

GOLF COURSE NEWS

New Course Listing
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THE NEWSPAPER FOR THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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More graduates chasing fewer jobs?

Assistant positions plentiful; head jobs in short supply

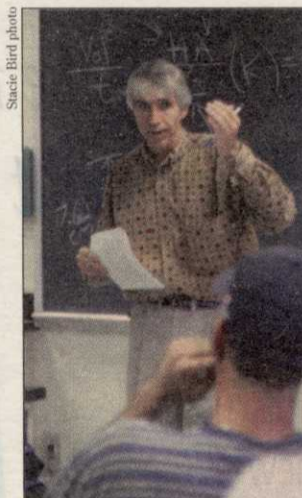
By PETER BLAIS

The demand for assistant superintendents remains strong, which bodes well for the turf school students set to graduate this spring who will fill many of those positions. However, even in the face of a record 468 new course openings in 1995, making the leap from assistant to head superintendent or retaining the top maintenance post remains a challenging proposition.

"We have heard about many more assistant jobs than we have graduates to fill them," said John 'Trey' Rogers, associate professor at Michigan State University. "The only people who seem to be having problems are those who have restricted themselves to a certain geographic area."

Faculty at Ohio State and Pennsylvania State universities echoed Rogers' senti-

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PSU's Dr. Charles Mancino, asst. professor of turfgrass science.

TURF SCHOOL REPORT

- How's the job market for mechanics? p. 11
- Complete listing of 2-year & 4-year turf programs, p. 20

As turf grads grow in number, so do worries of saturation

By J. BARRY MOTHES

The number of graduates from collegiate turfgrass programs this year will again be higher than last year. That, along with an increase in two-year degree and certificate programs, has fueled a strong perception there may be too many turfgrass graduates heading into the job market.

"I think there might be a bit of an overload," said William Torello, a professor of turfgrass management at the University of Massachusetts for the past 15 years. "I think there is a saturation level and I think we're real near it — if not at it."

"But almost 100 percent of our people do get placed. They may not all be assistant superintendents right away, but they get work. The golf course industry is certainly becoming loaded with trained people."

The Golf Course Superintendents As-

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New player emerges in group buying

By LOU PRATO

ELLICOTT CITY, Md.— A new nationwide buying cooperative aimed at getting major price breaks for golf course owners and superintendents on everything from chemicals to maintenance equipment is seeking its first charter members in the East.

National Turf Cooperative, Inc. (NTC), based here near Baltimore, expects to have at least 250 members signed up when it starts buying seeds, fertilizer, and other such goods from manufacturers and suppliers in October of 1996. NTC will concentrate initially on buying products necessary for the development and maintenance of golf courses.

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Temporary clubhouses don't have to be unsightly trailers sitting starkly in parking lots. To wit, this clubhouse facility at Hamilton Golf Club in Fishers, Ind.

Pre-fab clubhouses keep priorities on course

By PETER BLAIS

Golf developers are heeding the advice of course designers and installing temporary clubhouses, allowing the course to establish a reputation and generate revenue before building a first-class clubhouse facility. While the idea might seem a bit self-serving since course architects are paid for the course they design rather than the clubhouse that borders it, few would argue that it is the course rather than the clubhouse that first attracts players to a golf facility.

"Getting the course right and waiting on the permanent clubhouse is a con-

cept I endorse," said course architect David Horn of Architerra PC, a course design firm in Catasauqua, Pa. "You can get a good, prefab clubhouse for \$100,000 or less to get you through the first few years until the cash flow is sufficient to build a permanent one."

In fact, if done right, a prefab clubhouse can be attractive and may suffice much longer than a developer may initially think. Horn said he has sent many clients to see the supposedly temporary facility at Center Valley (Pa.) Club just south of Bethlehem, Pa.

Geoffrey Cornish-designed Center

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Group buying enters superintendent ranks

Continued from page 1

nance of greens, tees and fairways. Expansion into other areas such as carts, balls, clubs, apparel and accessories, as well as technical support and computer services, is in the second-stage plans.

If successful, NTC would be competing in some areas against the 3-year-old Smart Buy group purchasing program run by the National Golf Course Owners Association. Smart Buy enables NGCOA's membership of nearly 2,000 privately owned golf clubs

to acquire merchandise and services in 25 different categories, ranging from golf carts and bunker rakes to insurance and legal services. Still, NTC executives do not believe they are threatening the prosperity of NGCOA's Smart Buy program.

With 15,000-plus courses operating in North America, NTC sees considerable opportunity for everyone.

"There's already competition among suppliers and manufacturers of golf products so com-

petition is beneficial," said J. Joseph O'Connor, president of NTC. "We do not intend to be a trade association. We are a membership cooperative and we believe the very structure and nature of our cooperative will give us the critical elements to get the best prices for our members."

Although group buying has been done before on a regional basis with mixed results, no one has succeeded on a national level except NGCOA. Last June, an individual named Jeffrey

Dykehouse of Grand Rapids, formed an organization called the United States Country Club Association with the main purpose to implement a group purchasing program called the Cooperative Alliance for Purchasing. The association went out of business a few months later without ever making any purchases. NTC executives talked with Dykehouse and others during the several months they spent researching golf courses and cooperative buying.

"We know of some small groups put together by the golf superintendents themselves that have bought from the wholesal-

ers, but most have failed because the superintendents couldn't spend all that time involved with the group," said Robert L. Owens, who will help manage NTC's day-to-day operations. "Four or five have come and gone. There's a group of 12 courses in Ohio that's done quite well. Scotts [Company] told us the largest group of buyers they know about is American Golf which owns and manages 187 courses."

NTC believes it will succeed because of the financial backing of the National Cooperative Bank (NCB), the big Washington institution which finances cooperatives of all types. "Our partnership with NCB enables us to provide many additional services for our members," said O'Connor. "The bank will help finance major equity purchases, capital improvements of courses and clubs and a myriad of other banking services that may not have been available to our members on their own."

A board of directors made up of the members will control and oversee the cooperative. It will be managed by a separate company, Turfcom, which helped research and structure the cooperative. Owens, who is Turfcom's executive vice president, also will serve as Chairman of the Board of NTC under the terms of a service agreement.

The membership fee for a single course is a one-time charge of \$2,000. Members who own more courses will pay \$1,000 for each additional course. Members also will be required to make a minimum of \$30,000 in purchases annually.

In return, NTC indicated, members will get prices "significantly below present industry purchase price levels," but also will receive additional discounts and rebates depending on the percentage of products they buy.

"We are a not-for-profit cooperative," O'Connor said. "Any excess income after expenses will be given back to the members in the form of dividends."

NTC is zeroing in on the golf course superintendents to recruit members. That's different than NGCOA which goes after owners.

"The superintendents are the people who make the primary decisions on buying the products we're selling," said O'Connor. "They can convince their owners that they can save money, maybe big money, by joining our cooperative."

But NGCOA feels that tact may backfire on its new potential competitor. Michael Tinkey, director of the Smart Buy program, said NGCOA's cost savings on its merchandise is only part of the equation.

Asked Tinkey: "If you have the opportunity to join something for \$2,000 and the owner says he already pays our annual membership fee of \$350 — and not only gets a price reduction but also gets services in legal, envi-

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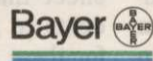
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NTC: Group buying

Continued from page 27

ronmental, governmental affairs services, and so forth, without having to pay extra — what do you think the owner's going to do?

"We believe our long-term relationships between the owners and operators and suppliers is mutually profitable and mutually beneficial."

O'Connor believes NTC's overall services and the financial backing of NCB will negate any misgivings an owner might have. "Once an owner understands what NTC is and what we can do for them, they'll see the advantages of belonging to our cooperative," he explained.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), encourages buying programs or anything else that will help its members, but it will not judge the merits of either the Smart Buy or the NTC approach.

Continued on next page

Golf Course Marketplace

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NTC: Group buying

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Because membership in a cooperative falls under the jurisdiction of the Security and Exchange Commission and the financial requirements of each state, NTC must file documents state-by-state before it can begin soliciting members. That's why NTC began its membership recruitment in late March in just two states, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Marketing memberships in Maryland and Delaware began in mid-April. By June, Ohio, Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina are expected to be involved. The rest of the states will follow through the summer and early fall, O'Connor said.

The NTC can be reached by phone at 410-997-1840.