

GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ARE UNSUNG HEROES

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America knows that it has an image problem with public golfers. Most public golfers don't know what a golf course superintendent is.

Country Club members are a bit more knowledgeable. Surveys show that they not only know who their particular golf course superintendent is, but what his duties are, as well. Generally, country club members appreciate the difficulty of the job and the efforts of their superintendent.

And that's the rub. Not many public golfers appreciate the condition of the course they are playing. Ergo, golf course superintendents tend to keep a low profile.

"That's not a fair situation," insists Bob Still, manager of media relations for the GCSAA. "The public course superintendent usually faces a much bigger challenge (than the private course superintendent) because public courses get a lot of play. And generally, they don't have as much budget to work with."

The extremely exclusive Cypress Point Golf Course in Monterey was named the second best course in Golf Digest's biennial "100 greatest golf courses in America" article a year ago.

Cypress, which is not only an outstanding golf course but is always in excellent condition, runs about 13,000 rounds of golf a year. Las Positas generally does that in five weeks.

Another popular misconception, according to Still, is a superintendent's attitude toward the golf course. "Public golfers tend to think that the superintendent is just collecting a paycheck and that he doesn't know the first thing about golf," he said. "But the number one interest in the heart and mind of these (superintendents) is the golfer. Superintendents love the game of golf. They have to (because) the work is hard and the hours are crazy."

Actually, golf course superintendents have to know the rules of golf because they are tested on them as part of the certification

process.

The GCSAA spent years trying to organize a certification system for its members. "It wasn't easy," said Still, referring to the process finally completed two years ago.

"One of the things we needed as a requirement (for certification) was a four-year (college) degree and a lot of the older superintendents just don't have a degree. In many cases, the job was handed down father to son."

The GCSAA finally implemented a certification system based upon two full days of tests. The people taking the test have to exhibit sufficient knowledge of parasites and the chemicals to kill them; turf management; drainage; and all of the complex things that go into maintaining a golf course.

And, as mentioned, the test includes a section on the rules of golf. "These guys have to know the game," said Still. "The rules of golf are basic and important to superintendents."

A person has to be a member of the GCSAA and an active golf course superintendent (also known as a greens keeper) for five years before taking the certification test. Younger applicants are required to have a four-year degree, usually in agronomy.

The GCSAA will certify superintendents who don't have college degrees if they have been on the job for awhile. Non-degree applicants, however, have to take a series of seminars geared at bringing them up to date with current scientific techniques.

"We have a fulltime staff of six people who travel around the country giving seminars," said Still. "Our aim is to make it mean something to be certified. We feel that a certified superintendent will have a high level of knowledge and ability, and as such will be in high demand."

As the GCSAA's program further matures and more people complete the certification process, the everyday golfer will benefit because the overall condition of golf courses will improve.

New (and often less expensive) techniques make it easier to troubleshoot problems and remedies are more exact than in the past. For example, soil testing is now done on greens to determine if aeration is necessary. Only the greens that need help are aerated, where before, every green on the golf course was aerated the same, usually twice a year.

Environmentalists have lobbied to get certain chemicals banned or restricted, a process that Still says his organization generally supports. Proper knowledge of chemicals by the superintendents means more careful use and less adverse environmental impact.

By pooling its knowledge and requiring qualified personnel, the GCSAA is working toward mitigating the impact of limited budgets. That will, in turn, keep public green fees down and affordable for the average golfer.

(The preceding article is a reprint from the April 23, 1990 issue of The Valley Herald from Livermore, CA.)

Christmas Party Sponsors

Additional supporters for GCSANC annual Christmas party are:

Target Chemical Company

P.O. Box 1117
Corritos, CA 90701

Naiad Company

Jim Karrick
5627 Stoneridge Drive #316
Pleasanton, CA 94556

Scotts Pro-Turf

Chuck Dal Pozzo
415- 791-8985