

Certification proves superintendents' professionalism



by David C. Holler, CGCS

When a club needs a good accountant, it finds a CPA. When looking for a good manager, those candidates with MBAs and other business degrees often are best. When legal help is needed, most people turn to a member of the bar. But what should a club look for when it needs a golf course superintendent? The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) considers "CGCS" to be a reliable credential that should not be overlooked. It stands for "Certified Golf Course Superintendent."

The profession of turf management is becoming increasingly complex, and it is difficult for the CPAs, lawyers, and other professionals who hire superintendents to know exactly what the turf professional should be able to do.

Among the many things a superintendent must understand are fertilizers, maintenance products, government regulations, pesticide usage, ecology, plant physiology, and weather. He also needs to understand things like personnel management, equipment maintenance, budgeting and, of course, the game of golf.

The CGCS after a superintendent's name is an indication that his peers consider him to have the knowledge to handle this complex job well.

What does it mean?

Another reason GCSAA feels that CGCS is a valuable credential is that equally good golf course superintendents often have different backgrounds, which makes measuring their golf course management skills difficult. Some superintendents have backgrounds in civil engineering,

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physics, horticulture, agronomy, or simply long years of experience. The certification program consolidates all backgrounds and abilities and provides a standardized measure of knowledge in the field.

According to GCSSA President Ted W. Woehrle, CGCS, it is “another way of improving the quality of the superintendent. By becoming certified, he has proven to himself, his peers, and the golf world that he has achieved the specified level of knowledge required of his profession.”

The certification program is now in its sixth year. So far, it has not received broad recognition within the golf industry, but GCSSA feels that the recognition level is rising. Woehrle has said that golf clubs shortchange themselves by not knowing about and encouraging turf managers to join their professional organization and earn its highest credential. The golf course superintendent is the one responsible for one of the largest parts of most club budgets and the most valuable asset — the golf course itself. This kind of responsibility requires a high level of expertise.

Who is certified?

Some 2,000 of GCSAA's nearly 4,200 members are eligible to become certified. So far about 17 percent of that number, or 350, have satisfied the requirements, and 31 more are in the process. Those who are certified are now working in 40 states, Canada and Guam. Moreover, the number of certified members is increasing steadily, along with GCSSA membership and the number of those eligible to be certified.

GCSSA anticipates that in 1977, about 75 more superintendents will earn certification. To become certified, a superintendent has to follow these steps:

1. Be a Class A member of GCSAA for two years. This means having the responsibility for the maintenance of a golf course for at least 5 years. (He must be in charge of a golf course for 3 years before he can become a Class A member.)

2. Through appropriate channels, make application, which is verified for accuracy.

3. Take and pass, with a score of 80 percent or higher, a comprehensive, 6-hour, written examination on the following topics:

- Practical Turf Management
- Business Administration
- Rules of Golf
- Plant Protectant Chemicals
- Leadership
- History, Ethics, Procedures, Purposes of GCSAA

Those who meet all these requirements are qualified to use “CGCS” after their names.

In order to protect the integrity of the title and program, a superintendent must, after 5 years, show evidence that he has continued his education, if he wants to renew his certification for another 5 years.

Continuing education sufficient for certification renewal may take several forms. Partial credit can be earned by participating in the annual GCSAA International Turfgrass Conference and Show (which this year offered more than 50 hours of educational opportunities). More credit can be earned by taking part in GCSAA-sponsored seminars on subjects like pesticide usage, landscaping, turf nutrition, etc., and still more by undergoing additional high-level testing. At the end of the first 5-year certification period, 85 percent of those originally certified have renewed their credentials.

In summation

The certification program not only allows the golf course superintendent to be measured; it also provides a credential laymen can use when evaluating golf course superintendents. GCSAA Director of Education Palmer Maples, Jr., summed up the program when he said, “Certification itself is no absolute guarantee of performance. It is however, a demonstration that the certified person has been measured by his peers against a predetermined set of standards and has the required body of knowledge to perform well.”

CGCS is being considered a meaningful and respected credential of many golf courses. You may want to consider this credential the next time you are looking for a superintendent for your golf course. □