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## THE VALUE OF A GOOD SUPERINTENDENT

We still undervalue and take for granted what you do. This must change.

In the past, my column has addressed the value of master plans, contractors, architects, tree removal plans, and other things. In looking through my titles, while I have written about the things superintendents do, but I have never addressed the value of a good superintendent.

I put myself through college working golf course maintenance. As a result, I have always favored the superintendent's viewpoint on all things golf related. Right or wrong, I have developed the opinion that golfers all too often overlook the difficulty of the superintendent's job.

While it's hard to summarize, I can give you a few ideas, even if quoting others. Some of my favorite pithy quotes concerning superintendents:

*"You'll never be able to define a great superintendent until you had one."*

*"A really good superintendent is much less expensive than a mediocre one."*

*"Anyone can maintain a golf course with a big budget. A great one can do it on a modest one."*

*"Your superintendent is part scientist (entomologist, meteorologist, agronomist, edaphologist (soil science), environmentalist, etc.) part engineer (drainage expert), part financial manager and part purchasing agent. Budget management is important – and time consuming – but they still need to make time to get out and ride their golf course. No one can manage a golf course from an office."*

Of course, he/she is also an HR director who needs to hire, relate to, and inspire lower paid workers (who often don't speak English) every day. I am always amazed at the productivity differences I see between similar golf course crews. A good superintendent

gets a lot out of a crew.

On most days, they also need to work with corporate chieftains with equal aplomb, often switching gears in a matter of seconds. Personnel management isn't taught in turf schools, and probably only lightly touched on in even business schools.

Short version, example No. 1 – growing grass is easy, managing people isn't.

And yet, for all of the above, most people hear "superintendent" and see Bill Murray in Caddy Shack, and many expect to see him (her) in overalls and driving a tractor.

“When they have a problem, they don't call an outside consultant. They usually call the superintendent next door or across town, who more often than not willingly shares all the information – and sometimes equipment – they have.”

As regular readers of this magazine know, fellow columnist Terry Buchen can spin a phrase while talking course maintenance. He puts his respect for the qualifications of a good superintendent this way, "All you need is brains and common sense... and the ability to be a team player... and work long hours... and love and understanding of golf....and..."

Short version example No. 2 – the list of things a superintendent must do – and do well – goes on and on.

The hardest part about the job is that it's so easy to measure the results – you can see absolutely everything they do, right and wrong. Nothing doesn't show up. All actions are reflected on the ground and in golfers

eyes... if not immediately, then soon. But, rising expectations blind most golfers to the "right" and they usually see only the wrong or mistake the best that can be attained given the superintendent's prime assistant is none other than Mother Nature with a mistake by the superintendent.

Superintendents are inventive problem solvers. When they have a problem, they don't call an outside consultant. They usually call the superintendent next door or across town, who more often than not willingly shares all the information – and sometimes equipment – they

have. They may not have invented networking, but they have perfected it for their own use.

Somewhere in the average superintendent's routine, is taking time to mentor their fellow superintendents, including the next generation. Most attend local, regional and national meetings of their associations to further their education, and share what they know with others.

We still undervalue everything a good superintendent does. We take them entirely too much for granted. We think we understand their job as well as they do... and often let them know that. It's time for that to change, and I nominate 2014 as the right time to do it. GCI