School for troubled kids turns them on to golf course maintenance, on their own new layout

By JOEL JOYNER

GLEN MILLS, Pa. — Take one brand-new golf course, 65 troubled kids and a superintendent doubling as a guidance counselor, and what have you got? You have the Glen Mills School here, running one of the most unusual golf course maintenance training programs to be found anywhere.

Most of the kids have been "court referred" to the Glen Mills School, which is dedicated to turning around troubled teens. The student body, 1,000 strong, includes mostly inner-city youths from all over the country, usually aged 15 to 18, who are sent here for offenses ranging from drug dealing and auto theft to manslaughter and gang-related crimes.

The course, designed by Florida-based architect Bobby Weed, is an 18 hole, $8-million layout, set right on campus. Open since September, it provides students a place to learn landscape maintenance, golf course management, agronomy and maintenance mechanics. They'll also learn how to properly apply chemicals on the 235-acre track.

Although the public is welcome at the course, the school built the course specifically to serve as a training ground for the students. "The goal is to turn out technicians who can command good pay on the market," said John Vogts, superintendent at Glen Mills Golf Course, who was formerly the assistant superintendent at nearby Merion Golf Club. "For most students in the program, to leave here for a well-paid job at a golf course is an accomplishment. We help them into careers where they can start at $30,000 a year."

The groundskeeping program is one of the largest vocational programs at the school, with its own dormitory and classrooms.

Right now, 65 students are in the course maintenance program, and Vogts plays a key role in their development. "They are basically fine kids who simply need a second chance," said Vogts. "We start them out on small projects like raking bunkers and mowing the grass. Then we proceed to more specialized training as spray technicians and equipment mechanics."

COURSE IS CUTTING-EDGE

The construction of the course provided an unexpected learning opportunity. "We had some weather difficulties," said Scott Sherman, senior associate designer at Weed Golf Course Design. "For the first..."