UK-US internships a boon for all involved

East Lake Golf Club in win-win situation

By MARK LESLIE

ATLANTA — Scotland, Ireland and England gave America golf. Now more and more golf courses in America are returning the favor, accepting turfgrass students as interns for a year of on-the-job experience.

In the midst of preparing to host this year’s PGA Championship in November, East Lake Golf Club is one of the most enticing among the American hosts — much to superintendent Ralph Kepple’s delight.

"Interns are wonderful," Kepple said. "They are here to learn. They are willing to do most anything — as long as they know they will do something else later that they will learn on. They’re motivated. In this industry right now that is difficult to find."

"I love teaching these guys," said A.J. Horr, East Lake’s assistant superintendent. "Interns, including Americans, are the meat of our crew. It’s a good trade-off. They are enthusiastic about learning. They ask questions and they challenge you about why you do different things. If I don’t have the answer I will look for it. It makes me think a lot more than if I had interns who just sat in the room and listened."

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Continued on page 27

Program head: Study aboard opens doors

By MARK LESLIE

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Saying that turfgrass maintenance is "an international profession today, unlike any other," Ohio State University’s (OSU) program coordinator for International Programs in Agriculture said his training internships are door-openers for American and foreign students alike.

Twice as many students are coming to work at U.S. golf courses as there are Americans traveling abroad under the agricultural internship program. But Program Coordinator Michael O’Keeffe stressed: "We want to encourage more American students to go overseas and do this. There is an infrastructure. We obtain a legal permit for training that allows them to learn and enjoy the country [they are going to]."

Students from colleges other than OSU are looking into the foreign golf courses for work, as their states have a federal work program that allows businesses to bring in seasonal foreign labor is one way to beat the labor shortage. Foreign students are looking to supplement their regular workforce for a Sound Environment (RISE), urged superintendents to be more vigilant on insecticide use on golf courses.

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Continued on page 27

Canada GSA’s president hails association’s help

By PETER BLAIS

OTTAWA, Ontario, Canada — Merlin Affleck, head superintendent at Stanhope Golf & Country Club on Prince Edward Island (PEI), was elected president of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA) during the group’s recent annual conference and trade show.

"I found out how professional golf superintendents were when I started this job [as head superintendent at Stanhope] 15 years ago and got involved with the association," the new president said. "CGSA has helped me answer a lot of questions."

Affleck has been at Stanhope since 1980, head superintendent since 1984 and a member of the CGSA since 1986. He is married with four children aged 10 to 23.

During a brief talk at the conference, Affleck discussed his own course and golfing in Canada’s smallest province, known for its red clay, beautiful beaches, sand dunes and quiet lifestyle.

The 1994 opening of Tom McKee-designed Crowbush Cove, which hosted the 1998 Molson Skins Game, helped elevate the game of golf on PEI and raised the standards for the rest of the courses.

Continued on page 27

Turfgrass Alumni Association, the New Jersey Turfgrass Association, and the Center for Turfgrass Science at Cook College.

The groups honored the 1989 graduates of the Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management School, Advanced Golf Turf Symposium Attendees, Cook College undergraduate and graduate student scholarships recipients, and turfgrass industry leaders.

GOLF COURSE NEWS

New England Conference Review

Foreign workers a solution to the labor crunch

By ANDREW OVERBECK

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — With the economy booming and unemployment rates dropping, superintendents are having an increasingly difficult time finding and retaining quality seasonal workers. However, as some golf courses are already discovering, utilizing foreign labor is one way to beat the labor-market crunch.

Speaking at the New England Regional Turfgrass Conference, John Young, president of the New England Apple Council (NEAC) and head of H2a/b Employer Labor Programs, outlined the advantages and availability of a federal work program that allows businesses to bring in seasonal foreign labor.

Young, who has been in the apple business for 38 years, has used foreign labor to supplement his regular workforce for all but one growing season.

"The foreign workforce is hardworking, they want as many hours as they can get and they are willing to do the backbreaking work that local workers don’t want to do," he said.

Golf courses, Young said, are eligible for the government’s H2b program.