



Making Green

I was raised by educators so I know, firsthand, the effort it takes to teach. Late nights grading papers, preparing lesson plans and patiently nurturing a pupil until the light goes on are just part of the job. I have a tremendous amount of respect for teachers because I find teaching hard to do. (I agreed to spend some time with my daughter's class last year at one of those "parents come to school to talk about their job" days, and in front of 30 seventh-graders I spoke for five minutes that seemed like five hours. I really don't like kids, especially teenagers, in large groups like that. They give me the willies.)

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I asked my mom, one day, how she found a sense of accomplishment in her work because a teacher can't stand back at the end of the day and see what he/she "built." She told me about a time in her kindergarten class when she had the kids painting with watercolors. One of the little boys stopped painting, and his head shot up, a look of pure wonder on his face.

"I made green!" he exclaimed. "It's my favorite color and I made it!" He was enchanted as only a six-year-old could be. He had experienced the magic of being able to create. His delight was contagious and so the other children became busy with mixing paint to see what new colors they could create.

Mom told me that it was those times, when the classroom was buzzing with creativity, that got her through when she found herself at loose ends.

Like many of her stories, this story has another meaning (she's a past master at multitasking). What she left for me to figure out for myself was that her little six-year-old artist was experiencing the joy of creation. The ability to create is an unmatched power that no one can take away from us. From growing a garden to knitting a sweater to building a birdhouse, we have the power to make something from nothing. Now, to be the catalyst that precipitates the joy of creation in someone else, like my mom did with her little green-lover, that is a special gift.

That's the case for mentoring.

Those of us who work on a golf course don't have to go far to enjoy the thrill of creation. Whether it is the act of creating a new tee or setting up the course for the day, we can see the fruits of our labor unfold before our eyes, but we can't do it alone. If we want to truly succeed in presenting an outstanding golf experience to our customers, we need to foster an environment that allows our staff to see that they can share in the joy of its creation.

The best boss I ever had once told me that it was his job to help me to do my job. He encouraged questions and made the time to listen attentively to my sometimes outrageous ideas, even letting me try a few out. There were mistakes, to be sure, but I loved working for the guy because he allowed me to share in the joy of his creation. He taught me that mentoring wasn't so much showing someone how to do something; that's only part of it. It's also allowing someone to learn the best way, by personal experience. Remember the last time you made a suggestion and were told to go for it? You "owned" that suggestion and you were going to make it work come hell or high water. Sharing ownership is a big part of mentoring.

The golf course superintendent profession has changed over the years.

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Surveys show that more and more of a superintendent's time is being captured by administrative tasks: personnel and human resource issues, governmental reporting and compliance issues, training and safety issues. These management needs siphon off our direct inputs into the presentation of our golf courses. Gone are the days when a superintendent could get lost "on the course" for days on end. It stands to reason that this evolving administrative diversity necessitates sharing the load. A capable assistant superintendent (or two) is fast becoming an absolute requirement for a well-managed golf maintenance operation.


The MAGCS, recognizing the growing importance of the team concept in golf course management, is proud to have an assistant superintendent on its Board of Directors. The position is Class C advisor, and like its Class E (commercial) counterpart, the person holding the appointment is responsible for representing his/her constituency among the MAGCS membership on the Board level. Last year our Class C advisor was Erwin McKone, assistant superintendent of River Forest Country Club under Joel Purpur. Erwin came on board and absolutely blew us away. Under his direction, a committee of Class C members set up and ran a tremendously successful scholarship outing at Orchard Valley, raising \$1,500 for our scholarship fund. In addition, the committee set up the first of what we expect to be an annual Class C education day: the Assistants Winter Workshop, which was held at the Midwest Golf House last month. Erwin was all set to continue his work on the Board this year and unfortunately (for us) got a job as a golf course superintendent. So we fired him—just kidding.

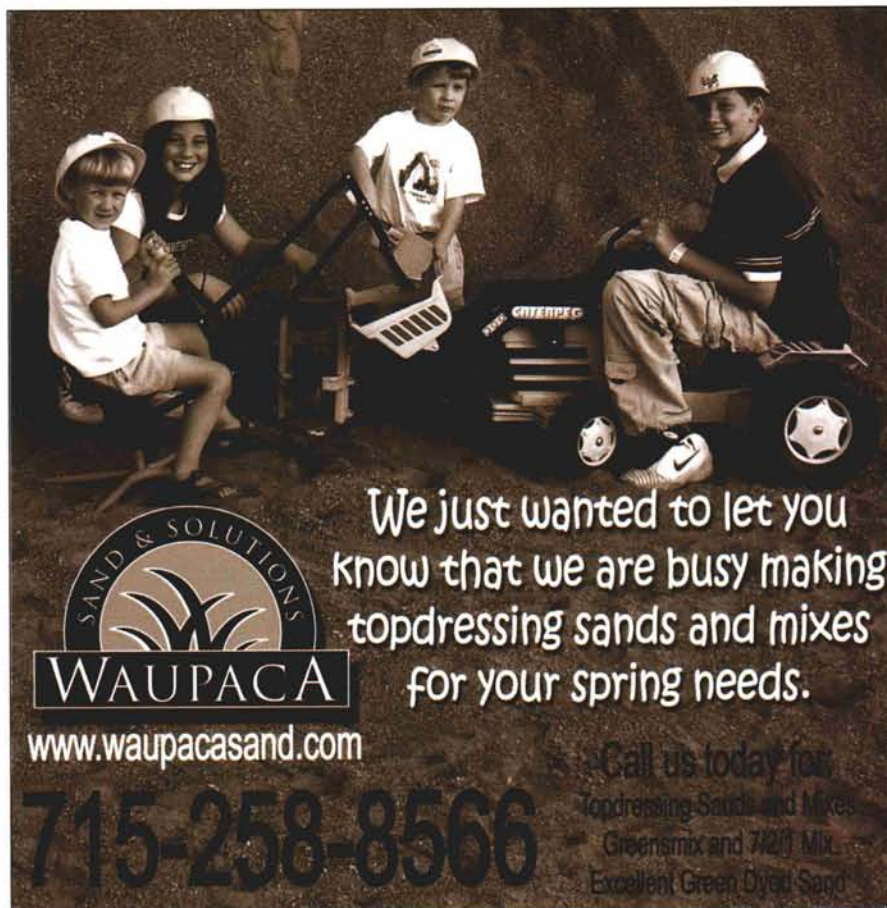
Anyway, we needed a new Class C advisor so I asked our executive director to put the question to the Class C Committee and Chad Kempf's name came up. Chad is the assistant superintendent at Hinsdale Golf Club under Bob Maibusch. I called Bob to see if he would agree to allow Chad to accept the appointment, and Bob didn't skip a beat in agreeing to give Chad the assignment, also telling me what an

excellent choice he would be. So Chad is our new Class C advisor and if form holds true, Bob will be looking for someone to replace Chad next year, because he'll be a superintendent somewhere—but that's really the point, isn't it?

Our current membership roster reveals a disturbing fact. Our Class C membership is roughly half of the total of Class A and B members. Either half of our Class A and B members don't have an assistant superintendent, or half of our superintendent members don't encourage or permit their assistants the opportunity to participate in this Association. If you happen to find yourself in the latter group, I urge you to consider sponsoring your assistant as a member. Assistant superintendents work hard putting in the time they need to get the experience necessary to compete for the next level, or it may be that your assistant is in a position he/she considers to be his/her life's work. Either way, the benefits of membership in the MAGCS far outweigh the dollars and cents it costs to

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join. It's easy to do, just download a membership application from our Web site, www.magcs.org, or call Luke Cella at 630-243-7900 and get the ball rolling. At some point, I promise, you will experience the special thrill of someone under your tutelage coming up to you and saying, "I made green!" 



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