

MUNICIPAL GOLF

A park director is not a golf superintendent!

by Richard Viergever, CGCS

A great many municipal or government owned or operated golf courses are finding it difficult to operate effectively, and many are having trouble breaking even financially. In many cases there are valid reasons for this, but too often poor operational organization is at fault.

Most municipalities, when they set out to build or buy a golf course, start out on the right foot. They have a feasibility study made by a responsible group such as the National Golf Foundation; they select a recognized golf course architect and make sufficient funds available to do a proper and adequate job of construction.

Richard Viergever retired 2 months ago after 12 years as golf course superintendent for the Sunnyvale (Calif.) Municipal Golf Courses. His 30 years as a golf superintendent included 7 years at San Francisco's Olympic Club, so he knows what it's like on both sides of the golf world, public and private.

Here, unfortunately, is where good practices often end.

Where does the golf course belong?

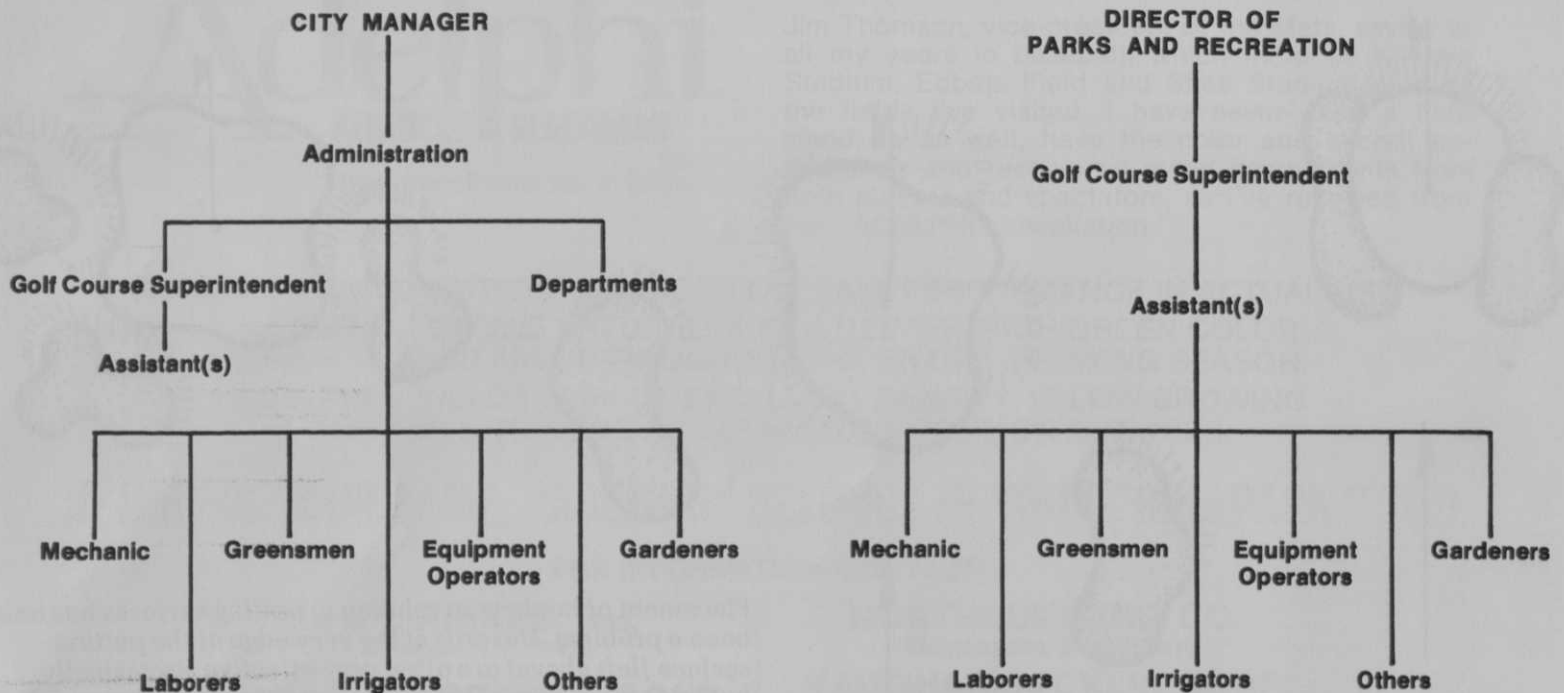
Many governments find there is no place in their existing organization where a golf course fits. This is true of departmental organization as well as Civil Service job titles and descriptions. But instead of making appropriate changes in the organization, they are determined to fit the golf course somewhere into it as it stands. This seldom works efficiently.

An example is when the golf course ends up in the parks department. "A golf course is essentially a large park," say the city (or county, or other) officials. This is far from true. Also the park director or superintendent usually knows little about golf course maintenance operations and, even if he does, hasn't the time to spend on the many details that are required. In many cases, he actually

interferes with the work of a qualified man who should be in charge of the operation. This, admittedly, is sometimes true also of private country club greens committee chairmen and owners of public courses.

Many courses do function satisfactorily as separate divisions of park and recreation departments. In this case, an able and qualified golf course superintendent should be hired. He should be fully responsible for the selection and deployment of his crew as well as for choosing the proper equipment, supplies, and materials and for allocating available funds as he may find necessary. All of this, of course, in accordance with established policies and procedures.

Probably even more effective, especially in the case of a large course where championship conditions and superior maintenance are desired and budgeted for, or where a city maintains more than one course, is the es-



ABOVE LEFT would be a very workable table of organization with city manager, mayor, or other title at the top of large operation.

ABOVE RIGHT would be workable for a smaller operation. Categories could be combined for 9-hole or short course facility.

establishment of the golf course(s) as a separate department directly under the city manager or equivalent. Here the golf course superintendent is not bound by policies, practices, and rules of another department when such rules would not normally pertain to golf courses.

What's in a name?

Municipal managers may look through their Civil Service job titles and not find "golf course superintendent" listed; so they might hire a greenskeeper, supervisor, foreman, head gardener, or something else to be in charge of golf course maintenance rather than create a new job title. This may do one or several things. First of all, top qualified golf course superintendents may not be interested or may not even realize that the requirements, benefits, and prestige are the same as they are seeking, so they may not be attracted to the position in the first place. Then if a qualified man is hired with some other title, even though he may have the same responsibilities and duties and receive as high a salary as golf course superintendents at other courses, he might not receive the respect and acceptance of his fellow professionals who carry the proper titles.

The titles of other golf course personnel should also be different from those of park, public works, or other personnel. A park gardener, for exam-

ple, could not satisfactorily do the work of a golf course greensman without a great deal of training. Neither could a public works tractor man take over as a golf course equipment operator. A qualified golf course superintendent would be able to select properly titled personnel, and his recommendations should be followed by the municipal personnel department.

Equipment and purchasing

Equipment maintenance is often one of the inefficiently performed functions in municipal course operations. Too often it is performed largely in a central shop, usually located in the city corporation yard. It is done by general mechanics and often involves delay because of priorities and lack of parts. It involves much lost time in transporting equipment back and forth between the golf course and the



Author checks fertilizer stockpile. If proper open orders are maintained, such supplies can be bought as needed, without delay.

shop. Also, mechanics available are not always experienced with the specialized equipment. A mechanic should always be assigned to the golf course, have his tools there, and spend full time there. I believe an honest appraisal of the cost will show a considerable saving, especially when the longer life of the machinery, the reduced downtime, and more effective use of operators' time is taken into consideration. The improved appearance and playability of the golf course will be another plus factor.

Purchasing is one of the most important items in controlling funds. This is done, of course, almost entirely by the purchasing department. The golf course superintendent must have certain latitude in the way of open or blanket purchase orders for emergency items such as chemicals, parts, seeds, small tools, etc. Most, if not all, municipalities maintain these orders and it should be the golf course superintendent's responsibility to arrange for these needs with the purchasing agent well in advance. The superintendent should spend as much time as necessary with the purchasing agent to make him familiar with current practices in requisitioning and writing of specifications, especially for major equipment.

With efficient maintenance practices, the quality of the golf course will be directly proportional to the budget allotment. □



Where there is no full-time mechanic on the premises, operators often try to make minor repairs themselves — but only qualified mechanics should work on specialized equipment like this.



This equipment has broken down on the course and may sit until the next day before a city mechanic can get around to repairing it — even though actual repairs may take only a few minutes.