

Superintendents Talk Certification

We surveyed local certified superintendents to get a sense of how they feel about their certification. Most couldn't say enough about the value they've derived from earning—and maintaining—their CGCS status. Here are their insights:

Many enjoyed the “feel good” aspect of adding CGCS to the end of their names. . . .

“In my 25th year of certification,” notes Preakness Hills’ John O’Keefe, “I am confident that career advancement is just one of the benefits of certification. The CGCS designation is something that makes me feel proud and also gives me a feeling of significant accomplishment. I especially appreciate the distinction my club has enjoyed by having a certified superintendent. At the certification luncheon in San Diego in February, it was a great feeling to look around the room and see that I am among some of the best in our business.”

The Stanwich Club’s Scott Niven notes a similar sense of accomplishment: “I have always felt proud to be able to tell members of my club that I am certified as a relatively small percentage of individuals in our business can say that. The CGCS distinction is also a very prominent and valuable item on my resume and website.”

“For me,” says Country Club of New Canaan’s Mike Reeb, “it has been a professional qualification of intrinsic or core value, a goal that’s provided personal satisfaction throughout my career.”

To Larry Pakkala, superintendent at Silvermine Golf Club and superintendent-at-large for Plant Food Co., certification was a means to an end: “I always have looked for ways to improve my self-image, and certification was a means to do that. I didn’t do it for financial gain. It was a personal goal I set for myself. In our industry, unlike many others, certification isn’t required. It’s up to the individual. Many superintendents take the same number of GCSAA and other courses

as a CGCS without becoming certified. And there’s value to that too. I, personally, am proud that I went through the process of becoming certified—and that I’ve maintained that status for 30 years. I’m looking forward to remaining a CGCS well into retirement.”

For Bedford Golf & Tennis Club’s Bob Nielsen, it’s what certification stands for that’s important: “Certification is presently the highest standard by which an individual can be held in our organization. While I don’t believe certification increases an individual’s ability to become a better superintendent, I do believe it demonstrates a commitment to the profession. This is, and always has been, important to me.”

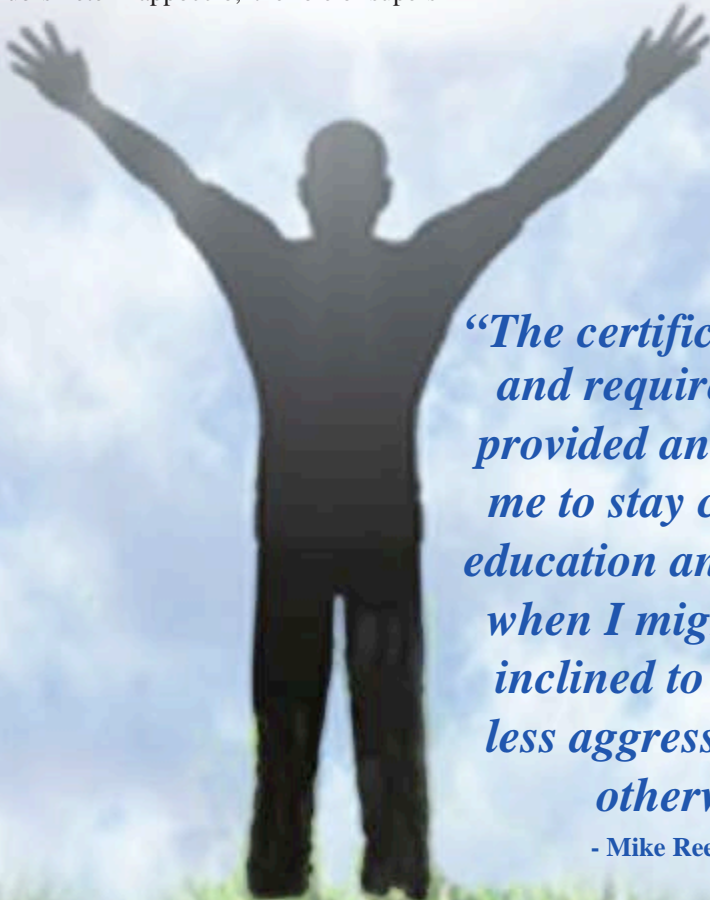
Others feel it has given them a leg up in a competitive industry. . . .

“Back in 1986,” says Silver Spring Country Club’s Peter Rappoccio, “the role of supers

and our status within our clubs was nowhere near what it is today. Many of us looked at certification as a way to distinguish ourselves within the industry and take our jobs to the next level. Though the industry has begun to change and the important role of the superintendent has become clearer to club members and others in the golf industry, I still feel that certification is a distinction that all superintendents should try to attain—and maintain. I have been certified for 27 years, and I already have enough points to be recertified in 2016!”

Emphasizing the importance of CGCS status, Scott Niven adds, “I have always been the kind of person who wants to climb as high in the industry as possible, so as soon as I heard about the certification program back in the early ’80s, I immediately went on a search to find out what I had to do to obtain that classification. Certification holds a certain amount of status in many industries, so whenever you tell a club member, golfer, etc., that you are a certified golf course superintendent, it always indicates to them that you are a professional in your field at the highest level and your work will be representative of what could be considered state-of-the-art in golf course management. I have never questioned my decision to be certified and feel that it has only helped me to achieve a fairly high level of success in this great business.”

Like Scott, Brae Burn Country Club’s Blake Halderman regarded earning CGCS status



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as a solid career move. "When I was a young superintendent, my entire goal was to put myself in the best possible position to get the job I truly wanted. I felt if I wanted to be viewed as one of the top 10 percent, then becoming certified was necessary."

Similarly, Meadow Brook Club's John Carlone felt becoming certified would set him apart from others in the industry. "When I earned my certification in 1991, I felt it would make a statement to my peers and potential employers that I desired to be the best I could be in my profession. I remember feeling, 'All good superintendents are certified.' Of course, I've long known that there are plenty of highly capable superintendents who are not certified. Yet I still think that every young superintendent should challenge themselves by pursuing their certification!"

Rockland Country Club's Matt Ceplo feels certification is all the more essential in an economy where job competition is fierce. "I would urge every superintendent to become certified. Completing your certification, in my opinion, demonstrates to current and prospective employers your commitment to the industry and to the profession of golf course management. And because you have to stay current with the latest developments and technology to maintain your certified status, employers know that they are hiring or employing someone who is on their game."

Echoing Matt's sentiments, Country Club of Darien's Tim O'Neill notes: "Although certification does not guarantee success, statistics show that it can enhance our career opportunities, job security, and lead to better managed facilities. Moreover, in this highly competitive industry, certification is a demonstration of a superintendent's passion for the profession, and it allows a superintendent to be recognized for meeting established levels of competency. It goes beyond 'growing grass' by requiring knowledge in business, communication, leadership, and the environment. It was a personal goal of mine when I started my career as a superintendent in 1981, and I believe it has been a sig-

nificant factor in my success as a golf course superintendent."

Still others enjoy the educational nudge the certification process provides. . . .

As Glen Arbor Golf Club's Ken Benoit notes: "I became certified in 2004, and my experience has been 100 percent positive. In studying for the certification exam, I rediscovered the joy of learning and take great pleasure in keeping up-to-date on turf-related science and participating in the continuing education process. My involvement in the GCSAA certification program has been nothing short of a wonderful experience."

John Carlone sings the praises of certification's educational requirements: "After 22 years, I still appreciate how being certified ensures that I stay current with every aspect of our changing profession through ongoing education."

"Truth be told," says Mike Reeb, "the certification process and requirements have provided an incentive for me to stay current with education and new trends, when I might have been inclined to settle into a less aggressive approach otherwise. I'm proud to be certified and intend to remain a CGCS for as long as I'm able to renew."

"No doubt," adds Blake Halderman, "the certification process forces you to stay current in the industry, which is a positive for both you and your club."

Peter Rappoccio is one who feels the educational benefits of the certification process far outweigh any potential for financial gain: "I didn't pursue certification with the goal of getting more pay. I viewed it as a means to take my status, through education, to the next level. Those who say becoming certified is not worth the effort because financially it means nothing, have their priorities out of whack. It was, and still should be, a means to continue to improve our knowledge of the business, which, in turn, makes us better supers."

And some feel there's just no good reason NOT to become certified. . . .

"A superintendent may or may not feel the need to become certified as it relates to his ability to do his job on a daily basis," says Ken Benoit, "but in my opinion, there is no good answer when asked by a current or potential employer why you are not certified."

Bob Nielsen echoes Ken's sentiments, saying, "One question I always asked myself when deciding whether or not to pursue certification was how I would explain, if it came down to me and another certified superintendent for a position, why I wasn't certified. I have never been able to come up with a good answer."

To Blake Halderman, becoming certified is one of those "why not?" things: "If all those around you are certified and your club finds out you're not, I don't think it will sit too well. You will have to play defense. With the ease of maintaining the certification these days with online courses, I don't see any reason not to get certified and keep it."

While many superintendents were pleased with the recognition and support they received from their clubs for earning and maintaining their CGCS status . . .

A number of respondents admitted their clubs have little idea what CGCS stands for. . . .

"I don't believe my employer gives me any more credit for being certified," says Bob Nielsen, "but that is as much my fault as anyone else's. I have not promoted it."

And according to Blake Halderman, "I don't think 99 percent of my club knows what CGCS stands for or what it takes to keep that status. While being a CGCS may not mean much on a daily basis, I still feel the long-term benefits make it worthwhile."

Larry Pakkala, on the other hand, felt more clubs are aware of the benefits of certification than most of us realize: "For many years, I've noticed that some job notices state that being a certified superintendent is a plus. So there are clubs out there that do know about it."

In the end, few certified superintendents would deny the many personal and professional rewards of earning—and maintaining—their CGCS status . . . even if no one knows it but themselves.