

Viewpoint

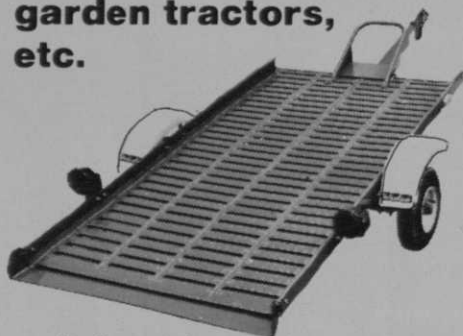
Why be a golf course superintendent?

Who needs it? The prestige and pride in presenting the golf world with a beautiful, well-manicured golf course often attracts new blood into the golf turf management field. A young person loving golf, working summers on a golf course, caddying, and maybe excelling to be selected as an Evans Scholar is sometimes drawn to a career in golf course maintenance — but may grow to regret this choice. This career has attracted several thousand to major in golf turf management in college. It has grown to the point where there are no jobs available in their "love" so they have had to wait several impatient years as an assistant or in a lower position hoping for the opportunity to become the superintendent. Is it worth it? Others not finding or accepting such a lower position may have altered their objective by entering another turf related career. Not having achieved their primary objective, they are probably still looking with envy at those working as superintendents. If they have never worked as a superintendent, then it will probably be difficult to convince

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them how fortunate their career direction has been.

After a few years as a golf course superintendent many accept their destiny without thought of recourse or changing. These superintendents must have a special quality which permits one to disregard a profession with so many frustrations. Others not having this quality become restless and depressed and start searching for a way out. Many want out, but are reluctant to move because of age and fear. These are unhappy superintendents who continue to do an adequate job in spite of themselves. How sad.

If it were possible to obtain the data from country clubs, owners, and superintendents, we believe that these questions would present some interesting conclusions:

To clubs/owners: How old is your course and how many superintendents have there been during this period? How many were fired? Why? How many resigned? Did you find out why?

To superintendents: Age? How long a superintendent? At how many courses were you the superintendent? Why did you change jobs? Would you pursue this career again?

Most country clubs, resorts, and public courses do not deserve an experienced and dedicated golf course superintendent. Many who have this caliber of person aren't really aware that they have a very special person in their employ. The superintendent is expected to be a master magician, which often leads to ulcers, alcohol, divorces, heart attacks, and breakdowns.

Austere budgets, equipment failures, lack of supplies, unfavorable weather conditions, poorly constructed courses, inadequate irrigation, and the golfer are but a few of the forces in the daily life of the superintendent. One man is coping with all of these forces without a supporting management team. Multi-course operations cannot be compared to 18-hole golf courses which are the majority.

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The 18-hole course superintendent is alone without a secretary, a purchasing agent, and often even a mechanic. During the height of the season the job becomes 7 days a week, 10 or more hours a day. Break that down into hourly wage. Freedom is certainly there, and one can work without controls or direct supervision. But, considering all the positive aspects of the profession of golf course superintendent, is it worth it?

A large percentage have inadequate salary, no health plan, no retirement program, no job security. Extended sickness could be loss of employment. Other uncontrollable situations can also result in loss of employment. How much more untenable can a job be? The businessmen golfers playing your course wouldn't work one day under those circumstances, yet they expect you to do so.

Consider the young man graduating from college anxious for "his" golf course. Benefits, hours, job security, and sometimes salary mean nothing. But after about 10 years his thinking should start to change. If it doesn't, then in terms of our society, his values are questionable.

Employers of golf course superintendents not presenting their most valued employee with decent conditions, benefits, and salary deserve a high rate of turnovers, frequent turf problems, and marginal golf course conditions. Superintendents staying in such positions deserve what they are getting: little or nothing. The smart superintendent has said "Who needs it?" and moved on when the employer was hardheaded or simply couldn't afford to produce favorable employment conditions. Former superintendents who have moved on, upwards or sideways into the turf industry have no regrets and profess that they would never be a superintendent again.

The status level of the superintendent will never rise until pressure groups are formed to insist the demands are met. If this is not done, then why be a golf course superintendent? Who needs it?

Author's note: A good first step would be to hand this article to your greens chairman or employer. Or place the article on bulletin boards, as it is directed at the employer and to open the eyes of those going into or new in the profession. Others know it.

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