

# Assistant supers', turf students' learning experiences are everywhere

By TERRY BUCHEN

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — In all of my vast travels around North America, I've seen an ever-changing new trend, especially during the past three years: Assistant superintendents and turf students are only making job applications for open positions at high-end private clubs and high-end public-access courses.

Why are these future stars of superintendency going to work only for the "household name" clubs and courses?

In an unofficial survey of many of these recent turfgrass college students and graduates, the vast majority said that, first and foremost, they want a "big-name golf course" on their resumé.

My next question to them is how much do they expect to learn at some of these famous courses. The standard answer that they want to learn a lot.

In the meantime, after working at some of the better clubs and courses nationwide and in Canada, countless turf students admit that many other students were working at many of these courses, and therefore their learning experience was nowhere near their expectations. It still helped to have the respected course on their resumé, but the learning experience was a disappointment.

I truly believe there is more and more of an epidemic of turf students and subsequent assistant superintendents who will not pursue working at anything less than a famous venue and it seems that it is only going to get worse. Some of these former students have told me they learned a lot at a famous club but their main function all summer long was to do one task and do it well — from raking bunkers to mowing greens.

It is very true that having the famous entity on their resumé will definitely help in their future job searches. But it is well known that even with the best job references, all future superintendents still have to know what they are doing. If not, it will quickly catch up to them.

When I was a superintendent, I felt many times that I did not spend enough time with our turf students, so I started a Turf Club in the early 1990s. It all boils down to the old cliché that a person will only get as much out of a job experience as they are willing to put into it. This is very true, but sometimes there are so many other turf students working at a venue that they simply cannot learn as much as the superintendent wants to

teach them, or that they want to learn.

One way to counteract this situation is to work for the vast majority of clubs and courses that are not the top of the list. Here, they can learn a lot by working for the many other top superintendents who may not have the big-name recognition

but are very good at what they do and are excellent teachers and mentors.

Further unscientific research has brought forward about the many turf students and assistants who are currently

## SAVVY SUPERINTENDENT



working for, or who have worked for, some of the lower- to medium-level clubs and lower- to medium-level public-access courses who have had a wonderful, fully satisfying experience.

Many times they are the sole turf student, so they can have more personalized attention and are given much more responsibility and authority.

I have talked with many superintendent colleagues during the past three years who cannot find any turf

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## Nothing looks better than a course



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# Netwal prepares Deere Run for opening, Tour

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said his next challenge is to make sure the course survives the inevitable heat and humidity of summer without losing ground. "Turfgrass doesn't grow in hot, humid months," said the certified golf course superintendent. "The best growing seasons are spring and fall. We just hang on

in the summer. It's a challenge even on mature courses." Two wet springs in a row in the Quad Cities have been the biggest challenge to the growing schedule, according to Netwal. But the PGA Tour construction staff has worked diligently to ensure that the TPC at Deere Run will be ready for tour-

nament play by the year 2000. Sod contractors from Michigan worked through last December laying sod. Erosion areas have been re-seeded and re-sodded in order to keep the project on schedule, Netwal said. Extra drain basins have been added on several holes to handle water run-off. Meanwhile, the spring rain

*"The drought we were hoping for hasn't arrived yet. As soon as the drought arrives, we'll be praying for rain."*

— John Netwal

was like a house guest who doesn't know when to go home. And it was still hanging around this summer. "We've been pummeled [with

rain] the last week and a half," Netwal said in June. "We got one inch in 15 minutes the other day and we've had two other downpours that were worse. It causes erosion on newly seeded areas and it undermined some sod in some areas. But that always happens in construction. It's not anything out of the ordinary."

Netwal has little choice but to remain stoic in the face of such uncontrollable weather uncertainties, so he goes with the flow and maintains a cool, just-dry-enough sense of humor consistent with his weather preferences.

"The drought we were hoping for hasn't arrived yet," Netwal said. "As soon as the drought arrives, we'll be praying for rain."

The construction of the TPC at Deere Run is part of Deere & Co.'s nine-year title sponsorship agreement of the PGA Tour's long-standing Quad City tournament. Deere gave the Tour 385 acres of rolling, wooded property on the Rock River to build the course. The Tour will own and operate the facility as part of its TPC network. Deere Run is being designed by D.A. Weibring, winner of three Quad City PGA events, and Chris Gray of the Tour's design department.

## Savvy Super

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students or assistants to work for them because they are not at a "household name" course. This is very frightening and very sad for our profession's future. I suggest that students intern with the lower- to medium-level clubs with knowledgeable superintendents. Try it and you and your career will really like it.

### GCSAA BACKS 1ST TEE

LAWRENCE, Kan. — The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and its members are involved in a number of projects related to The First Tee Program, an initiative to create facilities and programs that make golf more affordable and accessible, with a special emphasis on youths. As part of GCSAA's 1999 Golf Championship, GCSAA and The Toro Co. teamed up to benefit The First Tee facilities being developed across the United States. In the previous two years of linking the golf championship to charitable efforts to benefit junior golf organizations, GCSAA members donated more than 225 golf bags, 7,000 golf balls, 450 golf clubs and \$1,700.

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