

FEATURE II

Fred Behnke, CGCS, Mt. Prospect Golf Club

How Do You Say Thank You?

Day of the Club Championship:

- 4:45 AM Woke up, got dressed
- 5:00 AM Left house to go to work
- 5:01 AM Discovered flat tire on truck
- 5:05 AM Brewed coffee and began changing tire (in the dark)
- 5:35 AM Finished tire change and began drive to work (remember its dark and I'm old and slow)
- 6:10 AM Arrived at course cranky and late to discover:
 - Greensmowers out working
 - Cups being changed
 - Tee service in process
 - Bunkers being raked

Secondary tasks were posted following completion of morning chores and the rangers even had the drinking water out! They were now busy looking for lost balls in the usual spots.

So...I looped the course, moved a few ropes and stakes, and got a second cup of coffee. And it felt good - really good!

It was one of those mornings that are especially rare and gratifying - everything was happening just the way it was drawn up. This was a morning you wish you could bottle up for one of those "other" mornings - you know what I mean - when your number one guy finds you on number 13 and asks why the shop fire extinguisher isn't working .

Anyway...I got to thinking about the incalculable value of a trustworthy and competent crew. We all seek to provide our customers with the best product possible within the limitations of our budget, and while that budget may range from a couple of hundred thousand up to a million plus dollars, the one thing all golf course superintendents have in common is that the labor line item is, by far, the largest expense.

Let's face it, growing the grass may be among the smallest part of our operation. We need bodies and equipment to keep

the place in shape. Day in and day out we rely on our well-trained and reliable crews to make our plans become reality. Certainly there are bumps in the road, we are, after all, dealing with people and circumstances that can change in a heartbeat, but most of the time if we act fairly, communicate clearly and provide proper tools and training - our employees get the job done.

How do you say thanks for the effort?

I had the opportunity to canvas several superintendents about this subject. Again, I had to promise to keep the responses confidential in order to encourage input, but I did identify the type of facility and its general geographic location.

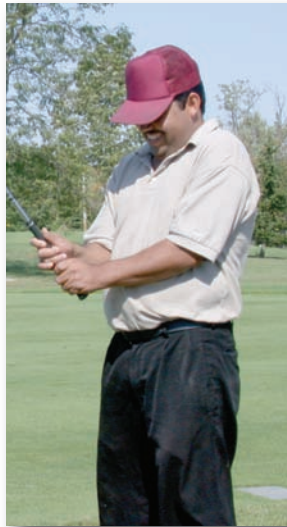
Virtually everybody I asked offered employees what may be described as the traditional perk package: limited facility use with specific benefits depending on the amenities available at the club, but the examples below are over and above "policy."

Muni - North West Suburbs:

"We have two picnics every season: 'end of summer' and 'Thanksgiving.' The staff works in the morning to prep the course and then we take the afternoon off (with pay) and have a cook-out. Some

food and beverages are donated, but the lion's share of the food is bought with money we get for recycling aluminum and other 'junk.' We invite family members and pro shop staff to each event and encourage bringing a dessert or appetizer to share. The Thanksgiving party is the kick-off of the holiday season and allows for the seasonal staff to participate before they're laid off for the winter. We try to publicize the party in advance and often get the summer kids home from college to attend. We have games and music, but it's mostly a chance to kick back and enjoy some excellent ethnic food."

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Getting the staff out to play a little golf can build morale and camaraderie. Use all those "free" hats and shirts from your suppliers as prizes.

Daily Fee – North Suburbs

"We have a couple of cook-outs every season. Sometimes we can get the food and beverages donated from the clubhouse guys, but mostly I just get some burgers and brats and fry them up. It's pretty informal, but the guys enjoy eating and drinking beer on the clock."

Private - North Shore

"Last year the club chartered a bus and took the staff to a Sox game. All departments were invited, and all expenses were paid. We also get lunch delivered from the kitchen, but that's more of a 'benefit' than a treat."

Muni - Western Suburbs:

"We try to do a couple of food extravaganzas for the crew during the season. We try for July and again in October/November before everyone leaves. It is usually a cookout the first time. Then I will take them to a restaurant of their choosing in October/ November after we play a little golf. By that time the crew has pretty much dwindled down so it ends up being between 8 and 10 people. I also pay them for those

days - it is the least I can do for all of their efforts. And I usually give them something from the uniform budget, shirts, hats, etc. I had winter jackets with their names made on them last season for those that stuck it out the longest."

Private - North West Suburbs:

"During the holiday season the club hosts a dinner-dance for the employees. The kitchen staff has to work it, but they take care of themselves later. Coat and tie, live music, ice sculpture, open bar. It's very nice to see everybody all cleaned up. We also do a more informal steak fry down at the shop in the summer."

Muni – Western Suburbs

"We all chip in every other week or so during the season and grill after work. We work straight through to finish early. It's voluntary, but everybody usually sticks around to eat, and then some of us go out and play golf. I grab some rental sets from the pro-shop and we play a scramble for nine holes."

To be fair, I have to include a couple of responses that are more "old school" and along the lines of... "My employees know they are appreciated when they get their checks on payday."



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Staff appreciation events are as individual as the golf courses we manage. There is no right or wrong way to say thanks for the effort. Suffice it to say that if you are squirreling aluminum can money to feed the crew, you are not alone. If you are pulling money out of your pocket to finance a lunch, you are not alone. If you allow the crew to kick back and enjoy an afternoon on the clock, you are not alone.

Call it team-building on your daily labor summary.
We are living in turbulent times.

By the time this article is published we will have completed a presidential election that will mean big changes for all of us. During the campaign both parties claimed to be standard bearers for the change that the American people demanded. So regardless of who won it looks like there's a new sheriff in Washington, D.C.

A financial crisis of epic proportion is percolating through the economy and the ripples (or tidal waves) will continue to be felt in the near future.

Some homeowners are fighting tooth and nail to hold on to their homes.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, North Korea, China and some other countries will get our attention between now and the holidays.

Al Qaida and the Taliban continue making noise.

Jobs are scarce.

Health care is in crisis.

People are scared, and it seems like things are spinning out of control.

This year's Conference and Show in New Orleans is giving us an opportunity to make something good happen. The GCSAA and its partnering associations are teaming up with Habitat for Humanity to host a couple of work days before the trade show opens to help build homes in some of New Orleans' most devastated areas.

This is a first-ever volunteer project sponsored by our industry's biggest gathering of the year. Wouldn't it be nice to absolutely overwhelm the host city with support?

Please strongly consider volunteering for one of the two work days scheduled (Tues. Feb 3 and/or Wed. Feb 4). More information can be found in your conference brochure on page four or at www.golfindustryshow.com.

There is a twenty-five dollar registration fee that the MAGCS has graciously agreed to reimburse any member who participates.

Thank you. **-OC**



Cookouts and cold beer are still by far the most popular method of a quick thank you to your staff.

2009 Golf Industry Show Volunteer Habitat for Humanity Project

If you would like to give something back to the people of New Orleans, here's your chance to make a big difference. The partnering associations of the Golf Industry Show are teaming up with Habitat for Humanity to host a series of special work days before the trade show opens to help build homes in some of New Orleans' most devastated areas. No experience is necessary, and all the equipment and supplies are provided. Your time and energy can help make the dreams come true for several families in a big way.

The work days will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 3, and Wednesday, Feb. 4, from 7:45 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

All volunteers will be placed in teams of 15 to work on homes within a particular area. The Golf Industry Show will provide transportation from the New Orleans Morial Convention Center, lunch at the work sites, and plenty of outdoor necessities such as water and sunscreen. Project t-shirts will be provided to show your team spirit and build camaraderie with your peers.

If you'd like to participate in this first-ever volunteer project, you can sign up through any of the education conferences presented by GCSAA, NGCOA or CMAA. Participation requires a \$25 registration fee. (MAGCS will reimburse you, thanks to Fred).

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