

LOOK HOMEWARD FOR SUPERS

You are a committee of one, twelve or whatever. And you're looking for a golf course superintendent. So, you place an ad in the national golf and trade magazines and await the arrival of the most important ingredient in your country club operation. Right? Wrong!

"One of the worst things any group seeking a superintendent can do is go out of the area for that person," a veteran member of the profession said during the University of Massachusetts Turf Conference. "It has been proven a thousand times over that the best superintendent is the homegrown superintendent. He knows the lay of the land, so to speak, and more important - he knows the behavioral pattern of that land."

The midwest section of the country has underway a very successful apprentice program for would-be superintendents. Young students of the turf are placed on local courses where they learn the rudiments of the job and concentrate on the properties of the turf, the climate and other factors affecting life of the plant.

"From this warehouse of potential leaders, we get most of our new supers," Bob Williams of Highland Park, Illinois told. "It's just a matter of being practical. You wouldn't hire an Eskimo to be a lifeguard at a beach, would you? It's the same in golf course maintenance. You want the person who is familiar with the grounds to be groomed."

Of course, the analogy is not all that drastic. Certainly, there have been successful transfer superintendents who made the switch from one section of the country to another without incident. But, it stands to reason that a country club is taking some measure of risk with a job candidate whose experience has been concentrated in an area foreign to it in soil makeup, rainfall, temperature and general topography.

Williams tells of one midwestern superintendent - highly skilled and highly regarded by everyone in the region - who suddenly decided that he would try his hand on the West Coast. "The job out there was more for money and a good opportunity for the right man," he disclosed. "But the weather trends, growing conditions and types of plant diseases were altogether different from what this fellow had encountered back where he knew the land. It took him only two years or rather it took the new club that long to realize a mistake had been made. Just think of all the grief, frustration, disappointment and money which would have been saved and avoided had those people hired someone from their immediate area."

The country club employment committee would do well to heed this advice, but Williams also adds that the aspiring superintendent stands to gain from the same situation. There is a tendency for young students of the profession, assistants and others to reach for the moon when they're only equipped with a step ladder. They flock to the national magazines and become addicted to the want ads there. Sooner or later they make their move and the precarious state takes hold.

"Not only do the young ones look for greener pastures, some of the established supers think along the same lines," Williams remarked. "We all have our moments of anger with our present employers, times when we're ready to pitch it all and strike out for new courses and trails to conquer. But hasty decisions - influenced by emotional upheaval - can be killing to a superintendent's future. You know, we are the most secure of the three executive branches of the country club. There is less turnover among supers than either

the club professional or clubhouse manager. That proves, than, that not too many of us go off on a tantrum and escape to supposedly better jobs. The few, who do, often live to regret it."

The key to both job security and efficient course grooming has to be that familiarity with turf, weather, and the rest according to local conditions. And the man who knows the land, is going to be the best man to exploit that land into a well-groomed golf course. This is why super-seeks should look homeward for the best qualified candidate.

Gerry Finn

Credit - News Letter of New England

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Frank Tyger

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