

# 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.



John Pierson

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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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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Jay Lassiter

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Job #5000 being set at Primin Creek Golf Course near the Nevada-California border about 35 miles west of Las Vegas.

## Lassiter comment

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of a professional golf course designer. The end result enhances the golfer challenge, freshens the look of the layout and makes it more playable and enjoyable. The additional greens-fee revenue can be substantial. This option requires significant capital investment, moving dirt and, often, shutting down the course.

### Option 2: Irrigation System Renovation

Updating the irrigation system costs much less than re-designing the course, yet can have a significant effect on attracting golfers back to an established course. Although this still requires a capital investment, it is much less than moving tees and reshaping fairways and greens. Optimally spaced sprinklers create uniform water coverage, eliminating brown spots. And central control optimizes the watering window, allowing more play time.

Ultimately, though, powerful central irrigation control provides flexibility in system programming and adjustments ensuring healthy, beautiful turf.

Televised golf has created an expectation among golfers that anything less than wall-to-wall, green grass is unacceptable. Irrigation systems often can't support that. After renovation, courses have enough sprinklers, along with better control capabilities, to meet increased expectations while staying within the operating budget.

It's all about having the right irrigation design and getting the right system. But how do you get the right design and system? The best bet is a qualified irrigation consultant who can evaluate a course based on a superintendent's requirements; redesign the system and act as the golf course's agent throughout the entire process.

Manufacturers today are recognizing the trend toward golf course renovation in their product development efforts. Toro has led the way with reliable wireless central irrigation control systems — more than 800 have been installed in the U.S. alone. We continue to expand the market with the latest in that technology: TouchNet.

New golf course openings are exploding in the U.S. The real effect of 1,500 new golf course openings since 1992 may prompt existing golf courses to evaluate whether or not it is time to renovate. "Keeping up with the Joneses" is serious business for the course losing revenue to its competition down the street.

Manufacturers have the products. Designers and irrigation consultants are available to help. The next step is for superintendents to evaluate the benefit of updating their golf course to entice golfers back to their course so they can recapture precious greens fees.

## Leslie comment

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happily, he did not listen to the mayor of New York."

The rest of the rail travel revolution is history. Now, superintendents and others in the golf industry can simply sit and wait for the results of this Green Revolution. Some of the fallout may be very interesting.

"This is a very technocratic area," said Dr. Michael Kenna, director of Green Section research for the U.S. Golf Association. "It's very technical, but with a lot of bureaucracy. For every scientist there are two lawyers standing behind him. The

biology and biochemistry is easier than the law regarding it.

"Whoever can learn the most, the fastest, and patent significant parts of it will be able to springboard into the future. That's the race. If you figure out all the genes that affect, say, drought stress, do you own it for other applications like corn?"

Just what we need, right? — more work for lawyers.

For those in turfgrass — the poor sister to farm crops — the problem is funding.

"If it were corn..." Dr. Sticklen lamented.

Well, it's not corn. But those universities and companies that get the fast jump

could reap a huge harvest, in both seeds and money, in the years ahead.

Let's just pray no one splices grass's green gene into a bluejay.

•••

Pete Dye and Jack Nicklaus could have been comedians playing off each other — Nicklaus the straight man, Dye the Jerry Lewis type.

Both men spoke on Pinehurst #2 at the 50th anniversary meeting of the American Society of Golf Course Architects at Pinehurst, N.C. (see full coverage starting on page 23).

After Nicklaus referred several times to

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