

# The Gator Growls

By Sandra P. Carmouche



## Creating Professionalism

Greenskeeper, golf course superintendent, golf course operations professional; what difference does it make provided that superintendents are making a living doing something they like?

On the surface, professionalism is nothing more than an image presented by superintendents, right? And since most superintendents enjoy being viewed in a positive light, indeed their jobs depend on it, this objective has been accomplished.

But wait a minute. Image is a two way street. Along with its presentation, it is also the golfing public's perception of the superintendent's credibility and competence.

What about the clown who buys unnecessarily expensive or inferior products in order to receive a kickback? Sure, eventually he'll be fired, but his replacement will be looked upon with mistrust and disfavor and it will be difficult to overcome the impression.

How about the creep who contacts your Greens Committee Chairman and tells him he can do a better job than you at a lower cost. Now you have to double-justify your position on everything, which erodes your working environment.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a code of ethics which provides for the censuring of unethical individuals? Or how about a list of approved companies and businesses whose products or services meet reliable requirements.

Of course, along with the professional image comes recognition. Because superintendents possess expert knowledge in the field of turf grass management, they deserve special recognition. And the field is relatively exclusive, in that the services and expertise provided to a golf club by the superintendent cannot be provided by just anyone.

The person who maintains a golf course must have an extensive knowledge of grasses, pests, weeds disease, fungi, chemicals, and fertilizers. He must possess an in-depth mechanical ability as it pertains to the type of equipment used on golf courses and be an expert on irrigation. The superintendent must also know how to manage and direct personnel and be able to prepare financial statements while dealing with budgetary demands.

Then there are the little extras, like an understanding of

the basics of engineering when drainage problems occur. Or the ability to design a new green so the club won't have to hire an architect. And since landscape plays an important role at golf clubs, the superintendent must have some knowledge of horticulture.

And don't forget pools, tennis courts, and waste treatment facilities which, in many instances, are assigned to the superintendent for maintenance.

The specialized knowledge that the superintendent must possess is not something which occurs through osmosis. Nor is it something which can be learned by trial and error. What was learned by just working on a golf course 30 years ago is no longer possible. Today it requires an institutionalized education in golf course operations.

With the research and technological advances being made in the turf industry, education is a continuing process. New diseases and infestations develop that require solutions and funding for researching these solutions is provided by superintendent associations from around the country. New treatments and applications are sought in order to contain the leaping costs of chemicals and fertilizers. Grasses that resist disease and infestation are being researched.

How many golfers realize the importance of these technical innovations? Are they aware that without these advances the future for golf would be dismal? The cost of maintaining a course in good condition would be prohibitive.

Likewise, without the market, superintendents would be out of a job.

There are a variety of factors that compose professional status and the production of new knowledge and its application is only one of the factors.

Before there can be a profession, there must be a market for its services or products.

Consider the medical profession, which is probably the ultimate in professional society. Until the turn of the century, doctors were no more effective at curing illness than witch doctors or folk medicine. But the American Medical Association, which was founded in 1847, had been promoting scientific investigation into the causes of and solutions to illness.

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Through scientific advances, the A.M.A. was able to establish itself as the superior occupation in the health-care field. And by educating the public as to the superior services provided by professional members of the A.M.A., it created a demand for their expertise.

Public confidence in the medical profession was instilled through competence, adherence to a code of ethics, and an institutional education that taught standardized practices, which were constantly being improved.

The medical profession then received governmental support because of the importance of public health. But since government is not an expert in the medical field, the medical profession is self-regulating.

Now compare the medical doctor to the golf course superintendent. Not too long ago, superintendents weren't considered to be much more than farmers. But since its inception in 1926, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has been concerned with the professional image of superintendents.

The GCSAA has promoted research and provided funding for improvements in the turf industry. The development of successful, cost-efficient techniques has created a demand for superintendents who are members of the organization.

The association has played a major role in the standardization of cultural practices and has set up a program for certification which recognizes occupational superiority. It has campaigned for public awareness of the superintendent and his work while providing him with timely information that affects turf management.

Since golf is one of the few sports that can be enjoyed by any age group, the market for superintendents is expanding at a healthy rate. At the same time, regulations are being placed on the turf industry by government for health-safety and environmental purposes.

Who will be held financially liable if these regulations are not adhered to?

The club is the correct answer.

So the golf club would be best served by an educated, professional superintendent who knows all there is to know about golf course operations, and then some. Not only does it decrease the risk of liability, it costs less and it's prestigious for the club.

And for superintendents, the benefits of professional status are enormous. Pay scales are increased, pension plans are developed, recognition, distinction and job satisfaction are enhanced.

The creation of professional status is a complicated task that involves many different aspects of a specialized occupation. Golf course superintendents have fulfilled the requirements or professional status and should be acknowledged as such.

Yet there are many superintendents who do not keep abreast of the latest technological advances and governmental regulations. They are not members of, nor do they support, any local, state, or national organizations. Image is not important to them and titles are insignificant.

In the future, it is doubtful that there will be a place in the golf course market for these superintendents.

For in the future, the superintendent who does not see himself as a professional will most likely be replaced with a superintendent who does. ■



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