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## Recruiting Bilingual Employees

*By John R. Piersol*

Many golf course superintendents and landscape company managers are seeking English/Spanish speaking employees. Many colleges are working hard to diversify their student bodies to include more minorities, especially in their turf and horticulture programs. The solution for both industry and education might be right in front of us, and we do not realize it: the children of Hispanic employees.

Golf courses and landscape companies in Florida and throughout the United States commonly hire Spanish-speaking employees. Many of these workers are U.S. citizens or are working to become citizens, and they have their families here. The parents may speak mostly Spanish and be struggling to learn English, but their children are in the public school system, and they quickly learn English.

The parents are usually not candidates to attend college, but their children are prime candidates. The parents may not consider horticulture-based college programs for their children, because they are not fully aware of all the offerings in the U.S. postsecondary system.

Plus, the parents may not want their children doing anything like what they do because, like all parents, they want a good life for their children, and the parents may think that being a laborer is all that the horticulture industries has to offer their children. The parents may not realize that there are excellent two-year and four-year college programs that can educate their children for lucrative management careers.

Golf course superintendents and landscape managers could survey their Hispanic employees to learn more about the employees' families; number of children, ages, interests, etc.; in fact, many managers ask about their employees' families as a function of good personnel management. Employees like to know that the employer cares about them and their family, and most Hispanics are very family oriented.

If the children are in ninth grade or above, maybe the manager could offer to have

them "shadow" with him for a day. Maybe it could be a "bring your children to work" day with an employee barbeque, etc. Managers could introduce the children to all that goes on at a golf course or landscape operation giving them an understanding of what their father does and the full range of opportunities that exist in the golf/landscape industries.

This introduction to the golf/landscape industries could lead to the employees' children asking for part-time work when they are of age. If they like the field, and the employer would like to see them stay in the industry with them or elsewhere, the employer could mention colleges to attend and perhaps, offer some scholarship help. Imagine how good this would make the parents feel! The employer helping their children get educated to get a good job.

College programs would also win. At Lake City Community College there are five horticulture/turf oriented programs: Golf Course Operation (3 years), Landscape Technology (2 years), Turf Equipment Management (1 year), Irrigation Management (1 year), and Pest Control Operations (1 year). All programs need good bilingual students to meet the strong industry demand.

Community colleges are inexpensive. A whole year of any program at LCCC for tuition, books, and lab fees is only about \$3,000. There is extremely strong demand in Florida and nationally for graduates from all the above programs, and career salary potential can be \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more.

Sometimes the answer is right in front of us. This could be the case with the demand for turf equipment technicians, irrigation specialists, pest control technicians, landscape managers, assistant golf course superintendents, especially graduates who are English/Spanish bilingual. Help yourself, the industry, colleges, and your employees' family by recruiting from within your crew. Lake City Community College and other colleges would be pleased to have these students, and providing scholarships could provide a significant benefit to the employees.

For any information on the golf, landscape, turf equipment, irrigation, pest control, or forestry programs at Lake City Community College, please contact me.

**Editor's Note:** *The author is chairman of the Division of Golf/Landscape/Forestry at Lake City Community College.*