More graduates chasing fewer jobs?

Assistant positions plentiful; head jobs in short supply

By Peter Blais

The demand for assistant superintendent positions remains strong, which bodes well for the turf school students set to graduate this spring who will fill many of those positions. However, even in the face of a record 468 new course openings in 1996, making the leap from assistant to head superintendent or retaining the top maintenance post remains a challenging proposition.

"We have heard about many more assistant jobs than we have graduates to fill them," said John 'Trey' Rogers, associate professor at Michigan State University. "The only people who seem to be having problems are those who have restricted themselves to a certain geographic area." Faculty at Ohio State and Pennsylvania State universities echoed Rogers' sentiments.

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New player emerges in group buying

By Lou Prato

Ellicott City, Md. — A new nationwide buying cooperative aimed at getting major price breaks for golf course owners and superintendents on everything from chemicals to maintenance equipment is seeking its first charter members in the East.

National Turf Cooperative, Inc. (NTC), based here near Baltimore, expects to have at least 250 members signed up when it starts buying seeds, fertilizer, and other such goods from manufacturers and suppliers in October of 1996. NTC will concentrate initially on buying products necessary for the development and maintainance of golf courses.

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Pre-fab clubhouses keep priorities on course

By Peter Blais

olf developers are heeding the advice of course designers and installing temporary clubhouses, allowing the course to establish a reputation and generate revenue before building a first-class clubhouse facility. While the idea might seem a bit self-serving since course architects are paid for the course they design rather than the clubhouse that borders it, few would argue that it is the course rather than the clubhouse that first attracts players to a golf facility.

"Getting the course right and waiting on the permanent clubhouse is a concept I endorse," said course architect David Horn of Architerra PC, a course design firm in Catasauqua, Pa. "You can get a good, prefab clubhouse for $100,000 or less to get you through the first few years until the cash flow is sufficient to build a permanent one."

In fact, if done right, a prefab clubhouse can be attractive and may suffice much longer than a developer may initially think. Horn said he has sent many clients to see the supposedly temporary facility at Center Valley (Pa.) Club just south of Bethlehem, Pa.

Geoffrey Cornish-designed Center
GCSAA shares job fears with PGA, who took steps to help pros

BY PETER BLAIS

Expanding job opportunities and influencing job continuity — that's what the Professional Golfers Association of America has been raising by Professional Golfers Association of America members — has become part of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's strategic plan.

"The golf course superintendent's profession is not exempt from such trends," warned Tommy Witt, GCSAA board member and chairman of the superintendent association's career development committee.

"But not too many people chasing too few jobs is something superintendents and golf pros have had to wrestle with in today's uncertain economic environment. Several years ago, the Professional Golfers Association introduced a new certification program designed to break up the logjam of aspiring superintendents wanting to become certified golf pros."

"Prior to June 1993, would-be golf professionals usually started their careers working at a course pro shop. After several months of on-the-job training, they attended the PGA's Business School I classroom program followed by Business School II. Getting to that point typically meant apprenticeships in the business, however, working as assistant pros. And since entry into the field was easy and the lifestyle seemingly attractive, many more would-be pros continued to pour in. The result was a glut of apprentices."

"The PGA recognized the problem. Acting on a study recommending the association revamp its educational offerings and upgrade members' skills, the PGA moved the PAT to the front of its educational program in 1993. Would-be pros could not enter the apprenticeship program until they had passed the playing test. The goal was to make sure people did not get stuck at the apprenticeship level. Of the 12,200 people who took the PAT in 1995, roughly 20 percent passed, according to PGA spokesman Scott Smith."

"We felt we had to upgrade our standards for people to realize that golf was really a business," Hunkler said. "We never set a maximum number we would accept. We simply needed to upgrade our standards. The result was a slight decrease in the number of people coming into the program."

"The PGA followed the front-loaded PAT requirement with additional steps an apprentice must complete before becoming a certified pro. These were:"

A two-day professional readiness program which addresses more seminars on subjects like management, relationships with management companies and administrators in various golf-related businesses.

"The golf industry has grown and the PGA wanted to recognize that there are many careers available for its members," Hunkler said. "For example in the Northeast and Midwest, many of our members were spending more time teaching at indoor facilities than they were outdoors."

The second program, called Career Links, uses computers to match employer job opening requests with potential job seekers. A PGA member puts his resume on file with Career Links.

"When an employer lists an opening with certain skill requirements, Career Links searches its files for potential candidates whose skills match those requirements."

"Resumes are forwarded to the potential employer who reviews the materials and sets up interviews. The program was just started last fall."

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