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, $6-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 year, the application fee is $35 and the deadline for applications is December 31, 2000. For more information, contact (814) 863-0129.

PENN STATE TURFGRASS APPLICATIONS

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. — Applications are now being accepted for Penn State's two-year Golf Course Turfgrass Management Program for the class beginning in September of 2001. The application fee is $35 and the deadline for applications is December 31, 2000. For more information contact (814) 863-0129.

Ziesmer named superintendent at Minisceongo

POMONA, N.Y. — Jason Ziesmer has been named superintendent at Minisceongo Golf Club, a private, non-equity club located here and owned by Empire Golf. Ziesmer is a graduate of Michigan State and has served as assistant superintendent at Minisceongo since 1998.

"Jason has done an outstanding job as an assistant, and under his leadership we expect him to build on our growth," said John Napier, general manager of Minisceongo. "He has been here since 1988, and has worked in the environmental field since 1972."

His prior experience includes three years of water conservation and soil stabilization work in Saudi Arabia. Later, Deegan promoted and marketed water conservation products in Western Europe. Deegan is currently president of the New England Chapter of the International Erosion Control Association.

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Some of the first students at Glen Mills, with superintendent John Vogts (far right)
IGM adds West Bay Club to its maintenance lineup

ESTERO, Fla.—The West Bay Golf Club here has contracted with International Golf Maintenance (IGM) to help the course achieve Signature certification with the Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program. IGM is a leading golf course maintenance company, with every one of its 40 courses enrolled in the certification program.

“We strongly believe in working in concert with the environment,” said Scott Zakany, executive vice president of IGM. “We realize that sound agronomic programs have far-reaching benefits for the golf course owners and the community.”

The West Bay course is the first in Florida designed by the architectural firm Pete and P.B. Dye. With varied elevations as high as 30 feet, natural vistas of mangroves and water on 12 of the holes, the 6,800-yard, par-72 private course offers a country estate setting that requires confidence and aggressive play.

As the leading provider of golf course maintenance and agronomic services, IGM offers personnel, materials, supplies, and equipment through an annual maintenance program designed for each individual course.

“We wanted a maintenance company with expertise in maintaining fine facilities,” said Frank Weed, president of West Bay. “In addition, we feel that IGM has a good understanding of the needs of the course.” The West Bay course will host the 2000 College Golf Foundation’s national match play championship this month.

IGM is a subsidiary of the Meadowbrook Golf Group, Inc. based in Lakeland, Fla. Resources and equipment are shared with all facilities served by Meadowbrook, which owns and operates courses throughout the country.

Glen Mills golf

Continued from page 8

six months or so there was a drought. Following that, we had downpours of rain - about twice the normal amount. It made things challenging, but we had some students helping out. They put down erosion-control matting, did seed-bed preparation and helped repair washout areas during rainy periods.”

Despite those tough conditions, there’s nothing second-rate about the golf course here. Weed said the course is in the great parkland tradition, wandering over rolling terrain and through mature hardwoods. Layered-sod bunkers, like those on the Old Course at St. Andrews, can be found throughout the course. Several streams and plenty of elevation changes add to the character of the layout.

Weed is well aware of the uniqueness of the training program. “So far as we know, it is the only facility of its kind - for golf, this is really an industry first. I started my career in golf as a superintendent, went on to be the chief architect for the PGA Tour and then opened my own firm. I think that shows these young men that there are opportunities for them in golf.”

Continued on page 35
Glen Mills School
Continued from page 13

HANDLING THE HARDWARE

On the hardware and turf side, the students learn on state-of-the-art gear. "We have a Rainbird wall-to-wall, computerized irrigation system with Xerigation drip capabilities here," Vogts said. "It pumps more than 2,000 gallons a minute. We also maintain top quality bentgrasses on our greens, tees, and fairways. There's bluegrass for our roughs and several fescues in our native grass areas."

"There's also variety in our equipment to give the students a well-rounded experience," he said. "For instance, we have a number of Toro products, some Green Kings V's for our fairways, Jacobsen PGM's for greens, tees, and approaches, Ransom AR250's, and four Toro sprayers for fertilization. The school has a tradition that when they do something, they do it exceptionally well."

Already, Vogts has seen a nice payoff. "Some of the students do as good a job as some of my crew, and better in certain cases," said. "Some of the kids who have progressed rather quickly have even started to act as trainers for other students. It creates less pressure for some kids."

"Our goal is to become the best-main-