

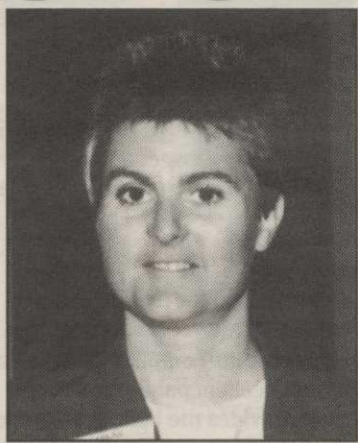
## Competence, not gender, tops Knaggs' agenda

BY PETER BLAIS

She wouldn't have any part of it. "I just don't like to talk about it," said Westchester Country Club superintendent Mary Patricia Knaggs after several attempts at getting her to discuss the difficulty of being a female in the male-dominated world of golf course superintendents.

"I could tell you some stories. But I'd rather look at things positively."

Competence, not gender, is what's important to the head superintendent at the Rye, N.Y. club. Yet



Patty Knaggs

**'Appreciation is very important.'**

— Patty Knaggs  
Westchester CC

showing appreciation for a job well done is often overlooked by superintendents.

"Appreciation is very important," Knaggs said during March's Maine Golf Course Superintendents annual conference. "Appreciation for work done was rated No. 1 in a

recent employees' survey, but, erroneously, No. 8 by managers."

Developing employee competence is very important to Knaggs. During her 14 months at Westchester, she has maintained a formal training program (started by her predecessor, Ted Horton) that touches on 18 different areas, including everything from irrigation management to tree maintenance to the proper use of utility vehicles.

While such a program requires a lot of work, it can lead to a well-

trained work force that allows a course to operate smoothly, she said. Knaggs believes assistants Bert Dickenson, Mary Medonis and Larry Grasso could very easily be running their own courses. She also has a number of laborers who would make very capable assistants, she added.

"We have a highly educated, highly motivated group of people," said Knaggs.

She also has a very unionized group of people. Unions are rare in the golf business. They are concentrated in the New York and Chicago areas.

Knaggs said Westchester's 35-member crew presents her with "a special set of challenges. You come to realize that your own, best judgment just isn't good enough. You have to check the contract continually to avoid problems."

But being the lemons-into-lemonade sort, she refuses to dwell on the negative aspects of a union shop.

"It trains you to be a very fair manager. It forces you to work within guidelines, whether you like them or not," she said.

Knaggs has paid her dues during her rise to the top spot at one of the country's best-known courses.

A 1983 graduate of the University of Massachusetts' associates in turf management program, Knaggs, 35, has worked on grounds crews at West Point, Eastward Ho in Chatham, Mass., and Mt. Kisco Country Club in New York. She also served as assistant superintendent at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield, N.J. and The Country Club at Brookline (Mass.), before coming to Westchester.

"You have to want it very badly," she explained of her success.

While her early career has been on the nomadic side, Knaggs hopes she has found a permanent home at Westchester.

"I'd love to stay here a long time. This is as challenging and stimulating as it gets," she said.

Like its employees, Westchester's 1,500 members (4,200 users and 1,400 golfers) are a highly educated lot.

"They prize education and treat you very professionally," said Knaggs.

The 45-hole complex (two 18-holers and a par 3 nine-holer) will host the annual Buick (Westchester) Classic June 21-24, two weeks later than usual. The schedule change eases the travel burden on the touring pros, who will remain in Illinois two straight weeks for the Centel Western Open at Oak Brook Golf Course and the U.S. Open at Medinah Country Club, before moving on to Westchester.

"That should make things a little easier on us," said Knaggs. "It will give the grass longer to grow in, but still come before the busy season."

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