



Introduce the topic of consultants at a gathering of club superintendents and you're likely to touch off a hot debate. Although the services of superintendent consultants have existed in the trade for some time, little on the subject has appeared in print or been said in public discussions, because of the discord it could create. But in private conversations, the superintendent consultant currently is one of the most talked about figures among his country club counterparts.

To serve as a superintendent consultant requires no special credentials beyond a reputation for expertise in golf course maintenance. And for a fee, he gives regular supervision to a course, or courses, other than his own. One eminent superintendent is consultant at five courses, while another has helped develop several resort courses in New York state.

Although there are other consulting services, *i.e.*, irrigation, design, construction and so on, these types are not usually on any long-term basis, nor are they offered by a practicing superintendent. The superintendent consultant (hereafter called the consultant), is usually hired by club officials who feel that their home superintendent could benefit from this outside help. At times the home superintendent is in agreement with this decision. But in at least one known instance, the

Hiring outside advisers for of home superintendents

home superintendent resigned rather than accept the outside help.

Those who protest the practice of bringing in a consultant argue that:

- The practice could help perpetuate a weak superintendent and keep him in a job that might otherwise go to a more capable individual.

- Adverse weather or other natural conditions over which a superintendent has no control can cause a club to seek out a consultant—even after years of satisfactory service.

- The Professional Code, printed in the yearly membership directory of the Golf Course Superintendents' Assn. of America states: "Honor requests for technical help from golf courses only when channeled through the superintendent of the course making the request."

- Because the consultant must be paid a fee, presumably out of the supervision budget, it might tend to keep superintendents' salaries at a lower level. (Fees are a matter of speculation. Most guesses are in the \$1,500 to \$2,000 range for a season.)

- It is possible that a course (or courses) would eliminate a full-time superintendent and operate only with a consultant and an assistant or foreman, thus eliminating one or more positions from the area.

Superintendent Consultant: Blessing or Problem-maker?

By BILL SMART

golf course maintenance is becoming a more common occurrence. But attitudes toward this practice run the gamut from genuine approval to outright resentment

- Reputation and the opinions of fellow turfmen are important. The following illustrates this point. The president of a local chapter of the GCSAA received a phone call from a superintendent who had been asked to be a consultant on his old course with the agreement and encouragement of the present superintendent. He wondered if he should accept. The president told him to get the request from the home superintendent in writing. Thus, both parties involved protected their reputations and avoided any misunderstanding that might have occurred.

Those who hold the opposite viewpoint voice the following opinions:

- The consultant is sought out by the parties who need help, not vice versa.

- The consultant works with the home superintendent in a spirit of cooperation. Both are striving for the same goal—a good course—and thereby raise the level of maintenance in that area.

- The lack of qualified and experienced superintendents has created a need for consultants. According to one consultant, smaller courses have always sought advice from successful local superintendents. It is only in the past few years that clubs employing men in the \$10,000 to \$15,000 salary bracket have turned to consultants for help,

and the trend will continue as long as there is a need.

- Superintendents who lack practical or technical expertise will in effect get on-the-job training, making them more valuable to their course. The need for a consultant will diminish as the "trainee's" knowledge grows.

- If a consultant turns down a job, the club will simply turn to someone else with the same offer. Again, if there is the demand, there will be a supply.

- If a course hires a consultant, the home superintendent keeps his job. The alternative for the course is to replace the super with someone else—even though the problems may be beyond his control.

- In many cases, the reputation and status of the consultant are such that he can deal effectively with personnel and policy problems that are beyond the jurisdiction of the superintendent.

In a profession the size of the golf course superintendent's, it is understandable that some clash of purposes occurs. Competition for the good jobs is keen. In areas where many courses exist, there is competition between them—not organized or vocalized. Add to this situation the varied educational and practical backgrounds of most superintendents, plus their independent natures, and any situation that challenges their pride or position is explosive.

Interestingly, in all the con-

versation about consultants, no one questions the ability of the consultant to do the job. It would seem a foregone conclusion that consultants do not get requests to consult unless they are experts in their field.

If there really seems to be a problem and superintendents seem to be dead set against bringing in consultants, do what one superintendents' association did. It formed a trouble shooting committee that made itself available to courses needing outside help, going into action only at the request of the superintendent, at no charge. However, bear in mind that the Northeastern Assn. (N.Y.) just recently disbanded its committee, which operated along the same lines. It had never been called upon in its years of operation. Perhaps, periodic reminders to clubs and superintendents in the area that the service is available would aid the success of such committees.

I have not tried to exaggerate or minimize the situation. There would seem to be a need for consultants in certain situations to the benefit of all concerned. There would also seem to be situations that had best be left alone. □

Mr. Smart, a frequent contributor to GOLFDOM, is superintendent of the Powelton Club, Newburgh, N.Y.