

Veteran superintendents such as Bruce Williams, CGCS, offer guidance and career advice to assistants. Photo: John Deere



Getting a head start

The road to becoming a superintendent these days usually involves much more than obtaining a degree and typing a resume. Assistant superintendents are looking to differentiate themselves from their peers, and that's where Green Start Academy comes in. The program, hosted by John Deere Golf & Turf and Bayer Environmental Science, was held recently in Clayton and Fuquay-Varina, N.C., for the second year and brought veterans to those who are still green in the industry.

Participant Adam Warring, assistant superintendent at The Links at Bodega Harbour in California, was looking for such an advantage. He was recommended by his superintendent, Brian Morris, and wrote an essay to gain acceptance into the program. Warring was one of about 80 attendees participating in the two-day program, which was

jam-packed with activities and information, he says.

The itinerary included a virtual tour of the Bayer research facility in Clayton, a tour of the John Deere Turf Care facility in Fuquay-Varina and sessions with professionals from the industry, including representatives from Bayer, John Deere, North Carolina State University, the USGA, the GCSAA and superintendents.

"It teaches assistant superintendents the new things going on in the industry," says Matt Armbrister marketing manager at John Deere's golf segment and one of the lead organizers of the program. "It's very dynamic; things are changing all the time. If they can learn more, they can manage their staff and resources better. They can learn a lot from meeting and talking to other people who are in the same boat."

The content of the program will be tweaked a little each year to keep the information relevant, Armbrister says. One of the sessions focused on water management, which is becoming more of an issue as that resource becomes more scarce. Throughout the program, none of the content was geared specifically to John Deere or Bayer products, Armbrister says.

The most valuable part of the program for Brett Ziegler, assistant superintendent at Knollwood Club in Lake Forest, Ill., was the opportunity to network and learn from industry veterans such as Bruce Williams, CGCS, of the Los Angeles Country Club and Bob Farren,

CGCS, of Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina.

While Warring says this type of program can help give assistant superintendents a competitive edge, he's frustrated by the seemingly impossible task of breaking into the superintendent realm.

"The information was good, but if anything, I would have liked to have gotten more advice as far as an assistant superintendent trying to move up to a superintendent position," he says.

Warring has searched for open superintendent positions but doesn't find it to be promising. "Typically, on 95 percent of the job postings for superintendents, line one says you must have previous superintendent experience," he says. "What the hell are you supposed to do?"

Ziegler, 24, concedes that it seems to be more difficult to become a superintendent than it used to be, but says it's attainable. His goal is to become a superintendent in the next five years. Programs like the Green Start Academy can help his chances, he says.

"I'm not going to say that if you went to this you're ready to become a superintendent, but at least it opened my eyes a little bit as far as the things I need to do to take that next step," Ziegler says.

The program will proceed next year based on survey responses from this year's participants, Armbrister says. — Heather Wood



A classroom setting allows assistant superintendents to discuss matters openly and to receive feedback from others. Photo: John Deere

