

A Brief History of the Turf Equipment Program at Lake City Community College

By John R. Piersol

The Associate in Science degree Golf Course Operations and Landscape Technology programs started on the campus of Lake City Community College in 1967. By the early 1970s, there was concern among leaders in the golf industry about the increasing sophistication of golf course equipment and the lack of specifically trained golf course mechanics.

Dr. Gene Nutter, the first director of the Golf Course Operations and Landscape Technology programs, worked with industry to establish an Industry Advisory Committee for what was then called Golf Course Mechanics Technology. The first curriculum was developed with direct input from industry.

Dr. Nutter's description of the program to the curriculum committee on the LCCC campus accompanies this story.

This background information from Dr. Nutter written in 1973 is very interesting as the need for trained equipment managers has increased tremendously, but the supply, even after about 35 years has not increased. Also, interesting are the 1973 statistics, and equipment costs, and salaries.

The Golf Course Mechanics Technology program started in fall 1973. Steve Bolton, a local small-engine shop owner, was the first instructor. In 1975, a retired Navy chief petty officer, Ed Combest, joined the faculty as the instructor, and the program began to make a major move toward shop management and preventive maintenance which Ed had learned well from his Navy career in aviation and ground support equipment mechanics. Ed was also a master at training young people, another skill he developed in the Navy as an instructor and leader.

From 1975 until 1988, the program

was in an old wood-framed building on campus. It was not much to look at, but Ed had it as neat, clean, and organized as one could get the small space.

There clearly was a need for a larger, more modern facility. With industry and legislative help, state money was budgeted for the first facility in the state developed specifically for golf course mechanics and — most believed — the nation. The program moved into the new 15,000 square foot building in 1988.

In the mid- to late 1970s, the one-year program in golf course mechanics became a mandatory part of the Golf Course Operations program making in a three-year curriculum. This increased the total number of students in golf course mechanics to 35-40, requiring more sections of classes and more instructors. The faculty team increased to three full-time instructors: Combest, Jim Lones, and BJ Cannon, all retired military.

The golf industry has always been heavily involved in the program going back to 1973 with the advisory committee, and Combest immediately solicited its support in 1975. It was important for the students to see and work on specific golf turf equipment. Ed worked with the distributors and manufactures to expand the equipment loan program so that students could be introduced to more equipment from the major manufacturers. The equipment loans have continued so that today the program receives annual loans of turf equipment, grinders, lifts, and more valued at easily \$300,000.

Going back to the late 1970s and 1980s, there was a push to recruit more golf course mechanics. The student numbers in the program were good because all golf students had to take the mechanics module, but the program was only graduating five to ten technicians. Interestingly, this problem still exists today, even though numerous recruiting efforts have been tried over the past 25-



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plus years.

Today the mechanics program is called Turf Equipment Management. The students can go one year and get an Applied Technology Diploma in Turf Equipment Technology and go to work or go to school for a second year of general education and business courses and receive an Associate in Science degree in Turf Equipment Management. Most students do the one-year program and go to work, and some work towards the AS degree while they are working.

Recruiting students for turf equipment is still a major problem even though the job market is excellent. It is common for LCCC to receive 40 to 50 job offers for five to ten students. Lack of career awareness is the problem.

There is a need for golf course superintendents to get involved in local high schools and bring principals, counselors, teachers, and students to a modern, organized golf course maintenance facility loaded with over a million dollars worth of equipment. This would be a tremendous community service, and it would introduce students to a career in turf equipment about which they know nothing. We hope that organizations like the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association, working in conjunction with local, state, and national superintendents' associations, will develop career awareness programs for high school students. Introducing young people to this career is critical to the future of the golf industry.