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Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times - by Lou Corsaro

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Joe Wojcik

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It's not an uncommon image: A small group of businesspeople laughing and chatting on the golf course, then retiring to the clubhouse for some whiskey and cigars.

Golf has long been synonymous with networking, a way of getting to know people and making them feel comfortable about, perhaps, sealing a business deal.

Whether that image is as true today as in the past depends on who you ask.

"I kind of feel like if you went 10 years ago, you might have spent more time on the golf course, you know, entertaining (people)," said **Terri Sokoloff**, president of Specialty Bar & Restaurant Brokers.

Sokoloff and her husband, Ned, CEO and founder of **Specialty Group**, take golf seriously enough that they have a four-hole mini course in the backyard of their home, where they can relax — but also practice.

"It's fun. It's relaxing," she said. "It's not like, 'Oh my God, we play this much golf. We better be good.'"

Sokoloff said she has noticed a quicker climate, "where people don't have that type of time to take to just play another round of golf."

She's not the only one to notice.

"I'm actually seeing golf is not played as much by younger people ... and I think that's, obviously, too bad, because it is a tremendous social game and a tremendous way to meet people," said **Frank Marmion**, partner and president of GatesmanMarmion+Dave. "But I think young people

today lead such structured family lives, there's just not time to take three-and-a-half or four hours to play golf."

For **Colleen Adams**, court reporter for MG&H Inc., it's financial considerations that lessen the amount of play.

"Well, it's gotten less and less because, you know, we really can't afford to take our customers golfing," she said. "It's not like you can write all this stuff off anymore."

However, Adams said she still meets a lot of potential clients through golf, and some of it is by happenstance on her own time.

"I'm playing somewhere, and I'm introduced to someone," she said. "He's an attorney, I'm a court reporter. I try to find out what his situation is."

Time sensitive

Sue McMurdy, executive vice president and CIO of **First Commonwealth Financial Corp.**, said she still finds nothing better than golf for spending time with the head of a business.

If you call a CEO and ask him or her to go to lunch and have a four-hour meeting, McMurdy said, "They'd fall out of their chair." But lunch and golf is another story.

Still, she does see constraints.

"I think that part has changed; you're maybe a little more sensitive about the time," McMurdy said.

Of course, **Marilyn Ross**, director of intermurals and recreation at the University Pittsburgh, notes that golf is supposed to have a bit of a time limit.

"Golf's not supposed to be played in five hours," she said, noting the goal isn't to sit at each hole for 30 minutes. "Your better golfers absolutely hate that."

To that end, as a member of the Executive Women's Golf Association's Pittsburgh chapter, she helps teach women about fast-play golf and offers lessons and swing analysis for beginners. The programs are proving to be popular.

"We've expanded in Pittsburgh," she said. "We do stuff through the winter."



Lou Corsaro is assistant managing editor at the [Pittsburgh Business Times](http://www.pittsburghbusiness.com).

Contact him at lcorsaro@bizjournals.com or (412) 208-3822.