

Better Training in Personnel Management

The dozen or so young men who are in charge of maintenance at courses in the Arlington-Alexandria-Fairfax county section of Virginia represent what has to be an enlightened breed. Known variously as the "Young Turks" or the "New Frontier Boys," the group must have slipped in moonlight courses in public relations when they attended turf management school. They have been completely accepted by older turfmen in the Washington area because, as one veteran greenmaster, a member of the Mid-Atlantic GCSA to which the young supts. belong, says: "They are a bright but not brash bunch of young men. All have received fine educations in turf management, but they come to our meetings to learn and not let us know how smart they are."

The dozen are graduates of four schools. Half of them got their degrees at Penn State. Three are University of Massachusetts men. Two were educated at Rutgers and one is from Purdue. All but one, who is 32, are under 30 years of age. Each has been a head supt. for from three to five years.

Typical of all is Lee Dieter, who has been in charge of course maintenance at Washington G & CC, located on the western outskirts of Arlington, since 1962. Not quite 30, Lee attended Penn State from 1957 through 1959 and planned to return to his father's nursery business in Erie, Pa., when Bert Musser, now professor emeritus of Penn State's agronomy school, persuaded him to give golf course work a trial.

Accelerated Learning

"You'll learn more about turf and business management in one year on a course," said Musser, "than you will in almost any other phase of agronomy. Make a connection with a good supt. and you'll get accelerated training in just about every-

thing. If you don't like it, you can always go back to the nursery business. I guarantee that the year won't be wasted whatever you decide to do after that."

So, Dieter, like many young men before him, took Bert Musser's advice. His apprenticeship lasted not one but three years, largely because he wanted it that way.



Lee Dieter

... what I needed was training.

When he took the job at Washington G & CC, which was founded in 1895, and was re-settled in 1922 after building its original layout near the Potomac, he hadn't applied for it but was approached by the club.

Recommends Apprenticeship

The young man strongly recommends an apprenticeship term, preferably one of at least two years. This, even though he had started his schooling with dirt under his fingernails from working for many years in his father's nursery, and had compiled an unusually good scholastic average while at Penn State.

Lee has a simple explanation for not



Recent additions at Washington G & CC are shelters constructed of brick. Several of them are spotted around the course. Floor (at right) is gravel, but maintenance department plans to replace it with concrete slabs sometimes this year.

having wanted to take on the responsibility of a head supt's position immediately after leaving school. "I wasn't ready for it," he says flatly. "I suppose I had a lot of turf knowledge and quite a few ideas about how a maintenance job should be run when I graduated. But I didn't know how to apply either. What I needed was training under an older man to find out exactly how a maintenance operation should be handled. I may have been ready for a supt's job after two years, but a three-year apprenticeship didn't do me any harm."

All Endorse The Idea

There isn't much doubt that the Young Turks or the New Frontier Boys, whichever you prefer, endorse Dieter's thoughts about the training interval. Most of them snapped at the opportunity to consolidate what they had learned at the various schools they attended by serving an apprenticeship.

A turf school grad who has worked under an experienced supt. for a couple years, Dieter feels, usually acquires a good knowledge of fertilization practices and undoubtedly learns much about chemicals. Water management, though, may be something else. This is particularly true in the Washington area where young and old greenmasters alike generally agree that a fellow is "between the devil and the drought" most of the year. Disregarding

this one aspect, the young supt. probably has to make few concessions when it comes to technical knowledge.

Training Fails Here

But he is usually weak in labor relations. So far as Lee Dieter and other supts. of his age and experience in the vicinity of Washington are concerned, this is where education and even their apprenticeship training fails them. "The schools," Lee points out, "say they don't have time to give us much training in personnel management. Personally, I think they should cram it in somewhere because eventually our jobs are made or broken by the way we handle our employees. Most of the supts. who have had the rug pulled out from under them in the Washington area have stumbled because they didn't know how to deal with their employees."

This educational lack or oversight applies to a lesser degree where most apprentice training is involved. Older supts., according to Dieter and other young men who have come into the course maintenance field in recent years, are inclined to assign just about everything but the supervision of course laborers to their assistants. The latter, as Bert Musser pointed out, get accelerated training in practically all phases of the maintenance operation, but personnel management too often is omitted.

(Continued on page 122)

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Officers and directors of the Iowa GCSA for 1965, elected at recent turf conference held at Iowa State U., are (l to r): Harold McCullough, Oak Creek, Des Moines, director; Richard A. Bruns, Jr., Washington Park, Cedar Falls, president; Don Westfall, Highland Park, Iowa Falls, vice-president; Fred Carey, Finkbine GC, Iowa State U., secretary-treasurer; and Harold Kerr, Valley Oaks, Clinton, director.

Personnel Training Needed

(Continued from page 70)

The oversight is not necessarily intentional. Or, at least, that is the way Lee Dieter feels. "The primary job of a man who is running a golf course," he says, "is to keep the course in the best possible playing condition. Everything else is secondary. That includes the training of apprentice supts. I have seen, or I know of good supervisory training programs that have been started, but too often they have been junked and not picked up again because the supt. has been put under so much pressure in keeping the course in shape that he has had to give up on them. This is where the system breaks down."

Which leads to the question: Is there any solution to the problem of training an apprentice to handle the most crucial job he is going to have to contend with when he becomes a head supt.?

Lee Dieter suggests this answer: When an apprentice proves he is ready for supervisory responsibility, why not assign three or four or five men to him and make him completely accountable for the work they perform? If the apprentice shows that he is incapable of handling men, maybe that is the time for him to get out of the turf management business altogether.