

What's up with all these new "turfgrass" or "sports turf" management programs popping up all over the state?

By my count we have four community colleges and three universities offering some type of turfgrass management program, plus there are several others where short courses and/or related technical training is available.

Combine these with the hundred or so other programs around the country and you might have as many as 3,000 graduates each year looking for jobs in golf course management.

If you do the math, you have to conclude that this is not good for the recent graduate looking to secure a job, nor for the veteran superintendent trying to hold onto one in a tight economy. The 400-plus new

golf courses opening up each year in this country, combined with the small number of retiring superintendents, does not come close to the number trying to enter the profession.

While there really is nothing superintendents can do individually — or as an association — to stop this proliferation, we can act as advisors to these programs so they are serving the best interests of the community and our industry rather than their own needs to attract students and cash in on a popular field. The administrators of these programs should be held accountable if they are flooding the market with graduates who can't secure a job.

This isn't the first time this issue has surfaced. It started about 10 years ago when Lake City Community College, based on the success of its excellent golf course management program, announced plans for an expansion of the

program to try doubling the annual number of graduates. Past FGCSA president and good friend Kevin Downing led the charge then and was successful in persuading Lake City officials that the industry couldn't support such growth. Palm Beach Community College was also given guidance to modify its proposed program at about the same time. Kevin has continued his cautionary efforts, recently bringing the matter up with both the FGCSA and the GCSAA, and continuing to work with and advise Lake City C.C.

Many reading this are probably thinking, "What's the big deal? Isn't education a good thing for our industry?"

Well, yes, of course it is, as long as those running the programs are in tune with industry needs and are honest about the job market for those enrolled in their program. Few people who have the ability and determination to go to college are going to settle for jobs as career assistants, spray techs, or irrigation specialists, but that may be all that is available to them for many years following their graduation.

Every graduate expects to eventually become a superintendent. How long will that take, and how long will your career last when you eventually reach the top? Will your entire career as a superintendent span 20 years when you fully expected to do this for 40 or more years?

Will you never get that dream job because your application was just one of 200 the selection committee had to sort through? Don't you want to feel the security of being a unique and highly qualified professional, instead of a dime-a-dozen "maintenance" guy that an employer would feel no compunction about replacing, since there are so many others willing and able to take your job?

Irony — true irony — would be losing your job to that 20-something graduate from the college whose advisory board you sit on, and who attended on a scholarship given by the association in which you are an officer.

How Many Turf Schools Is Enough?

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS