

FEATURE I

Ken Shepherd, *Retired Golf Course Superintendent*



Grass Roots Planning Encouragement for the Next Generation

Before I decided to semi-retire from the Lockport Township Park District on June 30, 2011, I began to think about what I wanted the retirement phase of my life to look like. After some thought, I asked myself why would I want retirement to be any different from the way I lived before I retired. I also realized that whenever I have been successful, it was always because I had set goals and then implemented plans to reach those goals. As a result, I've spent the last couple of years on goals and plans for what I would do after retirement. As rewarding as it has been to be a turfgrass manager for over thirty years, I know that my new goal -- to mentor and counsel the younger generation -- will be just as important, rewarding, and challenging as my career in turfgrass has been.

To be a leader and mentor for the next generation has always been a passion for me. My father was the first person to teach me the foundational truth of hard work. I will always remember him saying, "If you're not going to do it right, then don't do it at all." As I moved into my career in turf, I remember hearing great stories about superintendents who took the time to mentor the next generation of golf course greens keepers. I hope those men who chose to mentor the next generation realized what an impact they made by choosing to stand beside younger men and share their time and knowledge with them. Mentoring and teaching has always been a backbone of the golf course industry. As much as the younger generations of the past have benefited from good leadership, the present generation has suffered from a lack of it.

I say this from my own experience as a mentor to young men from fatherless homes. The most recent statistics that I have show that as many as thirty-nine percent of American children live in homes without a father present, while eighty percent of inner city children have no father in their home. There is a deep need for leadership in our country and in our homes.

During the last ten years of my career I made a concerted effort to spend time with the young people working for us during the summer. I asked them about goals, plans, and their future careers. From the responses I received, I became really concerned. I couldn't understand how juniors or seniors in college could be so close to graduation and tell me that they still didn't know what they wanted to do! Instead of being frustrated with their responses, it was time to help them out.

One of the first things I did was to do a presentation called, "Tools to Build a Career." In it, I explained that having a degree is very important and will help open many doors. However, if a college degree is the only tool you have in your

tool box, it may not be enough to get a job in this economy. Several tools could help set you apart from other applicants. Tools that can be remembered with the acronyms CAD and WEB. CAD stands for Character, Attitude, and Drive. WEB stands for Work Ethic, Entitlement (nothing is deserved until it is earned), and Below (there is no job that is below you). If the young would add these tools to their boxes, prospective employers would be a lot more excited about hiring them. Guiding young adults in developing skills and making them able to fill their tool boxes with a wide array of tools is where leadership proves invaluable.

Grass Roots Planning is a free service aimed at seeing the next generation successful in their lives and in their careers. It's a service that's available to anyone. I've already made presentations to junior high level through college age students. In April, I will be addressing the Lockport Rotary Club. Available presentations include: Communication, Career Planning, Decision Making, and Character/Leadership. Information packets are also available, which include a business card, resume, references, and sample presentations. After all this preparation and work, I've been asked whether I will be frustrated if people don't listen or respond. My reply is, no. The plans for me to do this were set long ago when the Lord blessed me with a career that would afford me the opportunity to return the blessings I have received.

Let me close this article on planning by sharing with you the bible verse that we use as a theme in our summer camp for fatherless young men. The verse that Team Focus shares with the young men is Jeremiah 29:11, "'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" **-OC**