perhaps more than any other part of the property, locker rooms are where clubs must take special care to create a “home away from home” for their members. And a big part of providing that feeling of comfort and familiarity comes from always having a plentiful supply of the personal-care products and other locker-room amenities that members have come to know and trust.

At a storied property like Medinah (Ill.) Country Club, where membership legacies span multiple generations and current members are especially devoted to using their club faithfully and regularly, having the right products available in the locker room takes on special significance, says Rod Buckner, Medinah’s Director of Purchasing. “Our members are used to using quality products in their own homes and in other clubs they belong to or visit,” Buckner says. “They expect to find the same high-end, top-of-the-line items when they come here.”

Buckner teams with Men’s Locker Room Manager Eladio Garcia, Ladies’ Locker Room Manager Linda Alvarado and Assistant General Manager Mark Jablonski, CFBE, CSW, to specify and procure the locker-room amenities that will provide the highest level of comfort and satisfaction for Medinah’s members, while also projecting the proper image for the club. Often, Buckner reports, this calls for striking a balance between offering the best new items that have come on the market, while still making sure that long-time favorites and classic brands are there to enhance the old-friend, comfort-of-home feeling the club wants its locker rooms to have.

“There are a lot of ‘old school’ items, like Clubman and Brut and Old English, that members have been using for years, and we still need to have them,” Buckner says. “You may think they’re outdated, and they’re definitely getting harder to find and sometimes have even been discontinued. But we still have to do everything we can to try to find anything members want, and then always keep enough of those products in stock.”

inside knowledge

Fortunately, to continue to make sure all of the products and brands that its members want are on hand, the Medinah team is able to enlist the help of a longstanding and reliable partner—and one that literally shares a heritage with the club. Medinah’s primary amenities supplier is ‘Fore’ Supply, the Addison, Ill.-based company that specializes in distribut-
ing amenities and a complete line of locker-room supplies to clubs, resorts and golf courses, as well as hotels, spas, fitness centers and other athletic and hospitality venues.

‘Fore’ Supply is a 72-year-old company, now in its third generation of family ownership, that was founded by George K. Thein, who got the idea to form it after he himself worked in Medinah CC’s locker room as a young man.

Taking note of what the Medinah members preferred in the way of toiletries and other products, and figuring there had to be a more efficient way to obtain them than driving around the Chicago area to pick them up from a number of different companies, Thein got the idea to form a one-stop shopping source that could provide a full line of amenities to all of the clubs and other organizations that needed to have ample supplies of those products on hand at all times.

That led Thein to first begin an operation out of the garage behind the six-flat apartment where he lived with his family in Chicago. Enlisting the help of his wife Helen and two pre-teen sons, George P. and James R., the Theins persevered and showed great ingenuity to get their new company through some lean early post-World War II years, when products like shoe bags and shower slippers had to be handmade from pap- er because of supply shortages, golf-scoring pencils could only be created by sawing standard pencils in half, and deliv- eries were made from the family’s 1937 Pontiac sedan.

Thein’s vision of the value of providing a wide variety of products through a line vended by one company proved to be sharply on target, though, and it wasn’t long before ‘Fore’ Supply began its growth into a company that now services over 5,000 customers nationwide from a 20,000-sq. ft. warehouse in Addison, as well as two other fully stocked facilities in Phoenix, Ariz., and Punta Gorda, Fla.

One of those customers, not surprisingly, continues to be Medinah CC. And while most of the products that the club needs are now readily available, either as part of regular ship- ments or special deliveries, from ‘Fore’ Supply’s nearby facil- ity, the supplier still stands ready to do whatever legwork may be needed to help Garcia, Alvarado and Buckner come through for any specific requests they get from members, no matter how obscure or rare the item may have become. “If it’s out there and available, we’ll track it down,” says Kirk Dahlen, ‘Fore’ Supply’s Sales Manager who serves as the primary point of contact with the Medinah team.

While it might seem that meeting the needs of a long-time, core customer like Medinah could now be pretty much put on autopilot, the club still looks to ‘Fore’ Supply to help it continue to upgrade and expand the quality and variety of what it can provide for members. It remains important, Buckner says, for all of the club’s suppliers to keep Medi- nah’s managers up to date. In this regard, he notes, ‘Fore’ Supply has continued to help the team introduce innovative products that have been well-received by the membership, with recent examples including new cooler bags and replace- ment golf spikes that have been added to its line.

Even with such a longstanding and successful relationship with its amenities supplier, Buckner adds, it’s also important that he and others on the Medinah team remain diligent about making sure they are always getting the best service and pricing for the products they need. And while the emergence of purchasing options like warehouse clubs has added to the challenge for established suppliers to stand out among new competition, Brad Thein, ‘Fore’ Supply’s Operations Manager, and George K.’s grandson, says the company remains acutely aware of its need to carry out the standards originally set by its founder.

“Our members are used to using quality [personal care] products in their own homes, and expect to find the same items here.”

—Rod Buckner,
Director of Purchasing

The mix of personal-care products and amenities that Medinah CC provides for members represents a constant effort by its managers and supplier partner to strike a balance between offering the best new items that have just come on the market with long-time favorites and classic brands that enhance the old-friend, comforts-of-home feeling the club wants its locker rooms to have.