

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE AREA RELATIVE TO THE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS' FUTURE?

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If I were to answer this question in a nutshell, I'd refer to that old cliché that we have some good news and some bad news. First, the good news: Today's superintendents are better qualified, more talented, more articulate, more efficient and producing better results than ever before in the history of golf. Now for the bad news: The clubs can't afford them.

My report is based upon a combination of my own observations over the past 48 years and a recent opinion survey of a number of representative superintendents within the area. The data revealed complete agreement as to the changing trends in our profession.

Let us divide this subject into 3 general categories:

1. The Superintendent. (A personal profile)
2. The position of the Superintendent.
3. The profession of the Superintendent.

So, what changes do we see in today's superintendents relative to our counterparts of 20, 30 and even 40 years ago? First, he is much younger. We have only a handful of active supers today age 60 or over. In fact, we have relatively few in their 40's and 50's. The predominance is in the 25 to 35 year age bracket. Next, he has a better technical and general education. The majority of the "NEW BREED" are graduates of our University Programs such as Penn. State, Michigan State, Purdue, Rutgers and others. In addition to these, our Community Colleges are getting more active in Turfgrass Management training.

In line with his better education, today's superintendent is demonstrating better business management practices and executive ability. More records are being kept, more attention is given to costs, budgeting and prudent purchasing.

We find today's superintendent doing a much better job of communication. Both with his fellow superintendents and with his club officials and the golfers.

The younger men in the field display more aggressiveness and more independence than their predecessors. These two factors tend to impress me with the feeling that there is somewhat less of the old "Labor of Love" that was so outstanding in the "Old Timers."

My observation of the profile of today's superintendent is that he is:

- Young
 - Well educated
 - Technically trained
 - Efficient
 - Executive oriented
 - Well dressed
 - Capable of the social graces
 - Articulate
 - Aggressive
 - Uses a good balance of family and job interests
 - Self-confident
 - Respected and appreciated by both his employers and employees
 - And he has a great love of the game of golf.
- There are many to be thanked for the progress

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tightening by the clubs for 1975 and possibly even longer.

Another concern relative to the superintendent's position centers around the observation that we are seeing an increase of clubhouse managers using the title of General Manager. However, very few are functioning as such. I believe superintendents ought to take a long, objective look at this situation and collectively take a position either pro or con. This is really another subject in itself. With this thought in mind, our educational committee has placed the subject on our program later this afternoon so that we may have the benefit of additional insight into the situation.

THE PROFESSION — WHAT IS HAPPENING?

All of the superintendents that I interviewed on this subject were most optimistic towards the future of the Golf Course Superintendent.

Presently, job opportunities continue in golf and particularly in the allied fields such as:

- Landscaping
- Commercial representatives
- Parks Management
- Industrial grounds management
- Real Estate complexes
- Corporate superintendents
- Golf Course architecture
- and Cemetery Maintenance.

As we look into the future of our profession, we have to be aware of the old factor of supply and demand. Are we training enough or too many new men for the field? The National Golf Foundation tells us that we are constructing about 200 new courses per year, at this time, which is a slowdown from the past 10 year average. Not all of these would require new superintendents as some are additions to existing operations.

In addition to new positions at new courses, we will have to replace those superintendents who leave the profession for one reason or another. Judging from the mortality rate of GCSAA members, a projection of the entire field would mean a loss of some 120 men annually. So, between the new jobs and the replacements, we would estimate a demand for about 350 new superintendents a year.

Incidentally, I looked at this from another viewpoint and came up with a relatively similar figure. Taking the 11,000 present courses and figuring that each superintendent will work at his job for 40 years, we would require 275 men a year to keep the jobs filled and perhaps 500 men if the number of clubs were to double in the next 40 years. So I believe 300 to 500 new men annually is a fair ballpark estimate.

Now to look and see how many men we are training. Dr. Daniel, of Purdue University, recently told the American Society of Agronomy that he surveyed 56 schools and came up with a total enrollment of approximately 1160 turfgrass students, with 445 graduates this past June. Some of these students will end up as commercial representatives, researchers, and teachers. Some others will leave the profession. Also, we will have additional men who will come into the field without formal university training. All-in-all, even with rather nebulous figures, it appears that we are currently training about 500 men annually for about 300 to 500 jobs.

It seems to me that we are just about keeping pace with supply and demand at this time. However,

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that has been made. The schools, the teachers, on-the-job training programs, researchers, industry, the golf clubs and the local and international superintendents associations.

"THE POSITION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT"

Again, WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE AREA? —

Let us look at the salary scale. We must admit that salaries are not bad, but they are barely keeping up with the rate of inflation. One superintendent contacted in the survey noted that many superintendents are not being paid as well as the truck drivers that deliver supplies to the club.

With an annual inflation rate of over 5% in recent years, our salary levels should have about doubled in the past 15 years, just to keep abreast and with no allowance for merit raises. I recall a salary survey we made here in the area about 1960. We found at the time that our range was approximately from \$10,000 to \$18,000, with a median of about \$12,000. Today, 15 years later, my sampling indicates that we are generally in the \$15,000 to \$30,000 bracket with a median of about \$20,000.

Quite a number of superintendents are now engaged in outside business ventures such as landscaping to supplement their incomes. Most all of these that I know of do so with the sanction and knowledge by their clubs and officials. Of Course, this was always a no-no with the old guard as they were fearful of being accused of a conflict of interest. Especially at times when their turfgrasses might be under undue stress.

In addition to the salary situation, the fringe benefits have not kept pace either. For instance, surprisingly few clubs have retirement programs. I believe we have to place a good deal of the blame here on ourselves, along with the club house managers and the golf professionals. We have not done a good enough job of selling the need for programs of retirement, medical benefits, hospitalization, life insurance, business expenses, transportation, etc. In my estimation, it is high time the GCSAA, PGA and the CMA organizations get together and offer package benefit programs for all personnel at golf clubs across the nation. In this vein, I was pleased to read GCSAA President Baskin's message in the recent issue of "The Superintendent" magazine wherein he appealed to club officials in regard to retirement programs.

Further on the subject of the superintendent's position. We must take note of the decisions being made by our clubs when they find it necessary to replace their superintendents. Generally speaking, clubs are bypassing consideration of experienced superintendents in favor of young relative newcomers to the profession. This indicates that club officials are attempting to save dollars. Personally, I'm pleased to see these young men being placed in these responsible positions for their own personal welfare, but at the same time, I'm concerned by the fact that some clubs are paying more attention to the price of a new superintendent, than they are towards his qualifications and his proven ability.

Perhaps the most significant factor affecting the superintendent's position today is the state of the economy which puts us in a business recession along with high inflation. Membership waiting lists are shrinking or wanting. Dues and costs are up, business expenses have been curtailed, the stock market is down and all of these factors hurt club activity and income. Undoubtedly we will see more belt

GCSAA and the school will need to keep up liaison so that graduating students will not be disappointed in job opportunities. Our scholarship program of GCSAA has been active in providing funds to encourage and assist students in Turfgrass Management. (approximately \$20,000.00 annually) Here too, prudent planning for the future is definitely needed.

To summarize, "What Is Happening In The Area"? I believe we will agree that we are doing quite well but we must keep alert to changing times and make adjustments accordingly. Additionally, we must not lose sight of the fact that industry and research has played a terrific role in upgrading our profession and maintenance standards for golfers. The sophistication of our modern tools, particularly automatic irrigation and mowers, has given us a whole new ballgame. Advancement in research is developing new horizons in the use of chemical controls for plant growth.

As to the "Outlook For The Future", I have a great deal of confidence in the new generation of superintendents. With continued dedication and cooperative effort by all of us, I'm sure the superintendents, the profession and the playing conditions will continue to show improvement in the years ahead.



Ted Sokolis, Superintendent Village Links.

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