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Consider the Greenkeeper, Grau Asks Club Officials

By FRED V. GRAU

Director, USGA Green Section

Golf club officials are beginning to realize the increasing seriousness of the shortage of competent greenkeepers.

GOLFDOM gets an accurate close-up due to our impartial and experienced close-up on the employment situation.

When there is a pro vacancy at a good club there are from 40 to 100 or more applicants, of whom probably 30 per cent are well qualified men. When there's a manager vacancy there will be from 10 to 25 candidates well qualified by club or hotel records. But when there's a greenkeeper opening at a good club a lot of searching has to be done to find an able man who will work for the salary offered. Generally, the only way to get a competent greenkeeper is by taking him away from another club by offering him more money.

Even then the good man usually is so much in love with his course that he is reluctant to leave the place. If his family situation makes him desperate for more money he goes into another field of work. Despite union restrictions it isn't difficult for the versatile greenkeeper to get a card in a trade where training and production requirements aren't nearly as exacting as in course maintenance.

Now, players on smaller town public and daily fee courses insist on turf standards equal to those of expensive metropolitan district private clubs 15 years ago. Each competent greenkeeper has to make use of all the exceptionally thorough and practical scientific training he's taken during the past 15 years which have seen an amazing transformation and improvement in fine turf development. The greenkeepers are an unselfish lot of trained and loyal specialists but economic conditions have compelled them to take stock of their financial situation and prospects. The picture doesn't look any too bright to them.

The club officials' responsibility at this critical point is bluntly presented in the accompanying Open Letter by Fred V. Grau of the USGA Green section.

The main problem in golf course maintenance right now isn't grass. It's men.

Herb Graffis
Editor, GOLFDOM

Sirs:

I take the liberty of addressing you in this manner because it is not possible to talk with you face-to-face. Even though I might have that privilege this year, your respective offices may be occupied by someone else next year.

My reason for writing you is to discuss the position of your greenkeeper, or your superintendent, whatever his title may be, in relation to the welfare of your club. He has earned my respect. I have been in his line of work myself. As Director of the USGA Green Section I see more of him

than I do of you, therefore, I understand his true value to your club and can appraise his efforts in realizing your ambitions for your club.

Your responsibility is to provide the best there is available for the members of your club. The principal reason for the existence of your club is the golf course. Our responsibility in the USGA Green section is to develop research and educational programs which will help you to have a better golf course. This is accomplished in part at our Beltsville Turf Gardens but by far the major effort is in cooperative work with State Experiment Stations, universities, and Greenkeeping Superintendents' associations.

We travel extensively over the country to attend turf field days and turf conferences and to check on cooperative research work. When it is possible, we visit your course, examine the turf and discuss turf improvement directly with your greenkeeper. We should like to meet and talk with you, too, but seldom is that possible because you are busy running your business, which is your bread and butter. For 20-odd years I possibly have seen your greenkeeper once or twice each year and have come to know him well. There is a bond between us. We talk the same language which is both technical and practical and aimed only at providing a better golf course for your members.

Greenkeeper Pays to Serve Club

Frequently I learn, to my dismay, that your greenkeeper has had to pay his own way to the turf field day and to the turf conference. This is a credit to his desire to keep fully informed, but I'm sure you realize that it is your club which benefits most.

Think what it would mean to him if, in the annual course maintenance budget, an item for "Research and Development" were included so that he would feel free to attend important meetings without wondering, "can I afford it?" After all, your greenkeeper has become a highly-trained technical and professional man and he is the mainstay of your club. After 20 years we are still discussing problems with him. How many men have held your positions at your club in that period? Reliable statistics show that there is an annual turnover of more than 60 percent of club presidents and green chairmen.

Do you realize now why we deal directly with your greenkeeper? By all means, then, give him full responsibility for keep-

ing your course in top shape and provide him with the tools and materials which he needs to do the job. He won't let you down if you will stand as a buffer between him and the membership. Give him responsibility and let him do the job with the minimum of interference. Your confidence will give him added confidence in himself.

Incidentally, have you provided for your greenkeeper the increased pay in keeping with today's level of living costs and for the long hours of loyal service he has given the club? Won't you consider that seriously now that we are on the subject?

Every day your greenkeeper is actively on the job for from 12 to 16 hours a day. If anything happens at 2 a.m. it is his phone that rings and gets him out of bed to take care of the situation. And when there is an important tournament, or when the temperature and the humidity soar together, or when all Nature seems to be working against him, he can't sleep for worrying about the course. He is not a 40 hour-a-week man; he is on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The club probably pays unskilled labor \$1.00 an hour or thereabouts. Is he worth twice that? Three times that? Figure it out on that basis and you will probably hustle to the next board meeting and push through a logical and fair salary increase for him. As you may know there are not enough good greenkeepers to go around. Someone may have already offered him an inducement to leave your club because they have seen the work he can do. He loves your club and would hate to leave it, but he can't pay bills with love.

Another important point is that the salary you have provided for your greenkeeper has been below average. Very few young men are being attracted to the profession. This is a dangerous situation on a national scale.

In this day and age of new chemicals, new fertilizers, new and improved machinery, and new grasses, your club must look into the future and provide for continued professional supervision. It is suicidal to turn a huge expensive plant over to an inadequately trained man. It is up to you to provide an incentive for young men to train and to study for this profession which is so important to your success as the chosen leaders of your club.

At many clubs it is customary at the first cold weather to lay off the men that your greenkeeper has trained during the season. This may be the very time he needs them most. Next spring they will

have found better, steadier jobs and he has to start a difficult season with a "green" crew. I hope that this situation does not exist at your club.

I hope you will forgive me for my frankness in writing you like this. If our teachings and our new findings are to be of value to your course there must be provided continuous interchange of ideas and discussion on a mutual basis — and when you are tempted to write to us for information make sure that your greenkeeper first has the chance to provide it. He may know the answer better than we do most of the time. If he doesn't, then let him help you write the letter so that we can better understand the problem and each other.

Please try to understand that our sole desire is to help you provide a better golf course for your members and that the most direct and the only way we know how to do it is through your greenkeeper.

Sincerely, Yours for Better Turf.

Fred V. Grau, Director, USGA Green Section,

Plant Industry Station, Beltsville, Md.

Minnesota Greenkeepers to Tell Business to Bosses

March 17 at the annual Minnesota Turf conference the state's greenkeepers association will have a business lunch for club officials and members, and an afternoon session at which the business management of course maintenance will be set forth so the greenkeepers' bosses may have golf course upkeep interpreted in terms comparable with those of their own respective businesses.

Few club officials and fewer members have any idea of the organization and technical knowledge required in maintaining a golf course. The comparatively short time officers and committee members are in office and the reluctance of the dues-paying official to be exposed to work or worry at the club present a unique situation between course superintendent and unpaid executive. Minnesota greenkeepers are convinced operations would be improved for clubs and men responsible for courses if problems of finance, labor, taxes, cost accounting systems, course maintenance and use, turf research application and overall club operating problems were set forth for explanation and discussion.

Nationally noted authorities have been invited to speak on specialized phases of course management in its relation to the official and player.

Washington State Holds Second Annual Turf Conference

Second Annual Turf Conference to be held at the State College of Washington, Pullman, is scheduled for Feb. 16 and 17 following the annual GSA meeting in Los Angeles. Fred Grau, Dir., USGA Green Section will head the list of speakers appearing on the two-day program. Others appearing on the annual GSA program have been invited to take part in the Washington meeting. Greenkeepers in the Spokane area cooperating with the College in developing the conference program are H. T. Abbott, Supt. of Parks, Spokane; Louis J. Schmidt of the Indian Canyon Club; W. C. Brusseau, Down River GC; and Glen Proctor of the Manito G and GC and J. Harrison of the Hayden Lake Club, Hayden Lake, Idaho.

1949 Winter Turf Conferences

- Jan. 5-7—Northeastern Weed Control Conference, Hotel New Yorker, New York, N. Y.
- Jan. 6—Southern Turf Assn. Conference, Univ. of Tenn., Knoxville, Tenn.
- Jan. 13-14—Mid-Atlantic Assn. of Greenkeepers, Lord Baltimore Hotel, Baltimore, Md.
- Jan. 29—USGA Green Section Committee Annual Meeting, Waldorf Astoria Hotel, New York, N. Y.
- Jan. 31-Feb. 4—18th Annual Turf Short Course, Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N. J.
- Feb. 1-2—Oklahoma-Texas Turf Conference, Baker Hotel, Dallas, Texas.
- Feb. 7-11—20th Annual GSA Turf Conference and Show, Alexandria Hotel, Los Angeles, Calif.
- Feb. 16-17—Second Annual Turf Conference, State College of Washington, Pullman, Wash.
- Feb. 21-24—18th Annual Turf Conference, Penn. State College, State College, Pa.
- Mar. 1-4—Cornell University Turf Conference, Ithaca, N. Y.
- Mar. 7-9—Purdue Turf Conference and MRTF, Purdue Univ., Lafayette Indiana.
- Mar. 10-12—Massachusetts State College Turf Conference, Amherst, Mass.
- Mar. 14-16—Iowa Turf Conference, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa.
- Mar. 17-18—Minnesota Turf Conference, Minneapolis, Minn.