

# Labor woes are the top concern of supers in 1999

By TERRY BUCHEN

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — The Year 1999 is over and what a year it was! Heat, humidity, disease, crabgrass, clover, insects — the Midwestern and Northeastern golf courses had it all, just like the recent bad weather years of 1995 and 1988 in those regions, quite

possibly even worse. What overshadowed the bad weather more than anything else on most of the courses nationwide? Finding and keeping suitable hourly employees, both full-time year round and seasonal.

Fast-food restaurants are advertising heavily in most areas of the country for the labor short-

age they are often facing, many offering jobs that pay substantially more than golf course hourly labor rates, and they even include free meals, which is difficult for golf course managers to compete with. The excellent

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U.S. economy has meant fewer and fewer hourly employees looking for work in the great outdoors since they can make substantially more money working indoors on year-round full-time employment or in other outdoor

jobs such as construction, which is facing a serious labor shortage as well but is willing to pay more than golf courses usually can.

What is the golf course manager to do? Creative hiring is being practiced more and more, with encouraging results.

Examples include offering high school and college students "flex-time" to work up to seven days per week on very flexible hours. Many times this is one of the best ways to cope with seasonal labor shortages, especially during the spring and fall.

Signing bonuses are in vogue at some courses, where an employee after a short probationary period will receive a significant check. If they do a good job and stay for the entire season they frequently will receive a season-ending bonus as well.

Being a quality-oriented "people person" who can motivate employees works well because those employees will suggest to their friends to work there.

Hiring temporary workers and then offering any of the good ones a position on the maintenance staff is paying dividends and only a few bad experiences have occurred along the way.

Free golf will always be one of the best fringe benefits a golf course can offer employees, even to the point of allowing them to play not just one but many days per week after their normal working hours or on their days off.

Another way to fill the seasonal employee void is to hire and keep more year-round, full-time employees and to pay those employees more than in previous years to attract and keep them happy.

Charles E. Poole, superintendent at the Rum Pointe Seaside Golf Links in Berlin, Md., is keeping more year-round full-time employees and paying them more to start and gives them rapid merit increases to bring their level up to \$1.50 more than previous full-timers were starting at.

Poole has even seriously investigated acquiring a large van and picking up immigrant laborers up to an hour away and having them at work by 5:30 each morning, while finding a suitable driver, an obviously difficult task at best.

Immigrant workers are being used more and more as seasonal golf course workers as the demographics shift more in that direction. If an immigrant likes where they are working, they many times will tell their friends who, in turn, may pursue employment on the staff.

The bottom line is that paying an employee \$6 to \$6.50 per hour is in the past. The only really good way to win the war is to pay a competitive wage that will attract and keep hourly employees. There are plenty of available workers if a golf course is willing to pay a good, competitive hourly rate.



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