Grads' job market good, not great

By Peter Blais

College graduates have fewer superintendent job openings to select from than a year ago, although most should still find employment, according to faculty members at turf management schools.

"The job market isn't as good this year," said Michigan State University Professor John 'Trey' Rogers. "There may be fewer openings because superintendents haven't moved from course to course as much. Maybe employers are being more conservative. Or they were worried about the Gulf war and the economy. I'm not sure. But all our graduates should get jobs. Last year there were two openings for every student. This year it's more like a one-to-one ratio."

Texas A&M's Richard Duble also noted fewer superintendents changing jobs throughout the South.

"I suspect it had something to do with all the winter kill last year," the extension turfgrass specialist said. "Usually a superintendent loses his job if his greens die. But everyone's greens died last year, so they didn't blame the superintendent. If you fired the superintendent there was no one around to fix the greens."

Lake City (Fla.) Community College Professor John Piersol noticed a drop-off in job openings, even in the country's most heavily-crowded market.

"We've gotten calls from Arizona and South Dakota in the last week looking for mechanics. They've looked everywhere," said the chairman of the school's Division of Golf Course Operations, which includes a one-year certificate program in equipment and shop operations for aspiring mechanics.

"We have just seven people graduating from the program this year. If we had 50 we could easily place them in jobs right away."

And the pay isn't bad. Lake City graduates start at $7 to $10 an hour and are usually in the $25,000 to $35,000-per-year range within a couple of years, Piersol said. Pretty good for a high school degree or GED and a one-year certificate. So why aren't students knocking down Lake City's doors to get into the golf course mechanics program?

"High school students have never heard of the job," Piersol said. "Students who become mechanics usually don't play golf, so they don't know what's available. When they hear the title, they think about lawn mower and golf car repair."

"There's a real misunderstanding of what golf course mechanics do. Guidance counselors think all they do is grease equipment. But that's far from the truth."

"Golf course mechanics are often responsible for $200,000 or more in equipment. They're not grease monkeys. They're turf equipment managers. They set up shops, train people, develop preventive maintenance programs and work with computerized equipment.

"A properly trained head mechanic warrants $35,000 to $40,000 a year. He can save a course at least that much. Most superintendents will tell you the mechanic is their right-hand man."

In search of the perfect superintendent

Trent Jones joins with Faubel, Payne in new enterprise

By Peter Blais

Three of the best-known names in the golf course management business have formed a worldwide executive search firm for superintendents.

Architect Robert Trent Jones Sr., Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Immediate Past President Gerald Faubel and Michigan State University Professor Emeritus Ken Payne recently founded Executive Golf Search, Inc.

The firm will deal primarily with superintendents but may eventually branch into the club professional and general manager area, Faubel said.

One of the company's primary services will be helping courses define their needs regarding the type of superintendent they want. Conversations with club officials and follow-up questionnaires will be used to determine those needs, Faubel said.

"Some superintendents are strong in construction and others in maintenance," he added. "It's important clubs recognize what is entailed in hiring a superintendent who can meet their needs regarding communications, technology and the environment."

"We've always felt if a club first identified its needs before hiring a superintendent it would have greater success in keeping that individual."

Faubel said the firm will stress placing GCSSA-certified superintendents.

"We will closely adhere to the GCSSA code of ethics," the former association president said. "If a club has a superintendent we're interested in recruiting, we'll notify the club properly. We don't want anyone treated unfairly."

Faubel said the firm's strength lies in its founders' international experience and contacts in the course maintenance industry. Limited placement services are currently available for superintendents, according to Faubel. The GCSSA's Employment Reference Service lists job openings and salaries. At least two other placement firms deal with golf industry personnel, Faubel said.

"But no one has the in-depth experience we do with superintendents," Faubel said. "Other firms deal with architects, builders and club managers, too. We'll be just superintendents for now."

Executive Golf Search will help clubs develop salary, benefit and educational packages while assisting in contract negotiations to help recruit the best superintendents available, Faubel said. "Our goal is to meet and identify highly qualified individuals and attempt to reward them for their service to golf with the best possible jobs," Faubel said. "We have some fantastic people in the golf course maintenance field who are ready to move on to clubs. Often, those clubs don't realize how important the superintendent is, especially with the environmental situation today."

"We want to have an impact on the industry by having employers realize how important the superintendent is to their operations. It's a win-win situation for everyone."

The company is located at 699 Westchester, Saginaw, Mich. 48603.
Proposed water tax would put squeeze on Florida courses

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can to help conserve water. But we don't want the state mandating that everyone use reclaimed water when there isn't enough available.”

— Bob Brantley

The Florida Golf Council and the regional superintendent, sod grower and athletic field associations are committed to working with the state to find an equitable way to conserve water, agreed Brantley and Young.

“We need to conserve water,” Young said. “We don't want a tax as long as it is equitable.”

Making the tax equitable requires taking a course's seasonal watering needs into consideration, Young said. Most allotments should be higher when courses traditionally need more water — during the summer, while overseeding or when growing in a new course — and lower when the need drops, he said.

The state's four water districts and the Legislature have been very cooperative, Young said.

“We've met many times. It's a foregone conclusion we must consider something like this to conserve water,” the FTA official said. "We're opposed to the bill as it is written. The recession hasn't slowed the $700,000 environmental research program. Michigan State, Penn State, Lake City and Texas A&M all reported waiting lists to enroll in their turfgrass programs.

“We limit enrollment in our two-year program to 40 students,” said Young. “It's a little slower than last year,” said the chairman of the school's Division of Golf Course Operations.