



John Walsh
Editor

EXPERIENCE NEEDED

Grass janitor. I'd never heard that one before, but I thought it was an interesting term on which I should shed some light.

Recently, I discussed construction projects with those in the building realm. I heard part of an off-the-record comment about grow-ins: "... it's the difference between a golf course superintendent and a grass janitor," one person said. "Ooooh," I thought. "That sounds pretty harsh." But the point was clear: Growing in a golf course requires different knowledge, skills and methods compared to maintaining existing turf. And, typically, it's more difficult.

I pondered the concept and what others told me throughout the year during interviews for various articles. A reoccurring theme was articulated by consulting agronomists and golf course superintendents, builders and suppliers. They said:

- A minority of golf course superintendents has grow-in experience.
- University turfgrass programs need to include more education about construction and irrigation.
- There are relatively few golf course superintendents who are really good grow-in specialists.
- Too many inexperienced superintendents call builders back to help with grow-ins, and course conditions sometimes worsen.
- More interns and assistant superintendents need to spend time working on construction projects and/or grow-ins because the experience is invaluable and will make them better superintendents.
- Superintendents often get better jobs because of their construction and/or grow-in experience.

Because construction is down, it's understandable to think there isn't as much focus on this area of the industry as there should be. Yet, the truth is just the opposite: This is an excellent time for turfgrass students, assistant superintendents and superintendents to become more involved in construction projects, when realistic. When new golf course construction picks up again, they'll be better prepared to work on these projects. More importantly, the increase of the number of renovations and reconstructions creates more opportunities for those with construction experience.

Granted, not everyone will have the opportunity to be involved with a new construction project. But, more turfgrass management students should become involved with golf course construction and grow-ins because it will help them become more well-rounded and more valuable.

Communication, finances, human resources, management and other nonagronomic areas of a superintendent's job seem to be the focus of improvement for many. That said, let's not ignore the value of being able to effectively manage the incredibly important and expensive processes of building and rebuilding. Construction and grow-ins, which obviously are agronomy related, are critical areas of improvement – especially at the student and assistant levels. Do you agree?

Turfgrass management curriculums change based on real-world pressures and demands. That's why more business-related courses are being added to these programs. However, it's up to those in the real world, including manufacturers, who see a specific need in the market to provide such feedback to professors and those in charge of the turfgrass programs throughout the country to help make that change more quickly and effectively. And because of such change, maybe terms like "grass janitor" will fade from the lexicon. **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.



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