



# Lake City Community College's Department of Golf Course and Landscape Operations: Investment in Excellence

by BOB HANVIK

*Complex where Glo Classes are taught.*

**O**FF of Highway 90, right next to Lake City's airport, is a seemingly quiet, winding country road. From the highway, all you see is a sign announcing the existence of Lake City Community College ... somewhere down the road. As you drive down "College Road," though, you begin to realize the size and scope of the community college that soon comes into view.

Lake City Community College (LCCC) currently serves the needs of about 2,600 students, and is one of only two Florida community colleges that provides on-campus residence facilities. The college comprises 23 campus buildings, and its district includes 2,682 square miles—twice the size of Rhode Island—although many students come from outside the college's mandated district.

LCCC comes from humble beginnings, however. It was founded in 1947 as the Columbia Forestry School. At that time, the college's classrooms and labs were housed in structures that remained from a World War II air base (some of those buildings are still used today). Fifteen years later, the state of Florida created Lake City Junior College on the site of the old forestry school, with approximately 400 students enrolled. The school's name was changed to its current form in 1970.

LCCC provides programs in the liberal arts and sciences, as well as vocational programs such as business administration, computer programming, cosmetology, criminal justice, electronic technology, forest engineering technology and allied health.

One of the college's proudest and most successful departments, though, is its department golf course and landscape operations.

## **School of Golf Course Operations**

The School of Golf Course Operations at LCCC is the only program in the nation offering a three-year, 128-semester-hour curriculum. The accredited program is designed to develop total golf course operations professionals. Program graduates are qualified to enter their careers as assistant superintendents, with many opportunities to advance to superintendent, golf course construction supervisors or specialists in related areas of turf management such as sod production and athletic field management.

The program is divided into two phases. Phase I includes a year of study of golf course mechanics, with classes that were developed in response to industry needs and demands. Other classes included in Phase I are math, reading, communications and typing (these classes are known as the Mechanic Core Curriculum). After completing these first two semesters, students are eligible for the first of two summers of paid, on-the-job training (OJT) at a selected golf course within a 500-mile radius of the college. When they've finished Phase I, including their first OJT, students receive a certificate qualifying them as turf equipment service technicians (or golf course mechanics), a fast-growing field within golf course operations.

Phase II of the program consists of

coursework in management, plant materials, landscape design, soils and fertilizers, pest control, turfgrass management systems and the second summer OJT. Upon successful completion of Phase II, the student receives an Associate of Science degree in Golf Course Operations.

## **School of Landscape Operations**

Landscape Operations graduates are qualified for positions such as designers, salespeople, installation and maintenance foremen and interiorscape specialists. Graduates may also work in nurseries, lawn and garden centers, pest control services and other related areas of landscaping and ornamental horticulture. For experienced graduates, advancement opportunities in landscape contracting are possible.

Course emphasis is placed on exterior design, installation and maintenance; interiorscape concepts are also discussed. The curriculum includes courses in plant materials; soils and fertilizers; pest control; irrigation and drainage; landscape construction; and landscape design, installation and maintenance. Upon successful completion of the two-year program, the student receives an Associated of Science degree in Landscape Operations.

## **The Department's Success**

Each year, the number of available positions in the fields of golf course and landscape operations exceeds the number of graduates from LCCC's department of golf course and landscape operations. In addition, Lake City graduates are among

*Continued on p. 62*



### Lake City Scholarship Winners:

(Left to Right)

Iris Davis, Mike Stemm, Jeff Elwood, Eric Krahn, Frank Yaun, Al Smith, Dr. Muriel Kay Heimer (Pres., LCCC), Paul Meredith, Jennifer Moore, Dan Adams, Roy Clark, Chris Claus, Steve Fairtrace, Wade Hartsfield

Continued from p. 60

the most sought-after in the industry.

There are several reasons for this, according to John Piersol, chairman of the department, but a primary reason is the college's emphasis on the practical aspects of the industry. "We teach our students the importance of the day-to-day tasks of industry professionals," said Piersol, "from maintaining and repairing equipment to handling the paperwork that will eventually become part of the graduates' jobs."

Another important reason for the department's success, according to Piersol, is its close ties to industry members. "Without our strong relationships with the companies like Toro, Jacobsen and Nor-Am Chemicals, we wouldn't be able to have the good, up-to-date supplies that really help prepare our students," he said. "We wouldn't be able to afford them."

The department's success manifests itself in other ways as well. One of the most important gauges of the department's success is the quality of students who enter it. Many of them enter after having received undergraduate or even graduate degrees, and most of the students have some experience in the field before entering Lake City.

For example, Mike Stemm, a golf course operations student, holds a bachelor of science degree in agronomy from Colorado State University. Just prior to entering LCCC, he was the manager of a Pillsbury dried-bean plant in Nebraska. "I didn't feel fulfilled," said Stemm, 36, "and I decided that I needed a change." So, he decided to go back to college for his mas-

ter's degree in agronomy. When he visited the University of Florida, however, the head of the agronomy department advised Stemm to get a degree in golf course operations instead of his master's degree. "At first, I was disappointed at this supposed step back," said Stemm, "but now I realize that I owe that professor a lot. Without him, I wouldn't have attended Lake City, and I wouldn't have learned the professional attitude and the good, practical bank of information necessary to succeed in the industry. I also wouldn't have gotten the great job I've got lined up for after graduation."

#### An Awards Ceremony

Stemm's is only one of 150 stories in the department of golf course and landscape operations, however. There are many students who come to Lake City from far-flung destinations such as Finland, England, Canada and Bermuda because of the department's reputation. There's the woman with the master's degree in business administration who decided to change careers and go back to school. There's the dentist who quit his practice of seven years to work on the grounds crew of a golf course so he could get the experience he needed before enrolling in LCCC's department of golf course and landscape operations. But at an awards banquet held at Lake City Country Club in April, it was easy to see that each of the students appreciated the education they received in their fields from LCCC. It was more like a football awards ceremony than anything. Cheers and standing ovations followed each scholarship awarded and each instructor introduced.

Chairman John Piersol opened the ceremony by listing the amount of scholarship money used within the department. It totaled over \$30,000 from many sources, and another \$5,000 went begging in the area of service technicians alone because of the small number of students entering this field. Dr. Muriel Kay Heimer, president of LCCC, also attended the ceremony. She said that the department of golf course and landscape operations was a leader on campus because of its strong ties to industry and because of its wide scope, with students coming from every state in the union.

Scholarship winners were: Chris Claus (*landscape operations*) and Mike Stemm (*golf course operations*), \$500 each from The Toro Company, Minneapolis; Steve Fairtrace (*landscape*) and Paul Meredith (*golf course*) \$500 each from QAE Services Inc., Tampa, FL.; Roy Clark (*landscape*) and Al Smith (*golf course*), \$250 each from Nor-Am Chemicals, Wilmington, Del.; Wade Hartsfield and Frank Yaun (*both in landscape*) \$200 each from Post Landscape, a division of Post Properties, Atlanta; Iris Davis (*landscape*) \$300 from Glen Saint Mary Nursery for outstanding achievement in 1988, Glen Saint Mary, Fla.; Dan Adams and Jennifer Moore (*both in landscape*) from LCCC Landscaping Club, Lake City, Fla.; Debbie Bergeron (*landscape*), \$500 from the Northeast Chapter of the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association; and Eric Krahn (*turf equipment service technology*), \$800 from Stovall and Co., Inc., Atlanta.

Jeff Elwood received the prestigious Robert Lassett Memorial Award for the student who most exemplifies the qualities of Robert Lassett, an LCCC student who was killed while still attending the college. Elwood donated the \$500 scholarship to the Golf Course and Landscape Operations Endowment Fund, which is currently being built up to support programs that the department's regular budget cannot allow for, including scholarships, equipment, materials and others.

Finally, the Ed Combest Scholarship for Excellence in Service Technology was announced. Named for the current driving force behind the service technology program at LCCC, it is to go to the service technology student who most exemplifies Combest's ideals of professionalism and performance. ■