

Dodgertown's "C.H." Thomas name to remember

LOS ANGELES



DODGERTOWN

BY VERN PUTNEY

Kathy Switzer became the first woman to run in the Boston Marathon by forwarding her application as K. Switzer.

Carol Hall Thomas used that twist to get her foot in the door as course superintendent at Dodger Pines Country Club in Vero Beach, Fla.

Her 1986 resume was written as C.H. Thomas.

The Los Angeles Dodgers management was impressed with the person's credentials, wasn't taken aback when gender was revealed, and felt it picked the right "man" to head the maintenance course team.

Now the 1988 World Champion Dodgers, from star pitcher Orel Hershiser to Manager Tommy Lasorda, enjoy playing Thomas' courses while at spring training.

Quick promotion

Originally, Thomas was hired to supervise maintenance for the 18-hole Dodger Pines CC, the nine-hole Dodgertown Golf Club facility, landscape operations for the two clubhouses and general grounds maintenance for the 47-home residential community on the 450-acre complex.

Eighteen months later, she assumed entire grounds maintenance operation, which also includes five baseball practice fields and a 90-unit residential villa requiring landscape maintenance.

Her employees range from 35 to 60, and facilities operate year-round.

"I learned not to stick my hand on the hot stove twice," said Thomas as she noted an earlier resume rebuff directly linked to sex discrimination.

A superintendent at a small private club termed her qualifications "outstanding," but said membership never would hire a woman. He added that while the green committee was composed of men who actually verbalized all major golf decisions, he felt they did nothing without wifely approval.

He said he would encourage his daughters to work toward being superintendents because he believed a day would come when narrow-minded men would no longer have the majority of power.

While those sympathetic words didn't help Thomas get the job, they inspired her not to give up.

A different job approach paid off.

How do people react to Thomas as a woman in the job? Curiosity is the first word. "How did she get the job, and why does she like this type of work?"

Keeping the job has not been difficult, she says. "I work with an excellent management team that simply wants good people, and they recognize me as one of those.

"I can hold my own in any situation. Very little intimidates me because I've dealt with so many problems, and have paid attention to my mistakes."

A strong academic and professional background helped surmount many hurdles.



Carol Hall Thomas

She earned a bachelor's degree in microbiology at the University of Central Florida, and an masters in microbiology with a toxicology minor at North Carolina State.

She had teaching assistantships for microbiology and general biology with additional technical seminars and turfgrass courses from local junior colleges.

Thomas was employed for 2 1/2 years with the University of Florida Agricultural Research and Education Center in Ft. Lauderdale as a biological technician working with a plant pathologist on diseases of ornamentals and turfgrasses.

She then spent five years at Inverrary Country Club, a 54-hole facility at Lauderhill, Fla., as club horticulturist, and entered the ClubCorp. of America's assistant superintendent's training program.

She's a member of the Florida Turfgrass Association, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Florida State GCSA, Sports Turf Manager's Association, and a Florida certified nursery professional, and is on the board of directors of the Treasure Coast Golf CSA.

Her job has expanded to include long-range planning for golf and baseball areas, most hiring of employees, capital equipment purchases, and major purchase of chemicals and fertilizers.

She helped the local high school with its new baseball field, and interacts with golf members, baseball coaches and other staff members as problems or questions arise.

'Women as capable'

This venture into an expanded sports realm is novel. An estimated 200 women belong to the 8,000-member GCSAA, and up to 100 more are employed in course superintendent capacity.

"In a modern grounds maintenance operation," states Thomas, "there's no reason a woman would be less capable of doing the job than a man. With today's technology, the days of having to be 'strong as a bull' to operate the equipment or run an operation such as mine are gone.

"Most equipment is hydraulically operated, has power steering, electronic start ignition, et cetera, all of which make even the largest equipment operate fairly easily."

In fact, Thomas claims, "Women as a whole, once properly trained on how to use equipment, tend to be better operators. They tend not to handle equipment roughly, are more apt to report equipment malfunctions, are less reluctant to admit if they damage equipment, and clean up the equipment better.

"Women who are serious about moving

ON THE LINKS

up to higher positions try to work harder than most men so that they will be better recognized. They feel they must prove their capabilities more than the average man.

"They also seem to complain less about job assignments because they don't expect special treatment."

Thomas says many manual labor jobs now are easier. The new lighter-weight push mowers start and run easily. Weed eaters, hedge trimmers and other small hand-held motorized equipment no longer require exceptional arm strength.

"Even the hard digging that once was standard has been replaced by larger equipment with attachments capable of more finely detailed work," she says. "The shovels, rakes and hoes still are used, but for more tedious jobs such as irrigation work that may involve repairs requiring a finer, lighter touch, a woman operator might be the preferred choice.

"With soaring chemical costs and increasing environmental regulations, one must keep pace and be aware of happenings in those areas.

"I've seen veterans once referred to as greenkeepers replaced by younger people because they lacked the technical knowledge required in today's society. Their practical experience was good, but they were unable to modernize their thought processes."

"Women are capable of absorbing technical knowledge. They are able to keep written records, obtain proper licensing and interact with members or the public as well as any man," Thomas says. "Fortunately, more intelligent, less prejudiced, more innovative and progressive individuals are doing the majority of hiring. These people want the best person for the job.

Equal treatment

"I've hired the majority of my current staff

which includes but two women. I believe that men are more open with me about personal problems that occur at work, particularly dealing with other employees, than they would be with a male superintendent.

"One male employee, after a year of employment, 'confessed' that he originally had his doubts about working for a woman, but I had turned out to be a fair and competent individual."

She relies heavily on chief aide Steve Carlsward, "a valuable right-hand man."

"Dealing with club members has been interesting," she said. "To my surprise, most accept my status. In fact, women members have told me they welcome the idea of women in the field, and wish they had had such an opportunity.

"As a whole, men members are fairly agreeable, particularly those who have taken the time to know me personally. Those from the ancient school simply are not going to change.

"They think if something goes wrong the biggest reason is because she shouldn't be doing that type of work in the first place.

"On the other hand, there are enough men, in fact the majority, as all women are lucky to have, that simply like women, want to see me do well and are very supportive."

Thomas says she "loses out" with the men by not being able to talk with them in the locker room. "It's the one place they are more apt to carry on personal conversations," she says, while "in the women's locker room, it's amazing how much information is offered.

"I've been a member of two local supers' chapters. It's taken a while to feel like 'one of the guys.'

"Most large technical meetings list few women attendees. That doesn't bother me. At least the restrooms never are crowded!"

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