



**John Walsh**  
Editor

## UNDER THE RADAR

**W**hile writing this month's cover story, I learned more about an important and invaluable group of people in the industry who are overlooked more than ball marks on a muni par-3 green – longtime assistant golf course superintendents.

There are commonalities among them. They tend to fly under the radar. Many of these hard-working guys are Hispanic, quiet, humble and not as polished or politically savvy as some of the high-profile assistant superintendents in the business. Many don't have a college degree and stay at the same facility for their entire careers. The key commonality is their loyalty and dependability.

Longtime assistants make superintendents' jobs much easier because they've earned the respect of the staff, can manage a crew and know the intricacies of a facility inside and out. They can run the show, so to speak, when needed. A superintendent can leave the course for a week-long vacation with his family without worrying about coming back to dead grass, irate club members, a pissed-off owner or some other course-related crisis. Thanks to these guys, superintendents sleep well.

So, if longtime assistants are this capable, why aren't they becoming golf course superintendents? Maybe some of them are. If you know of a longtime assistant superintendent who came out on top of a job search for a head superintendent position, let me know. It would make great fodder for an article.

Experience is the primary factor of success, but the four-year turfgrass degree takes one a lot farther in the industry. Given all the effort the GCSAA and other organization have put into promoting college degrees, who can blame owners for passing up a longtime assistant for an up-and-coming young whippersnapper with a sheepskin?

Money is a determining factor at most facilities, and young, college-educated assistants are probably less expensive than a 20-year assistant. Additionally, the market is flooded with turfgrass graduates looking to become superintendents within a five-year period. The job market is extremely competitive right now. It's taking longer for many well-qualified assistants to get to the next level.

Life experiences prepare one to deal with others more than a classroom ever will. Many longtime assistants are in charge of hiring crewmembers, and they usually can tell a good employee right off the bat because they've seen all kinds come and go throughout the years. Despite the lack of formal education, longtime assistants have their upside.

Owners and boards should think more about hiring these longtime assistants for head superintendent jobs. Granted, not all longtime assistants want to become superintendents. That's fine. There's a place for career assistants in the industry. They're valuable beyond belief. But what about the longtime assistants who want to move to the next level? Many are trying to earn their associate or bachelor's degree to become more valuable to employers and better themselves. Considering crew management and budgeting experience, it might be worth it for facilities with tight budgets to hire these type of guys. They could hire a valuable assistant as a superintendent for less. It might pay off in the long run.

Longtime assistants deserve more respect and recognition from the industry as a whole. I'll do my part by giving them that in this space. If you're an owner or manager at a facility who has a longtime assistant, make sure you give him the respect and recognition he deserves. **GCI**

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at [www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard).



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### EDITORIAL

GIE Media, Inc.  
4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor  
Richfield, OH 44286  
Phone: (800) 456-0707  
Fax: (216) 925-5038

### Cindy Code

Editorial director  
Phone: 216-925-5019  
[ccode@gie.net](mailto:ccode@gie.net)

### John Walsh

Editor  
Phone: 216-925-5032  
[jwalsh@gie.net](mailto:jwalsh@gie.net)

### Heather Wood

Web editor  
Phone: 216-925-5026  
[hwood@gie.net](mailto:hwood@gie.net)

### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

**Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG**  
[terrybuchen@earthlink.net](mailto:terrybuchen@earthlink.net)

### Pat Jones

[psjhawk@cox.net](mailto:psjhawk@cox.net)

### Kevin Ross, CGCS

[kjross@vail.net](mailto:kjross@vail.net)

### David Wolff

[dgwolff@charter.net](mailto:dgwolff@charter.net)

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