

The Few, the Proud . . .

The analogy to the U.S. Marine Corps is an apt one. The Merit Club's special Open assistant, Chris Blake, and four interns—Steven Craig, Brian Stellwagen, Ben Grimme and Jeff Friedle—are experiencing all the rigors of turfgrass boot camp. Which is fine by them—all five young men are at The Merit Club this summer by choice.

“Preparing for a major Championship and the chance to work for Oscar Miles were my deciding factors in interning here,” notes Chris Blake, an Arizona native and recent graduate of Penn State. “That probably holds true for everybody.”

Adds Chris, “I’ve worked for a lot of young superintendents, and the longevity and established reputation Oscar has were a big draw.”

“Oscar explains the ‘what, why, where and when’ of championship golf course management from his vast previous experience,” says Jeff, who has one semester left at Joliet Junior College.

Beyond routine golf course maintenance practices, these interns are gaining exposure to the entire spectrum of activities that goes into readying for a major Championship.

“Preparation for the Open is so much over and above the usual,” explains Steve, who has one year still to complete in Penn State’s turfgrass management program. “The detail work is so important for the Open—we want the course to look good for the competitors, spectators, NBC-TV viewers and The Merit Club membership. I am really understanding the process of planning so that during the Open everything comes together.”

Brian, another PSU student, emphasizes that “participating throughout the whole planning and organizing” phase has been invaluable. Concurrs Steven, “The communication process here is excellent. Everyone’s working toward the same goal.”

All reflected on the unusual variety of tasks they’ve carried out, such as “preparing office trailer sites, spectator wood chip paths, landscaping a new practice tee, 90” tree spade transplanting,” says Jeff. And all praised The Merit Club’s membership as being most understanding and accommodating to tourney preparations.

the Interns!



The Merit Club's interns are (back, L to R) Chris Blake, Jeff Friedle, (front, L to R) Ben Grimme, Steven Craig and Brian Stellwagen, pictured here with Oscar Miles, CGCS (far right). Penn State intern Steve has made an unusual personal sacrifice to be in Gurnee this summer. His wife, back home in Pennsylvania, is expecting their first child July 4.

This multitasking group has been putting in 70- to 80-hour workweeks and will continue that arduous schedule until Championship week when, notes Jeff, “We’ll literally be living here.”

Agrees Chris, “We’ll be on call 24 hours a day that week.”

“During the tournament we have to be ready for anything, like heavy rainfall, which may damage sand bunkers, for example,” says Ben, who just completed his degree at Kishwaukee College.

When July 24 rolls around and the Open is golf history, ample work will remain. “The course is the members’ course, and we want to make sure when the Open is over, they still have a pleasurable course to use and be proud of,” Steve notes.

Given the tight job market for superintendents, all five interns believe that paying their dues this summer will give their resumes a substantial boost.

“The combination of Oscar Miles and the U.S. Women’s Open puts us so far ahead of the game,” Chris says—and the group agreed enthusiastically. 