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

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Program head: Study abroad 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

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 golf in Canada’s smallest province, known for its red clay, beautiful beaches, sand dunes and quiet lifestyle.

The 1994 opening of Tom McBroom-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

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Solving the labor crunch

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gram and that allows employers to bring in workers from any country. The program has several requirements:

- H2b is only available after employers test the U.S. market in the area and it is established that there is a shortage of available workers. The Department of Labor requires that companies advertise the availability of jobs in local papers.
- Foreign workers can only be brought in to fill seasonal or peak-load positions.
- Companies must meet local wage-rate requirements. These differ from state to state but usually fall between $9 and $12 an hour.

"After getting certification from the Labor Department, the next step is with the U.S. Immigration Service," said Young. "All workers will have to have visas prior to coming to the United States and this will take 30 days." The total time frame for getting workers approved is about 90 days.

Young has been accessing foreign labor through Florida East Coast Travel, a division of Florida Fruit and Vegetable that sources workers from Jamaica, Barbados and Mexico.

According to Young, using this program eliminates many of the headaches associated with using foreign workers. "Anyone who comes through this program is 100-percent legal," he said. "You don’t have to worry about green cards or mismatching Social Security Card numbers."

Mexican workers generally work cheaper than those from the Caribbean because their government does not place requirements on the employers. However, Young pointed out that there are generally more language problems with Mexican workers, they have no medical program and they are extremely unhappy if they work just 40 hours a week.

On the flip side, Caribbean workers have a liaison staff that handles all worker problems. Additionally, they speak better English, have health insurance and their governments provide police checks and physicals. There is also a predesignation program that allows employers to get the same worker back year after year. "This gives us an experienced workforce," said Young. "We do it with 85 percent of our workers."

As a result, workers from the Caribbean are more expensive. Employers must cover the cost of travel for each one (at least $650) and find them proper housing. Other costs involved with bringing in foreign workers through the H2b program:

- Immigration charges a flat $110 processing fee, no matter how many workers are being brought in.
- Travel costs will range from nothing to the whole thing. Workers from Mexico will often pay at least half the travel costs.
- Advertising job availability in local papers will run between $100 and $500.
- Employers must provide some form of transportation service to take workers shopping and to get them back and forth to work.

"There is an available supply of good workers," said Young. "But you have to go through the steps to do it. You have to deal with the Department of Labor which is hostile to the program because it is their job to find Americans work."

Therefore, Young recommends that potential users of H2b consider it only for jobs that are long enough to spread out costs and make it attractive to workers. Companies should also team up with others in the area to bring in workers collectively.

All of the effort is worth it, said Young. "You pay for what you get. And what you get is a highly motivated workforce that will want to come back year after year." 

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Near infrared and aerial photography at Imperial Golf Club in Naples, Florida, captures the benefits of using InfiltRx Soil Penetrant on fairways.