



John Walsh
Editor

Targeting workers

Labor is critical for the success of a golf course, and it's consistently one of the top concerns for golf course superintendents. Hiring maintenance workers is a challenging aspect of the superintendent's job, and it becomes more difficult when the labor pool is small or shrinking.

It's becoming even more difficult to hire quality workers because there's more supply (golf courses) in the market, fewer people who want to do golf course maintenance work and competition with other industries such as fast food and retail.

Labor isn't only an issue for superintendents at the local level, it's an industrywide concern, which is why industry associations should do something about it.

One solution for superintendents to fill vacancies on their maintenance staffs is to hire foreign workers. Many use the federal H2B program to hire workers that come from Mexico and Central America. Superintendents like these workers because they're punctual, dependable and work hard. These workers like their jobs in America because they pay more than most of the jobs they can get in their home countries. These foreign workers are filling a need in the marketplace that isn't being met by Americans.

However, employing foreign workers has its disadvantages. Many of these workers don't speak English, or if they do, they speak it poorly. And superintendents know how important communication is with their staffs to ensure jobs are done correctly, efficiently and in a timely manner.

Another disadvantage is availability. The federal government puts a limit on the number of H2B workers – 66,000 a year – that can come into the country yearly. Steve Mona, c.e.o. of the Golf Course Superintendents Association, said some GCSAA members in the North have tried to hire H2B workers, but there are none left because they've been hired already, mainly because courses in the South prepare for their season earlier than those in the North.

So if superintendents are in need of workers and can't get any more foreign ones, where are they going to turn? Well, they can look right here in America.

The national unemployment rate has been steady the past few quarters and is at 5.5 percent currently, but there are still many Americans without jobs. Newspapers throughout the country list hun-

dreds of jobs weekly, so it's frustrating to see the number of people out of work.

But for some of those unemployed workers, it's their own fault because they're too lazy or they're too picky about the jobs they want. Granted, they might not be qualified for some.

There are too many people who think they should be working in an office pushing paper making \$100,000 a year. Too many Americans are unwilling to do physical labor for a living. It seems to be a thing of the past for many.

Golf course maintenance work isn't easy. The job entails working outdoors, being on your feet most of the day and getting dirty. On the other hand, some of it, such as cutting grass on riding mowers, isn't difficult. While it might not be the most glamorous job, it's good, honest, available work that requires teamwork. It's a job to be proud of.

Maybe there aren't many people who think about working on golf courses. But if American workers aren't coming to superintendents for work, superintendents and the golf industry need to go to American workers. Just like the National Golf Course Owners Association, the Golf Course Builders Association of America and the PGA are trying to encourage more people to play golf, the GCSAA, GCBA and NGCOA should campaign and encourage more people – young and old – to work on golf courses. Age isn't an issue, but benefits that can be provided might be.

A public relations campaign is needed to communicate the benefits of this work, such as being on a golf course, working for educated people, learning a craft or trade and possibly having a career in the industry.

Superintendents shouldn't stop hiring foreign workers. In fact, the H2B program could expand, and some are lobbying for that. But the industry should think about ways to send messages to those American workers looking for jobs that the golf course maintenance industry is a beneficial place to work.

It's time associations spent money to encourage people to work on golf courses. Some Americans will become better workers, and golf courses might become a little easier to maintain. GCN

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