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## MAKE THE SMART CHOICE

Don't underestimate a good irrigation installation contractor's role.

Spring is coming and it is time to think about fall construction projects. Construction takes lots of planning and preparing for them to be successful, but all that planning, preparing and time spent will all be for naught if you do not hire the right contractor to install the work. Although this applies to any construction project, there are specific requirements and experience you want to look for when hiring irrigation contractors. The degree of experience required is dependent on the size of the project and also as to whether the irrigation is the majority or minority part of the project.

I always like to point out to superintendents and boards that you can have the best irrigation design in the world, select the best irrigation equipment, sold by the best distributor, but if you do not hire a good irrigation installation contractor all those other things will be useless. That said, what do you want to look for in an irrigation contractor?

First you want experience, and not experience limited to just the individuals working on the installation. You need an experienced foreman who can communicate with you and members and, if necessary, the board. English speaking is important. The company and site superintendent or foreman should have experience with at least five courses and preferably with the manufacturer's equipment being installed, whether it is Hunter, Rain Bird, Toro or another brand. Each manufacturer's system is different and the more they have worked with it the better off your project will be. There should also be an assistant



When selecting an irrigation installation contractor, you will inevitably reap the benefits of your decision or have to deal with the consequences.

foremen or site supervisor with some experience also so the work still gets done properly if the foreman is off for a day or at a meeting. I once had a job where only three things were done not according to plan and they were all on days the foreman was off.

It is imperative that the company also have experience with golf course irrigation installation, not just have an experienced foreman. Golf irrigation requires a company with specialized equipment and a lot of it. It requires a good stable financial base, as it can take a long time to get paid and there is a very large outlay of up front-dollars for materials and for the mobilization of equipment and personnel. Additionally, there are more stringent insurance and paperwork requirements than a residential/commercial irrigation contractors may be used to. The company also needs to know golf. Working on a golf course

requires a degree of etiquette that only people who work on a course know. Don't walk on the greens if not necessary or ever through a bunker. Loud talking should not be allowed and when traveling through the golf course you need to pay attention to play and stop and wait when necessary. Shirts need to stay on at all times.

When you are renovating the golf course at the same time as the irrigation system installation, contractor selection becomes a bit more muddled. Some golf course builders do irrigation and some do not. If they don't, then use the same selection process that you would use if it was irrigation only. If the builder also does irrigation, find out if they do irrigation only on their renovation projects, or do they do irrigation only projects also? You need to do your homework as some builders are good



at irrigation while for others it is just an add-on service that they do not do too often and therefore may not be very good at it. I like to look at it in terms of contract value. When you are looking at a project that is both irrigation and renovation which is worth the most amount of money?

Given the high cost of today's irrigation systems, many times the irrigation work is worth more than the renovation work. When that is the case, I recommend that the irrigation system be bid as its own project to irrigation only contractors as well as the builder. The renovation work can then be bid separately to golf course builders or the renovation work can be run through the irriga-

tion contractor using the builder of your choice as a subcontractor.

When bidding a public project, you have no idea who may bid the project as it is open to any contractor. In this case, the contractor qualifications need to be very strong so you get someone who knows what they are doing. You also need to make sure the public entity contracting the work enforces the qualifications during bidding. If it is a private bid, then you have total control over the bidding process. Keep the bid list short. Remember, the easiest way to keep a contractor from not getting your project is to not let them bid it in the first place. Once they provide a number, it will be a lot harder to get rid of them.

Keep the list to three to five contractors and interview them. In addition to references that you need to check, make sure you are going to get along professionally. Beware of board members who want to put contractors on your list, like the one that did their house – not qualified.

Successful projects start with picking good irrigation contractors. Take the time to do your homework and research prospective bidders. Use your network and other professionals to determine what company will be the best fit for your project.

Remember you will either reap the benefits or have to deal with the consequences of the selected irrigation contractor. **GCI**

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