

GOLF COURSE NEWS

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Richard McNabb (right) is the latest to earn the prestigious Master Greenkeeper status. For story, see page 15.

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GRADUATION REPORT

Trained irrigation techs, mechanics in demand

By PETER BLAIS

Shovel jockey. Wrench turner.

Not particularly flattering titles for the people who fill the roles of irrigation technician and turf equipment manager. But if educators, course managers and others have their way, *shovel jockey* and *wrench turner* could go the way of *greenkeeper* in the near future.

With superintendents increasingly strapped to their desks by administrative duties, the cry is going out for college-trained irrigation and maintenance equipment specialists who can work with today's high-tech watering and turf maintenance equipment.

"I'd kill for a formally trained irrigation technician," said Ray Davies, head superintendent at Merced (Calif.) Golf & Country Club. "Irrigation is critical. When you look at a well-manicured golf course, it

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RTC's Kiawah auction scheduled for May 19

By PETER BLAIS

CHARLESTON, S.C. — The prestigious Ocean Course at Kiawah Island is scheduled to go back on the auction block May 19.

A dozen parties interested in becoming the new owners of the Pete Dye-designed layout and site of the 1991 Ryder Cup attended a bidder's conference here in early April. Among the potential bidders were course owners, management companies, local golf industry veterans and individuals with no ties to the golf business.

"Those who haven't been in the golf business before may see this as a chance to get into the industry in a big way," said Tom Harris, senior vice president of golf properties with CB Commercial, which is marketing the property through its 150 worldwide offices. "Those who weren't in the business seemed well qualified, financially, to enter it."

Financial capability is one of the requirements the winning bidder must demonstrate before the

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A PEARL IN THE EAST

Dragon Pearl Golf Club, located outside Bangkok, Thailand, is one of the courses making a name for designer Jim Engh, who cut his teeth with IMG and Cotton Pennink. For more on a member of golf architecture's new breed, see page 45.

Supers turn OSHA regs to their budgetary advantage

By MARK LESLIE

While state and federal legislators struggle with weighing the costs and benefits before passing new laws, golf course superintendents may actually save their clubs money following suggestions from safety experts like Occu-

pational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) personnel.

By investing about \$1,500 a year for four or five years, his former club saved \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year in insurance costs, said Ray Davies, now superintendent at Lake Merced (Calif.) Golf & Country Club.

Referring to his old employer, Virginia Country Club in Huntington Beach, Calif., Davies said: "We didn't have a negative attitude. Just the opposite. From my viewpoint, it saves you money in the long run."

Complying with OSHA standards is "something

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Mike Robinson

Oregon ryegrass growers organize bargaining group

By HAL PHILLIPS

ALBANY, Ore. — Here in the Willamette Valley, the microeconomics of low carry-over inventory and a 1995 bumper crop have taken a back seat to the macroeconomics of floor prices, overproduction and their affects on the old standby, supply and demand. The result will likely be higher ryegrass prices this fall — maybe as much as 10 cents per pound, according to industry experts.

One reason? Seed growers here have organized the Perennial Ryegrass Bargaining Association (PRBA), which instituted a minimum price of 45 cents a pound in response to the gradual decline in perennial ryegrass prices. The PRBA has reserved the right to raise or lower that figure come August.

Seed dealers, those firms that market seed to golf course superintendents, view this development with mixed feelings. In time of poor supply, floor prices have little relevance. But in the long term, many

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Supers looking for more specialties among graduates

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always comes back to irrigation and drainage. Unless you do it right, there is no grass to mow."

Apparently, schools are listening. Up at California State University at Fresno, Center for Irrigation Technology Director Dave Zoldaski is pushing hard for the school to build a nine-hole golf course that would hopefully lead to a structured golf course irrigation program at the mainly agricultural school.

"With the training he gained here, one of our students got a job as an irrigation specialist at a private club. Within 18 months, he was head superintendent at another course," Zoldaski said. "There are a lot of golf jobs out there that our students could land if we can beef up the training."

At Lake City (Fla.) Community College, administrators are considering development of an irrigation technician program.

"The idea of offering a 12- or 18-month program keeps coming up when we talk to superintendents," said John Piersol, coordinator of Lake City's Golf Course Operations Program. "I'd say we'll do something within the next five years. A large landscape company told me they could place 30 irrigation techs tomorrow if we had them."

The immediate problem, Piersol said, is whether golf courses would pay for a formally trained irrigation technician. "From what we've seen so far, superintendents tell us they couldn't pay much more for a formally trained technician than for someone assigned to do the job from the in-house crew."

That mindset could be changing, however. "I'd say a formally trained technician would start at at least 90 percent of what the average assistant gets," Davies said. Ninety percent is impressive considering the irrigation tech may have a one-year degree, compared to the two-to-four-year degrees most assistants possess.

"I'd say an 18-month program would be sufficient — 12 months learning hydraulics and six months specializing in golf course applications," Davies said.

Added Tom Kimmel, executive director of the Irrigation Association: "We feel very strongly that course maintenance programs need to spend more time teaching students about irrigation. They spend a lot of time on turf, but very little on irrigation."

"Irrigation technician is becoming an important job at golf courses. Water is just so important in many areas. Irrigation systems are the most expensive part of building a new golf course and the water bill is one of the biggest monthly bills once the course opens."

It's hard to argue with Piersol's ability to pinpoint the need for new programs. He started Lake City's one-year Turf Equipment

Management certification program two years ago. Last year, the program graduated seven students. As a group, they received 50 job offers. This year's class graduated 25 students who received more than 60 job offers.

"It's like irrigation," Piersol said. "The equipment is expensive and complicated. A superintendent needs someone who can run an entire shop, not just a wrench turner. Our graduates have been starting from \$18,000-\$24,000 a year. They're making \$25,000-

\$30,000 in a short time. Experienced turf equipment managers at the larger resorts are making \$35,000-\$50,000."

Competition is still keen for the traditional entry-level job for turf school graduates — assistant superintendent. But the number of available assistant positions seems to be higher this year.

"We had more job offers than we had graduates for the first time in many years," said George Hamilton, agronomy instructor at Pennsylvania State Univer-

sity's turf management school.

Piersol agreed, to an extent.

"The market looks good this year for assistants," the Lake City educator said. "The problem comes three to five years out when those assistants want to move up. When a position becomes available, you typically see 30 to 100 applicants for a head superintendent job."

"There still seem to be too many schools pumping out too many people who want to be superintendents. Our students are getting



Wanted:

- Irrigation specialists
- Turf equipment managers
- Assistant superintendents

the idea.

"We have 44 third-year students set to graduate from our three-year Golf Course Operations program [where most of the school's assistant superintendents come from]. We have just 34 second-year students."

You have to start pretty early to get the pick of the crop at the orchard.

5:30... 5:20... 5am. Course Superintendent, Ted Woehrle, couldn't believe it. But shortly after the Workman® arrived at The Orchards Golf Club in Washington, Michigan, his staff started coming in earlier and earlier to get the Workman for the day. "We had other work vehicles," recalled Ted, "but everyone wanted the Workman."

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