

## golf business

# Nationwide survey of golf course workers' wages

by David J. Slaybaugh, editor

Of all the factors which make up a golf course maintenance budget, by far the single largest item is labor. In fact, in most instances, a course will spend more for labor than for all other maintenance costs combined.

The golf course superintendents who participated in the 1978 "Profile of the Industry" survey conducted by this magazine reported that they spent an average of about \$38,000 for course maintenance last year, excluding labor — compared to an average of about \$46,000 for labor alone.

Furthermore, it appears as if golf course maintenance will continue to become more labor-intensive in the future, as workers demand pay increases to keep up with the climb in the cost of living. The federally mandated minimum wage increases from \$2.65 to \$2.90 per hour as of January 1, 1979 — which will undoubtedly trigger another round of pay raises for most workers.

### A fresh appraisal

To gain further insight into the current situation of golf course maintenance workers, GOLF BUSINESS sent questionnaires to a thousand superintendents across the country, asking them to supply some basic information on their labor costs. We received 178 responses from superintendents in 44 states, so the results should paint a quite accurate picture.

Our survey respondents represent a good cross-section of golf courses and superintendents. Thirty percent of them remain open for golf year-round, but the average response for length of season was 9 months. The courses represent a good mix of municipal, daily fee, resort, and private operations, though there is large percentage of private clubs. (We give you this background data so you can keep it in mind when comparing the survey results with figures for your own course.)

### How do you compare?

Superintendents surveyed employ an

average of six full-time and four part-time maintenance people in season, and average of four full-time and one part-time in the off-season. These responses correspond quite closely with those from the 1978 Profile of the Industry survey, though that survey showed that the usual private club and resort course has more than the average, and the normal daily fee course has less. Municipal golf operations stick pretty close to the average number of workers.

Total maintenance labor costs for the 178 courses in this survey came out slightly higher than in the earlier survey, but remember that this group of respondents includes 56 percent private clubs.

Median response (that is, the figure below which are half the answers and above which are half the answers) for total labor costs was \$61,947. The mean (arithmetic average) was \$75,525 — but GOLF BUSINESS Research Manager Clarence Arnold said this was affected by eight courses which reported abnormally high figures (such as a resort course with 25 full-time employees). When he omitted those atypical courses, the modified mean was \$65,739.

The mean for municipal courses was \$79,435.

### Unions increase costs

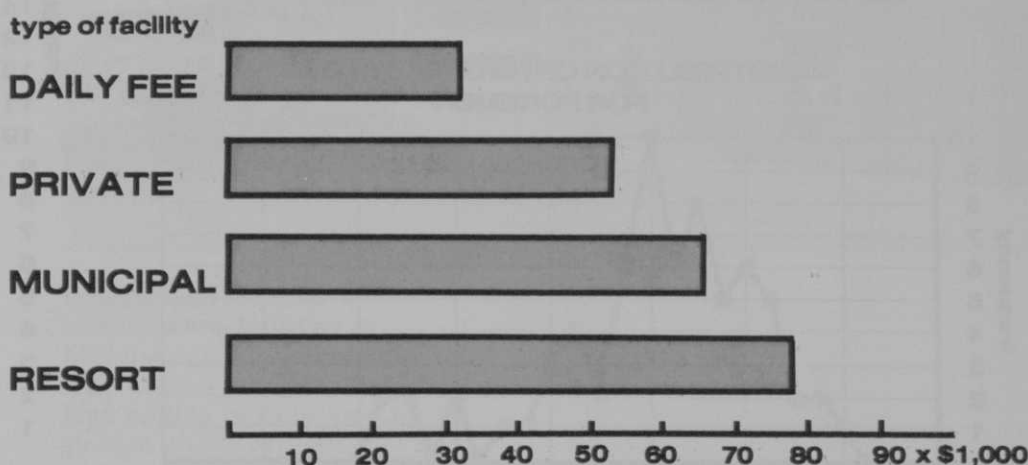
Course superintendents were asked to indicate whether their golf course workers were unionized: 8.6 percent said "yes," 91.4 percent said "no." But on those 12 courses where the workers are union members, the mean response for total labor costs was \$88,953. That is \$13,428 higher than even the greatest overall mean — a difference in costs of almost 18 percent.

When queried about the percentage of their labor costs represented by fringe benefits, the superintendents gave an average figure of 9.3 percent. At the municipal courses surveyed, fringe benefits amount to 14.8 percent of total labor costs — and at the dozen unionized courses, fringe benefits eat up a whopping 20 percent of the labor dollars.

Fringe benefits most often mentioned by superintendents at all types of courses were paid holidays and paid vacations — although it is rather hard to believe that 30 percent or more of the courses still don't give their employees paid days off. The

## MAINTENANCE LABOR COSTS

per course, 1977



Source: 1978 GOLF BUSINESS survey

amount of paid vacation averaged out to 7 days.

Health insurance is provided by 61 percent of the courses surveyed, and sick leave by only 52 percent. These were followed by life insurance (39 percent), disability insurance (37 percent), and a pension plan (30 percent). Other benefits provided by one or a few courses for their workers include uniforms, bonus, playing privileges or membership, meals and/or housing, credit union, profit sharing, education benefits, and dental insurance.

**Pay scales**

GOLF BUSINESS asked the superintendents for the rates they paid their assistant superintendents, foremen, mechanics, and course workers. You can see from the graphs accompanying this article that the distributions of answers to these questions was fairly symmetrical except for a handful of courses which pay relatively high wages.

The median response for assistant superintendents' annual salaries (the

way this figure was most often quoted) was \$10,816. The mean response was \$10,975. Among municipal courses, the mean was \$11,830. Among unionized courses, the mean rose substantially to \$14,224.

Other pay scales were most often expressed as an hourly rate, so are reported here that way. For foremen, the median response was \$4.81 per hour; the mean, \$4.91 per hour. Again, the pay was reported to be higher at municipal and union courses: \$6.04 and \$6.37 respectively.

Mechanics are paid more highly than foremen: the median response was \$4.87 for them, and the mean was \$4.99 per hour. At municipal courses this figure went up to \$6.43 per hour, and unionized golf course mechanics get an average of \$6.55 per hour.

Course workers, of course, are paid the least. The median hourly rate for them was reported to be \$3.26, and the mean rate to be \$3.43 per hour. The pay scale for course workers is substantially higher at municipal courses (\$4.81 per hour) and at unionized facilities (\$4.71).

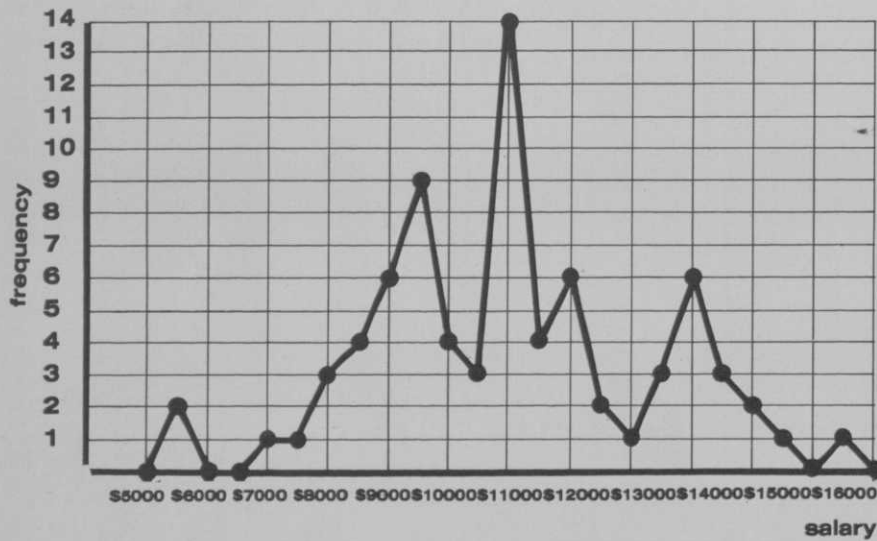
**Women workers**

Finally, the survey questionnaires included space for the superintendent to write in the number of workers employed in each job function — and how many of those are women.

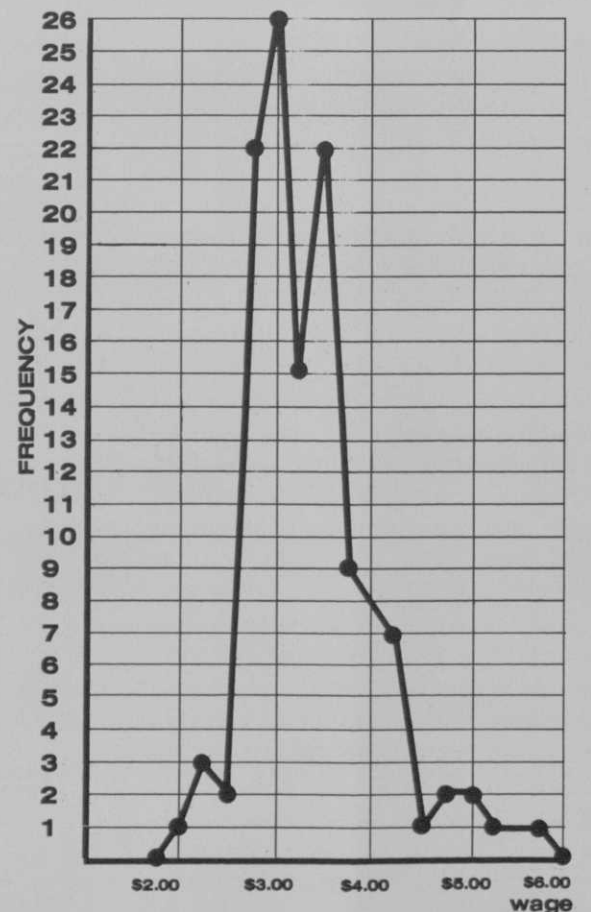
Of 101 assistant superintendents, none are women. One foreman (foreperson?) out of 83 is female, as are two of 104 mechanics. The largest number of women appears in the course worker category, where 57 out of 732 employees listed are female. That represents 7.8 percent of the total. We've been unable to locate comparable data from earlier years, but we'd be willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that the percentage of women course workers was nowhere near that high even 5 years ago.

Needless to say, we'll be watching these figures in the months and years to come and will measure their growth regularly. □

**DISTRIBUTION OF ANNUAL SALARIES FOR ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS**



**DISTRIBUTION OF HOURLY WAGE RATES FOR COURSE WORKERS**



**DISTRIBUTION OF HOURLY WAGES FOR FOREMEN**

