

Putting more "beef" in CGCS title:

Certification for Superintendents: Ego Trip or Educational Milestone?

Members of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America have been kicking certification around since 1971 when the Association began the voluntary testing program. The question appears to be coming to a head.

Most members contacted by Weeds Trees & Turf are glad that it is.

Several years ago the GCSAA, reacting to criticism of its certification procedures began an ambitious program (apologies to Wendy's) to put more "beef" into the designation "CGCS" (Certified Golf Course Superintendent). Much of the criticism aimed at certification has been directed at its most basic purpose — education. A sizable number of superintendents do not feel the present certification process appreciably advances the primary goal of the GCSAA which is after all, the continued education of its members in the profession.

"In the past certification just hasn't been any big deal," a veteran superintendent at an Illinois course notes. "I think it has been kind of an ego thing because at the average 18-hole course it just isn't going to make any difference to the green's chairman right now."

Another in Pennsylvania adds that the ultimate test of a superintendent's value is his performance on the job. "Let others judge you on the merits of your performance. It can be readily seen in your course rather than a title."

REAL VALUE

Other superintendents have wondered aloud about the value of the CGCS designation. "The certification is really just a label," another says. "The most important thing of this whole process is starting young superintendents off in the right direction, and, I don't want to sound too critical, but certification as it has been, just isn't accomplishing that."

Many GCSAA members obviously feel likewise, that the six-hour open book test presently required for certification isn't a fair test of a superintendent's ability, nor does it appreciably advance education in the profession.

While a significant number of GCSAA members (about 517 at this writing) feel it worthwhile to carry the CGCS designation, a large number of superintendents do not. The GCSAA currently numbers about 5,800 members, maybe 3,000 of them Class A members and eligible for certification.

"Some people feel that if we have 20 or 25 percent of our eligible members certified that that number isn't so good," Donald Hearn, chairman of the GCSAA Education Committee, says. "I'm not so certain that 20 is the right number or 70 percent. The only thing I'm fairly certain is that it shouldn't be 100 percent."

Also fairly certain, becoming certified in the near future is going to be more difficult, hopefully, more valuable.

After several years of study the GCSAA Certification Committee came up with a long range renovation of the certification process. In a nutshell, it calls for the implementation of closed-book examinations in 1988, and the additional requirements of one-year of college or the completion of an equivalent GCSAA continuing education program by 1989, and a minimum of a two-year associate's level degree or completion of the GCSAA continuing education program by 1994. There are other provisions, including the requirement of a 12 month internship under a qualified CGCS member. This could become mandatory for certification beginning in 1997.

Those GCSAA members who are certified prior to the changes will be exempt from the new requirements. The committee purposely set changes far enough into the future to allow all present superintendents time to become certified prior to the changes.

PLAN APPROVED

For the most part, efforts of the GCSAA Certification Committee are being applauded by association members.

"I think what the committee is doing is worthwhile and I think it will add to the profession if they upgrade the standards," Bob Senseman, the 33 year old superintendent of Ripling River Resort, Welches, Or, says "I think a lot of people really haven't bothered with it because they didn't think it was valuable, but the nature of being a superintendent is changing and more and more guys are coming into this profession with bachelors and masters degrees."

Bill Peel at Lake Charles, La, holds a degree in agronomy from Texas A&M and becoming certified is part of his career plans. "It certainly could enhance a superintendent's prestige with their club," he feels.

"Certification may be the most important program GCSAA has to offer the membership," says Michael T.

(continued on page 44)

(continued from page 42)

Saffel in Sheridan, Wy. "The plan of the certification committee has my general support. They are aware of the needs of the present membership and have addressed our future needs. Educational requirements, exemption, performance verification and internship are important if we are to advance our profession."

Dave Duren at Palmetto Dunes Resort, Hilton Head Island, SC, feels efforts to upgrade certification "should have been started a long time ago."

I think what they're doing is right and I think it's going to weigh heavily in hiring decisions in the future.

Prospective employers will know that you've put in a lot of study and work to be certified," he adds.

But serious work remains to be done with the GCSAA certification renovation. Superintendents should let GCSAA management or the certification committee know their ideas.

OPEN BOOK

Jon Scott of the Grand Traverse Resort Village in Michigan feels the GCSAA committee is on the right track but should study the 1988 closed-book requirement more thoroughly. "There isn't a superintendent alive that shouldn't be able to calibrate a spray rig or fertilizer spreader without looking in a book," he notes. "You've got to know how to do these things. But sections like the GCSAA history and by-laws, maybe that should be open book." Scott also notes the requirement calling for an oncourse inspection by a fellow superintendent (this requirement went into effect late in 1984) might become "a real touchy issue." although he doesn't see a better way to measure a superintendent's performance.

"It is difficult to perform an evaluation of another superintendent's work without some prejudice, usually positive. However, if CGCS is to be a realistic measure of one's performance and potential as a golf course superintendent, then past and present job quality must be recognized as a weighing factor," Scott says.

Education Committee Chairman Hearn is aware the new

certification program is going to need some tinkering with and he insists his committee is open to suggestions.

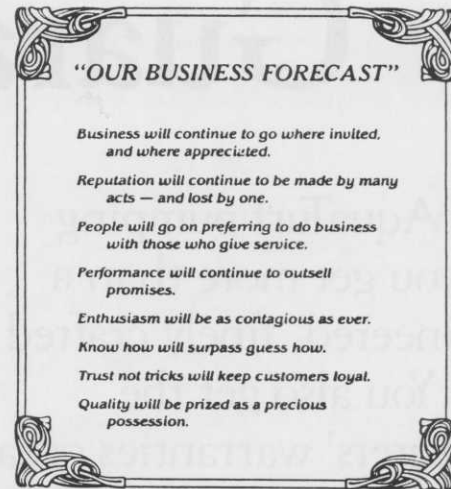
"We've gone ahead with what we've felt comfortable with but we're willing to make changes," he says. "We were involved with four or five drafts before we came up with the final draft and we've already had changes in the final draft. My suspicion is that there will be some more changes."

Even so Hearn doesn't expect the issue of certification to be enthusiastically embraced by all superintendents.

"No matter what kind of a program we set up there is going to be some people who feel like they don't need it and there will be some people who don't," he says. "But I don't think we should exclude the others who want certification."

In a related footnote, a GCSAA sponsored survey shows that a majority of superintendents prefer the title golf course manager to golf course superintendent. One thing is clear — superintendents are very aware of an increasing need to be viewed as the professionals they are — from the agronomic methods they use to the titles they use. ■

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