille should still be open. I am certain a server or a bartender will be there to meet and greet you soon.”

Bobbi appreciated Tony’s prompt response.

“Nope. Doors are all locked and no one is inside. The lights are off, too. Bummer. I am hungry. Even saw an ad on the cart for tonight’s burger special. Guess I will stop at Wendy’s on my way home. Thanks anyway.”

Tony replied, “Ms. Daniel, I am truly sorry about that. Please save your receipt. We will happily take care of that for you. I will also call your Food & Beverage Manager to see what happened. Have a good evening!”

Bobbi is a dues paying member. She is in good standing and has been a member at Forrest Lake for 15 years. She has built a strong LGG and likes to play several times a week. What are the odds the one night she wanted to grab a quick bite to eat at her club the grille would be closed? And closed 15 minutes before the posted hours of operation on the door? Even though she had a nice dinner on her way home, the club missed out on the opportunity to service their members and lost revenue on the transaction.

So what time does the grill close? While the sign out front says 7:00 pm, the outside service staff knew she was still on the course. She had a golf cart, remember. To Bobbi, even if she showed up at 7:18 pm, the grille should still be open. So, what time does the grille close? The correct answer is when the last member goes home. Tony seems to understand that. While she doesn’t know how the conversation went with the Food & Beverage Manager, it doesn’t really matter. The grille should have never been closed while there were members on property.

I’ll play devil’s advocate here for a second. What if the grille had stayed open, but Bobbi went to her car and left? That shouldn’t matter; that is a risk you take with dues-paying members on property. Bobbi has been paying her bill on time for the last 15 plus years, and if she wanted a glass of water and a bowl of free snacks, the grille should be open with someone ready to serve her.

While we wait for Tony’s response, I would like to encourage Tony and his leadership team to stop closing until the last member goes home. Forrest Lake is truly Bobbi’s home away from home and it is the club’s responsibility to service its members and guests. As an operator, I do understand budgets and staffing levels. Especially during a pandemic. But as a member, and an empathetic manager, I stand by Bobbi on this one.

June 7, 2021

So a line that says, "After hearing about Bobbi's situation, even if the restaurant had stayed open until 7:00 pm, I would recommend Forrest Lake stop posting hours of operation and begin closing when the last member goes home.

The next time someone asks you, "What time do you close?", look that person in the eyes, smile and with confidence, say, "We close when the last member goes home."

Ricky L. Potts, Jr. is the Membership Director at The Fountaingrove Club in Santa Rosa, California and can be reached at 707 308 1188 or via email: rpotts@troon.com.