



Steven Tucker is the equipment manager at the Ritz-Carlton Members Golf Club in Bradenton, Fla., and the president of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association. He can be reached at 941-309-2913 or stephen.tucker@ritzcarlton.com.

RESPECT AND RECOGNITION

On Sept. 1, 2006, 12 equipment technicians met by conference call to discuss starting an equipment technicians association. During that call, we decided this type of association was long overdue and it would be increasingly necessary for the development of the equipment technician position.

The equipment technician's role during the past 20 years has developed into much more than just a person on the staff who keeps equipment operational. With the increasing number of golf courses throughout the world, there aren't enough skilled technicians to meet the needs of every course. There are many reasons for this, however, we believe lack of awareness of the career opportunity is the biggest one.

How can you tell the difference between a skilled and unskilled technician? Is it the way he looks or dresses? Is it how quickly he can get a piece of equipment up and running? Is it the organizational or management skills he possesses? Unfortunately, there's no standard for measuring effectiveness, so everyone's perception of a skilled technician is different.

The GCSAA helped develop the superintendent position into one that's matured throughout the years. Superintendents as a whole have taken on more responsibility and, in turn, have gained much more respect.

It's for these reasons an equipment technicians association is being developed. An equipment technician is responsible for all the equipment that maintains the golf course daily and has a duty to make sure every member and guest experiences a golf course that's in beautiful condition every day. The position technicians hold can help determine whether a customer returns to the golf course to play again or if it's the last time he sees the golf course. In short, equipment technicians help support the revenue flow to the golf course.

On Jan. 1, 2007, the membership of the International Golf Course Equipment

Managers Association elected its first set of officers and board of the association. The board consists of equipment managers and technicians from throughout the world who've experienced many types of challenges in the industry. With the formation of committees, the association is able to have many more individuals worldwide – from industry leaders to assistant technicians – so everyone has the opportunity to assist expanding the knowledge and professional image of every technician, from the high-end private clubs to the small-town public facilities and distributors.

During the past year, the IGCEMA has achieved many things. We've hired legal counsel and an accountant to assure our path to provide a strong platform for coming years is legal and consistent. The IGCEMA officially became IGCEMA Inc. Oct. 12, 2007. We also joined the Federation of European Golf Greenkeepers Association's road show this year in South Africa where we taught three seminars about how to organize a workshop.

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The IGCEMA has continued to progress – it has membership in nine countries, and most recently, has been recognized by the R&A on its best practices Web site (www.bestcourseforgolfcourse.org) as an international organization.

Many of these achievements wouldn't be possible without the overwhelming support we've been given by the equipment manufacturers, superintendent/greenkeeper associations and the technicians throughout the world who've embraced the



association and want it to succeed. Despite the many accomplishments during our one year of existence, we have many more strides to make.

The IGCEMA has many things planned: a certification program; exhibiting at the Golf Industry Show; launching our environmental initiative and continuing to add local technician associations as affiliates to our organization, among others. We'll also make a big push to increase awareness of the association in the industry to help increase membership.

Another key focus will be encouraging more technicians to work at golf courses. The number of technicians in our industry is declining quickly and isn't keeping up with demand. Many colleges in the U.S. are struggling to attract students who are interested in being equipment technicians. While the equipment technician job has changed throughout the years, the IGCEMA would like to have it recognized as an important and rewarding career. This is no easy task, but if it's not addressed, it will hurt golf in the U.S. and abroad.

For the IGCEMA to make these strides, the industry needs to understand the value of equipment technicians, which is an integral part of the success of a golf course management team. Professionalism, standards, education and achievement should be recognized, nurtured and respected.

It's the goal of the IGCEMA to develop this idea and expand it worldwide. Doing so will encourage others to enter the profession. We intend to work with superintendent associations and manufacturers to develop this association and profession into one that gains the respect and recognition that's long overdue and much needed. **GCI**