

# ADVISORY COMMITTEE GUIDES LAKE CITY GOLF COURSE OPERATIONS PROGRAM

The golf course operations program at Lake City Community College may be a small program at a small school in a small city, but its advisory committee members are scattered throughout Florida and Georgia, and its graduates find positions all over the United States. A small program with a large and interested following, one might say.

Jerry Cheesman, program director, may have trouble assembling his committee for twice-yearly meetings, but the results are worth it. Cheesman says the committee's help in forecasting trends in the field is invaluable. "I'm isolated from this, and my advisory committee keeps me informed," he says. Besides keeping tabs on the field, the committee has input into course material, finds specialists to conduct seminars, and a few of the members even teach classes themselves. The committee members' areas of expertise range from landscape architecture, pest control, and agronomy, to selling turfgrass, running a nursery, and naturally, managing a golf course. This broad base gives the committee a "composite view," claims Cheesman.

By listening carefully to committee recommendations and maintaining communication with graduates of the program, most of whom enter what is generally regarded as a cliquish field, Cheesman can boast that in the last 11 years he hasn't had one student go without a job. "The pros are aware we exist," explains Cheesman. "They utilize our graduates in several lines of work." Working closely with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America helps Cheesman to keep abreast of job openings. In addition, alumni frequently join the organization after establishing themselves, so a constant recycling process occurs. Cheesman has found that alumni are extremely helpful in finding internships for students.

Exactly what a golf course superintendent does on a daily basis Cheesman hesitates to define. He will volunteer, however, that it's a seven-day-a-week job that normally begins at 6:30 a.m. He points out that "when an irrigation line ruptures at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, it's the superintendent who has to go fix it." Typical daily duties include getting the crew to mow the greens, changing cups and tees, manicuring the greens, looking for damage and signs of vandalism, checking the irrigation system, renovating sandtraps, and many others. Cheesman is quick to warn that a person earns the \$12,000 s(he) makes the first year in the business.

Since turfgrass is the most intensively maintained agricultural crop, a golf course superintendent is responsible for a multimillion-dollar operation. An 18-hole course can mean the responsibility of \$250,000 worth of equipment, a crew that requires close supervision, and a budget of up to \$500,000. After five years, many superintendents make over \$30,000 per year.

Cheesman says it takes a certain sort of person to succeed in this work: "Someone who can get greasy fixing a clutch on a tractor at 1:30 p.m. and four hours later have a three-piece suit on and be ready to present a budget to a group of doctors and lawyers."

To prepare students for the multifaceted job, Lake City offers a three-year program. It includes instruction in a variety of areas: golf course mechanics, preventive maintenance, diesel mechanics, plant growth, grasses for golf and landscape, agricultural chemistry, landscape art, soils and fertilizers, accounting, materials calculation, management, golf course organization and administration, and a host of others. Highlights of the program are fall and spring tours of different types of golf courses, which allow students to learn firsthand from superintendents all that is involved in the occupation, and on-the-job training during a summer internship. In Cheesman's opinion, these experiences "make the program real."

Each year, 40 applicants are accepted in the program, although between 8 and 10 students leave after the first year. Usually, 25 students out of the original class complete the entire program. Two other programs are conducted alongside of golf course operations: golf course equipment mechanics and landscape design and sales. After the first year in golf course operations, a student can obtain a certificate in golf course equipment mechanics. This certificate allows the student to become a mechanic without further education. "This is the hottest market of all," says Cheesman, who claims that the need for trained mechanics in the area is great.

Landscape design and sales, a two-year program, provides instruction for 25 students per year. The program does not compete with the University of Florida's program in landscape architecture, a more conceptual program emphasizing the design of cities and towns. In fact advisory committee members for the Lake City program, many of whom are graduates of Florida's program cited the need for a program that emphasized smaller-scale design, such as the design of hospital and school landscapes. So the program was begun. A graduate of the landscape design and sales program can expect to earn \$10,000. Enrollment in the program is 50 percent female.

Female enrollment in the golf course operations program is much lower — one female student this year. Females are encouraged to apply, however. Cheesman adds that women are "more meticulous than men, and better at manicuring. All employers are extremely pleased with the women they've hired. In this field, women are not at a disadvantage."

Cheesman mentioned that one prestigious golf course in Pinellas County has a crew of 70 percent women, and if

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# FIRMS TOLD WHAT TO DO WHEN UNION KNOCKS

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Unions are coveting many South Florida industries' workforces, aided by a management attitude of "it can't happen to me."

That's the warning sounded by Dr. David J. Schwartz, chairman of the South Florida Manufacturers Association's Labor Relations Subcommittee, and Stephen Cabot, senior partner in a law firm that specializes in labor relations.

Schwartz and Cabot conducted a seminar recently for the SFMA on "What To Do When The Union Knocks." But, the two warn the industry that waits for the union to knock may have already waited too long.

"Our whole point is to make manufacturers aware of what they can do, legally and ethically to deal with labor-relations problems before the union knocks on the door," said Schwartz, president of The Management Consortium, a Fort Lauderdale consulting firm. Schwartz is quick to add that he's not anti-labor. He began his career as a union organizer.

"We can best illustrate the problem by taking the old real estate adage on the three words that make a successful builder: location, location, location," said Cabot, author of the book *Labor Management Relations Act Manual: A Guide to Effective Labor Relations*.

"Those three words for labor relations are: communication, communication, communication."

Schwartz and Cabot are in the business of representing the management side of labor relations, explaining how to avoid union and labor problems by improving management's relationship with employees.

South Florida is ripe for union organization, they say, because the unions are already strong in the populated Northeast, Midwest and West Coast industrial areas of the U.S. Florida's "right to work" law has lulled many employers into a false sense of security and the state's smaller companies are particularly ripe for unionization.

"If I were still a union organizer, I'd be in my car right now blanketing this area with union material," said Schwartz.

The disadvantages of a union shop from management perspective are many, including loss of control of the business, the inability of being able to deal with employees on a one-to-one basis, and declining productivity and efficiency, the speakers said.

What should the employer do if he's committed to non-union status?

"The best line of defense is getting their act together now, organize what they can do and say, before it's too late," said Schwartz. "The biggest mistake management makes is that they don't listen. The problem is that most companies, their managers, don't know how to communicate."

Most employers, it seems, are unaware of worker unrest due to such factors as working conditions, compensation, benefits or even job security. And management is too often surprised that the first evidence of unrest is presentation of a demand to hold a union election.

"Management generally underestimates, takes employees for granted," said Cabot. "You can't talk above the level of the employee, because he won't understand what you're saying and he'll resent it. You can't talk below them either. You have to talk at them, to them and through them."

The open-door policy contributes to less communication in many instances, Cabot added. The employer who says his door is always open to hear complaints assumes everything is okay when he doesn't hear complaints. But a low-level worker isn't going into the boss's office to detail what bugs him.

"Instead of being satisfied that it hears no grievances, the management should find a way to encourage grievances," added Cabot. "The feeling for job security, and not being able to get it, is most commonly what makes the employee seek an outside organization for help."

Schwartz agrees. "Being willing to deal with employees is the key. The employees in most industries seek dependence. If he can get that dependence from his employer, then what does he need from a union to get dependence for him?"

The key, Cabot concluded, "is understanding yourself, understanding your employees and understanding who the adversary is."

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there were more women available, the owner would gladly hire more.

It would seem that such a program would have few if any problems. Not so, says Cheesman. He is highly concerned with reductions in vocational funding that may result in the elimination of small, high-cost programs, or worse, the expansion of the program without necessary staff and equipment. His question is one voiced by many: How do we maintain a high level of quality in an economic crunch? It's a question that haunts many programs where small is beautiful.