Degree-carrying 2nd assistants seen as a trend of the 1990s

By J. BARRY MOTHES

The steady supply of educated turfgrass graduates entering the job market year after year has led to more golf clubs and courses hiring degree-carrying second assistants, according to directors of some of the country's biggest and most highly-regarded college and university-based turfgrass programs.

"I think we've been seeing more and more head superintendents going with first and second assistants," said John "Trey" Rogers, an associate professor at Michigan State University. "They want more qualified people and for a few thousand dollars more [in salary] they can get an educated person as a second assistant. Their enthusiasm can make up for their lack of experience and they're worth it." Rogers said 30 of the 40-2-year turfgrass graduates at Michigan State this year are headed for second assistants' jobs. He pointed out there are real practical advantages for superintendents at clubs and courses who have a full-time second assistant superintendent.

"If you only have one assistant and you lose him, you're in trouble," said Rogers. "But if you have two assistants climbing the career ladder, you'll have a second ready to step in when the first leaves which brings some stability to the program."

The steady supply of educated turfgrass graduates at Michigan State that are headed for assistant superintendent jobs, according to John Rogers, is common since 1973 and Piersol said he's seen the demand soar in the past six to seven years. Lake City will graduate 27 students with degrees in turf equipment management this year — excellent opportunities at Lake City College in northern Florida. "There are just not enough good programs training golf course mechanics, and I don't mean small engine mechanics, I mean golf course mechanics."

Lake City has had a mechanics program since 1973 and Piersol said he's seen the demand soar in the past six to seven years. Lake City will graduate 27 students with degrees in turf equipment management. Piersol said the group received well over 80 job offers. "The equipment is so sophisticated and expensive that the golf courses have started screaming for qualified people," said Piersol. He said today's golf course mechanic — or turf equipment manager — has to be a far more broadly skilled person than in the past. "He or she has to be 50 percent mechanic and 50 percent manager. Someone who can set up a shop, organize a preventative maintenance program, use a computer, train and equip operators, and fix things... but the potential for a skilled, organized person is excellent."

Piersol said he hopes other turf equipment management programs start developing around the country. Officials at Delhi College in New York visited Lake City to study its program and launched a new program at Delhi last fall. And, as reported in last month's Golf Course News, officials at several Denver-area technical colleges are also looking into establishing some type of degree program for turf equipment managers. "I hope they're successful," Piersol said. "We can't train all the mechanics in the country, the need is just too huge."