

The job market for mechanics is good, but it could be better

By JOHN R. PIERSON

There is no doubt that the hottest market in the golf industry today is for properly trained golf course mechanics. Because of the expense and sophistication of today's turf care equipment and due to the small supply of properly trained technicians, it is a job seeker's market.

Last year, 25 students graduated from our 1-year, college credit program in Turf Equipment Management, and we received more than 70 job offers. The situation looks about the same for this year's class.

By the way, are these people golf course mechanics, turf equipment technicians, or turf equipment managers? At Lake City Community, we prefer the latter title because we feel the title "turf equipment manager" better represents what the golf industry wants.

Golf Courses are looking for people who are about 50 percent manager and

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50 percent mechanic. A turf equipment manager (TEM) has to know about shop design, shop management, how to organize a parts room, how to keep a reasonable inventory of parts, how to order parts properly, how to set up preventive maintenance programs, how to use a computer, and how to train equipment operators and assistant mechanics, as well as perform mechanic tasks. It is specialized, mechanics-requiring training that, unfortunately, is not offered at many schools — this is not auto mechanics or small-engine mechanics.

We've had turf equipment management at Lake City Community College since 1973. In 1988, we moved into a 15,000 square foot building designed specifically for this program. The building is an excellent facility unlike any that I am aware of in the country. Our "secret weapon," however, is our excellent faculty team consisting of program coordinator, Professor Ed Combest, and professors B.J. Cannon and Jim Lones. It is their understanding of and dedication to the golf industry and the management concepts they teach that make our program work.

There need to be more good TEM

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New course development forces older facilities to keep up with 'Joneses'

By JAY C. LASSITER

New golf courses are opening at unprecedented rates across the United States — more than 1,500 since 1992. Most of these are in the public play and municipal segments. While new course openings are occurring across the U.S., the bulk of this development has occurred in the Midwest and Southeast.

Until recently, these areas of the country needed new courses to support increasing demand. However, a new trend seems to be evolving. The number of new golfers are not keeping pace with the number of new golf courses. Now golfers can choose where they play golf and, because they are not spending additional discretionary income to play golf, there isn't enough greens-fee revenue to go around. Many courses will feel the pinch, prompting them to take action.

I call this challenge the "Keeping up with the Joneses" phenomenon. Course "A" has had a loyal golfer following and reasonably stable greens-fee revenue for years. Course "B" opens down the street with a fancy clubhouse, a challenging

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Jay Lassiter

course design with a signature name and wall-to-wall green turf. Golfers try Course "B" and many like the aesthetics and amenities enough to migrate some, if not all, of their discretionary spending there. Course "A" now has a significant revenue problem and no simple solution.

Bottom line: Invest in order to keep up with the Joneses.

This very scenario happened at Middletown Country Club just outside of Philadelphia.

"Several high-end daily-fee courses opened nearby within the last couple of years and we were losing some greens-fee revenues," said Sean McHugh, regional agronomist for Club Corp. of America, which manages the course. "We made the decision to upgrade our irrigation system in order to grow healthier and more beautiful turf."

Golfers are looking for an experience. The experience involves a combination of factors that include, but are not limited to, friendly personnel, a challenging yet playable track, beautiful, healthy turf and high-quality amenities. There are several options to achieve these experience factors. Let's focus on two related to the course itself.

Option 1: Golf Course Re-Design

It is remarkable to witness the transformation of a course under the skilled hand

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Leslie comment

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his winning the North and South Open at Pinehurst in 1959 when he was 19 years old, Dye said: "I never made it past the first round of the North-South. It's kind of hard to follow a fellow when you know you're just 20 Majors back — and time's running out.

"In 1946 or '47," he said, "I was playing a round, probably the practice round because I hadn't been beaten yet... I was introduced to Donald Ross and J.C. Penney. Later, the guys all talked about how we had met J.C. Penney, but I don't remember one person say they had met Donald Ross."

Speaking of Tour players getting involved as golf course design consultants, Nicklaus said: "I started out with Pete in '67. I went through it in a little different fashion than a lot of these guys do. I made 23 trips to Harbour Town and Pete never did pay me a dime."

Dye interjected: "You got what you were worth."

Laughing, Nicklaus continued: "I was trying to learn and do some things. The guys today don't all do that. They're out there working on the first day, but they don't go through the rest of it."

"You came out to The Golf Club more than that," Dye said.

"No," Nicklaus said, "I came out there three or four times, just to keep you from ruining my four holes."

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Dye remembered being on a train and meeting a man who had played Pinehurst three times. "He told me, shot by shot, about his rounds of 107, 109 and 113," Dye said. "'And,' he said, 'the greatest thing about that place: I never lost a golf ball.' Well, that really impressed me, it still does, and I feel badly about all the golf balls that everybody's lost on the courses I have built."

Thanks, Pete, I'll accept that sorrow on my personal behalf.

Piersol comment

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programs around the country to meet the huge demand.

Many schools don't want to start such a program for such perceived reasons as: it is too expensive to operate; there really aren't many jobs; the jobs are low paying; and it doesn't have the prestige of starting a turf program. (The latter is a whole other issue. What is a turf program? It is any school that has one turf course, or maybe two?)

When I hear these reasons, I know such schools are not really in touch with the golf industry. The golf industry will help a school start a program although, again, the right instructor who knows how to build relationships with industry is critical.

As superintendents are aware, the job market is huge and the pay scales we see are excellent. In Florida, an experienced, property trained turf equipment manager can earn \$40,000 to \$50,000 and above. Not bad!

Prestige? Well, most superintendents will quickly admit the "right-hand man" on their golf course management team is the turf equipment manager. This position is now a skilled, professional position offering excellent career opportunities.

The biggest problem today is the general public really knows nothing about this specialized mechanics field. That is why more people aren't seeking the training and why school officials are often confused about the potential of this career.

Superintendents across the country can help! Imagine if every local superintendent chapter across the country established a Recruiting Committee with the objective of getting superintendent volunteers into area high schools to explain the opportunities in the golf industry as a turf equipment manager. If this were to happen, it would be possible to get the word into a majority of the high schools in the U.S. Done year after year (like any marketing), this would create tremendous demand for this training. Informed students, and their parents, would then put pressure on local community colleges or vocational schools to offer the program.

Superintendents could do a great service for themselves if they would do the above.

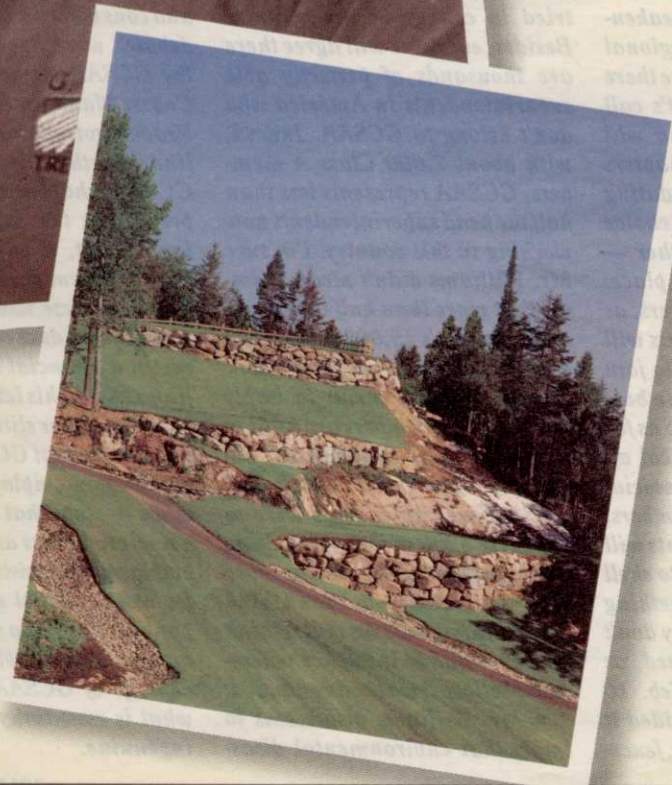
The market for good, properly trained turf equipment managers is hot! In my opinion, it will be that way for quite a few years. It is a segment of the golf industry deserving of much more attention.

We have 26 students graduating from our Turf Equipment Management program May 3. These students should really go out as assistant technicians working under a skilled turf equipment manager.



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