

# The Changing Of The Guard

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Today's superintendent is better qualified, more talented, more articulate, more efficient and produces better results than ever before. But his club cannot afford to pay him what he is worth.

Part of the reason for this is that times and trends are changing. First, the superintendent is much younger. There are only a handful of active superintendents today who are 60 or older. In fact, there are relatively few in their 40s or 50s. Most are in the 25 to 35 age bracket.

Next, today's superintendent has a better technical and general education. The majority of the "new breed" are graduates of university programs such as Penn State, Michigan State, Purdue, Rutgers and others. In addition to these fine programs, many community colleges are getting more active in turfgrass management training. In line with his better education, today's superintendent is demonstrating better business management practices and executive ability. More records are being kept, more attention is given to costs, budgeting and prudent purchasing.

We also find today's superintendent doing a much better job of communication, both with his fellow superintendents and with his club officials and the golfers.

Let us look at the salary scale. Salaries are barely keeping up with the rate of inflation. With an annual inflation rate of over five percent in recent years, salary levels should have about doubled in the past 15 years, just to keep abreast and with no allowance for merit raises. I recall a salary survey made in about 1960. It found at that time that the range of superintendents in our area was from \$10,000 to \$18,000, with a median of about \$12,000. Today, 15 years later, my sampling of the same superintendents indicates we are

generally in the \$15,000 to \$30,000 bracket with a median of about \$20,000.

Quite a number of superintendents are now engaged in outside business ventures such as landscaping to supplement their income. Most of the superintendents I know that do this do so with the approval of their clubs and officials.

In addition to the salary situation, fringe benefits have not kept pace over the years. For instance, surprisingly few clubs have retirement programs. I believe we have to place a good deal of the blame here on ourselves, along with the club managers and the club pros. We have not done a good enough job of selling the need for programs of retirement, medical benefits, hospitalization, life insurance, business expenses, transportation, etc.

We must also take note of the decisions being made by our clubs when they find it necessary to replace their superintendents. Generally speaking, clubs are bypassing consideration of experienced superintendents in favor of young relative newcomers to the profession. This indicates that club officials are attempting to save dollars. Personally, I am pleased to see these young men being placed in responsible positions for their own personal welfare, but at the same time I am concerned by the fact that some clubs are paying more attention to the price of a new superintendent, than they are towards his qualifications and proven ability.

Perhaps the most significant factor affecting the superintendent's position today is the state of the economy. Membership waiting lists are shrinking or wanting. Dues and costs are up, business expenses have been curtailed, the stock market is down and all of these factors hurt club activity and income. Undoubtedly we will see more belt-tightening by the clubs for this year and possibly even longer.

As we look into the future of our

profession, we have to be aware of the old factor of supply and demand. Are we training enough or too many new men for the field? The National Golf Foundation tells us that we constructing about 200 new courses a year, at this time, which is a slowdown compared to the average for the last 10 years. Not all of these would require new superintendents because some are additions to existing facilities. In addition to new positions at new courses, we will have to replace those superintendents who leave the profession. Based on GCSAA figures, a projection of the entire field would mean a loss of some 120 men annually. So, between the new jobs and the replacements, we would estimate a demand for about 350 new superintendents a year.

How many new men are we training? Dr. William Daniel of Purdue University recently said that he surveyed 56 schools and came up with a total enrollment of about 1,160 turfgrass students, with 445 graduates last June. Some of these students will end up as commercial representatives, researchers and teachers. Some others will leave the profession. Also, we will have additional men who will come into the field without formal university training. All in all, it appears we are currently training about 500 men annually for about 300 to 500 jobs.

It seems to me that we are just about keeping pace with supply and demand at this time. However, the GCSAA and the schools will need to keep up a liaison so graduating students will not be disappointed in job opportunities. The GCSAA scholarship program has been active in providing funds to encourage and assist students in turfgrass management, about \$20,000 a year. Here too, prudent planning for the future is definitely needed.

In summary, I believe we must keep alert to changing times and make adjustments accordingly. Additionally, industry and research has played a terrific role in upgrading our profession and maintenance standards for golfers. The sophistication of our modern tools, particularly automatic irrigation and mowers, has given us a whole new ballgame. Advancement in research is also developing new horizons in the use of chemical controls for plant growth. □