

The Invaluables

The key to a successful club is that rare individual who makes it special

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL FIELDS

What makes a great club? Members and the course they play are essential, to be sure, but without a vital third component—employees who take pride in a job well done—the definition is incomplete.

It is simple, really: Great clubs have great people working there.

Standout staff members are not only good at what they do, they have a combination of skill and personality that carries through all their efforts. They have been at their clubs long enough to be inextricably linked with the tone they help set; when you think about a place, they are the ones you think of.

The individuals profiled here have each been at their clubs for a decade or more – at least 40 years in a couple of cases. The clubs know that they bring something special to the job, to the staff, to the members they interact with. It's what makes them The Invaluables: the club just wouldn't be the same without them.

Eddie Romero

**Locker Room Manager
Fiddler's Elbow Country Club, Bedminster, N.J.**

It can take a little effort for a first-time visitor to Fiddler's Elbow to reach the locker rooms on the lower level of the expansive clubhouse, but once you're there it feels like home.

That's because the person in charge, 25-year club employee Eddie Romero, is on hand to greet members and guests with a smile and a can-do attitude that is hard to match.

"Eddie's the greatest," member Dr. Michael Lerner said as he stopped by Romero's station en route to an afternoon round this fall. "Nicest guy in the world."

Romero, 48, who grew up in Mt. Vernon, N.Y., started working at Fiddler's Elbow as a house man in 1993, doing tasks around the clubhouse. The locker room manager liked Romero and offered him a job there. Romero worked his way up to manager, which in the Fiddler's Elbow locker rooms means doing whatever can be done to help a member.

"We try to have a concierge service that's run out of the locker room," Romero said. "We try to provide the members with any type of amenity they need. We go from repairing shoes to taking care of dry cleaning."

Romero's repertoire at the 54-hole facility is wider than you might think. "One member ran out of gas on [Interstate] 287 and called me," Romero said. "I went out, got gas, found him, and filled up his tank with gas. Another guy needed his suit repaired fast for an important business meeting. Within a day, he had it back."

Sometimes, though, it's not about tasks but talk.

"The members here are friendly, very open," Romero said. "We feed off each other, cheer up one another if someone's having a bad day. I tell them my personal stuff, and they tell me theirs. It's pretty cool. And it stays in the locker room."

The warm relationship Romero has with the membership was shown in early October with the inaugural playing of the Shoe Cup, a net competition between teams of members who locker in the club's various quarters. "Some members and I presented the idea and the pro said it sounded great," Romero said. "A lot of folks played. The trophy is coming; it's supposed to be shaped like a shoe, which is pretty cool."

Cool, just like the vibe Romero promotes in the locker room.

