

# Hiring a Superintendent

Filling an opening for a superintendent can be a confusing ordeal for the club and the applicant. Here are some helpful guidelines for both parties

**BY BILL SMART**

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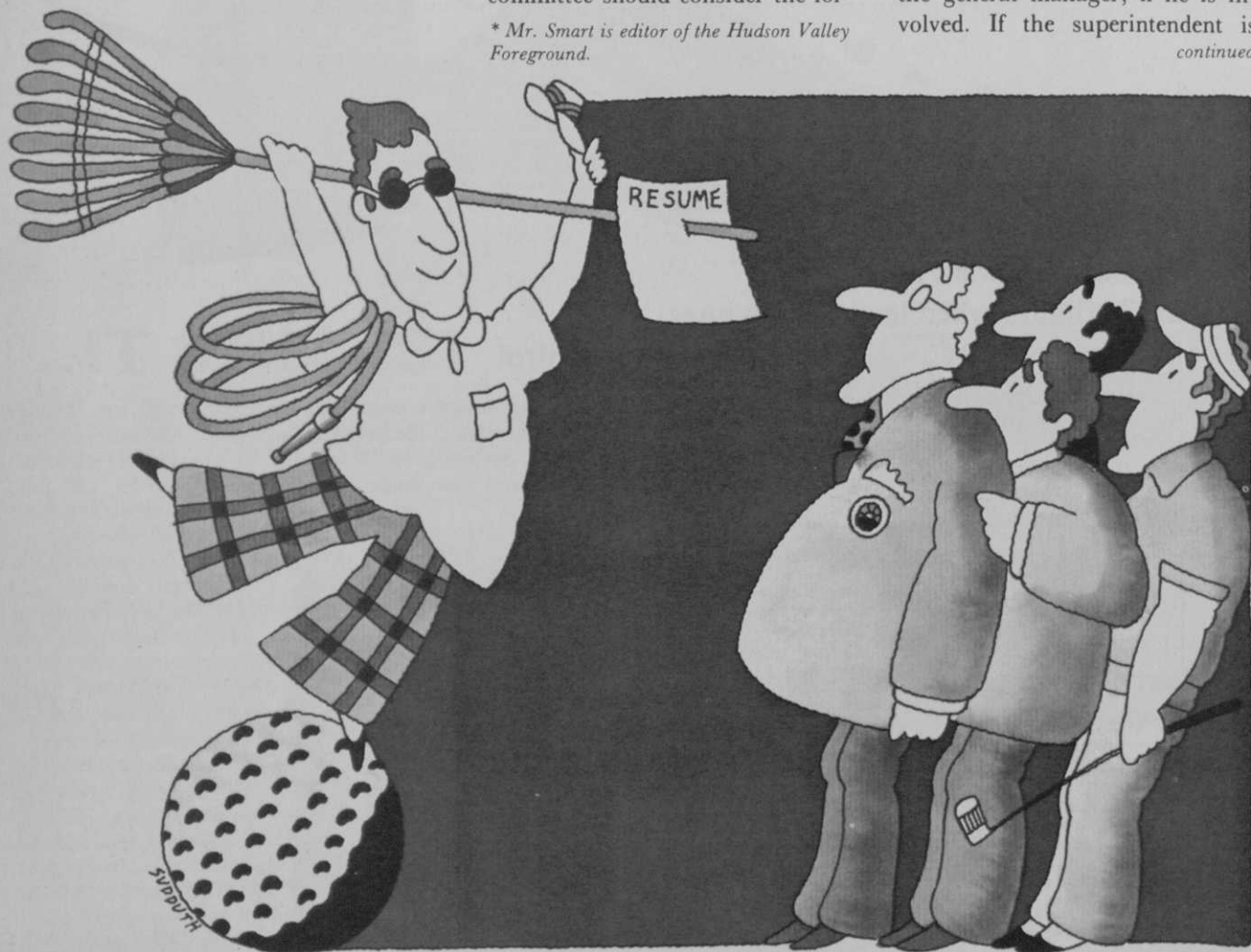
In 20 years of associating with golf courses and more recently as an editor,\* I have been involved directly and indirectly in many position openings. I have observed many errors on the part of superintendents applying for jobs—and even more errors on the part of courses seeking a superintendent.

It is usually the greens committee's (sometimes called the golf committee) responsibility to contact prospective applicants. The committee should consider the fol-

\* Mr. Smart is editor of the Hudson Valley Foreground.

lowing guidelines to eliminate any misunderstandings on its part and on the part of the applicant. The committee might first decide whether or not the present superintendent operated the course in a satisfactory manner. Far too often, job changes are a result of personality clashes and financial problems (budget and salary) that can and should be negotiated by a formal meeting with the super and the greens committee and include the general manager, if he is involved. If the superintendent is

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ILLUSTRATED BY ART SUDDUTH

## HIRING A SUPERINTENDENT

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leaving for reasons other than those mentioned, a discussion will at least clear the air. He might even recommend someone to replace him.

If harm may be done to the course because of the absence of supervision, immediate preventive steps must be taken. The present superintendent, the assistant superintendent (or foreman) or a superintendent from a nearby course should supervise routine maintenance until a replacement is found. At the same time, consider the assistant or foreman as a possible replacement. Interview him as you would any other applicant and use the interim as a "trial period." This progression from one job to the other is logical and desirable in many cases. Practical experience on a course is of more value than most committeemen realize.

It is important at the outset to agree on the qualifications of the men you wish to employ. No doubt, most greens chairmen would like to have a graduate of a four-year turf school with 10 years of practical, successful operations behind him, if for no other reason than to justify the committee's choice to the membership. Unfortunately, men of this caliber are scarce, and when available, command top salaries and fringe benefits. As a guideline, your local golf course superintendents' association (a call to a few local superintendents will give you the secretary's name and club) can give you information on the wage scale in your area. The National Golf Foundation, Room 804, The Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Ill. 60654, can also furnish information, gratis.

It is obvious that not all clubs can offer top salaries; therefore, they will have to settle for more practical solutions, *i.e.*, a young man with a good academic background and little experience or a

man with good practical background who lacks formal turf education. This does not necessarily mean that you are settling for second best; the great majority of the men operating the nation's top courses have no formal turf training. Many of the younger graduates of the 10 week to two year college turf programs have the aptitude and knowledge to make up for lack of experience.

Most chairmen simply do not know where to seek out prospective superintendents, having the feeling that the search area is very limited. It is, however, accessible through the following routes: 1) Your present or former superintendent; 2) The local GCSA, through its secretary or officers; 3) The Golf Course Superintendents' Assn. of America, 3158 Des Plaines Ave., Des Plaines, Ill., has a free placement service; 4) State and nearby state GCSA secretaries' names and addresses are in the GCSAA directory; 5) A commercial firm doing business (course supplies) with your club will be glad to give their over-the-road salesmen your needs. (Incidentally, commercial men are responsible for more job opening information than all other sources combined.); 6) Ads in trade magazines, names available from your pro and any superintendent; 7) If in a "heavy" golf area, your local paper should not be overlooked, especially the golf column editor; 8) Personally contact local superintendents. In short, cover all areas; the more applicants you have, the better choice you can make for your membership.

At the very beginning, give out as much information about the job as possible. Box number ads that read: "Greenkeeper wanted, 18 holes, salary open" get little response. The same job description could read: "Supt., 18-hole, irrigated course, N.Y.C. area, budget \$83,000, salary \$10,000 range." (Although these are actual averages from a 1965 New York City survey, they are now outdated.)

Be as factual and accurate as you can and reap the rewards of applicants who are really interested. I have a letter on file now that states "top salary" when, in fact, the salary is moderate of that area.

Offering to pay travel expenses for an interview will draw applicants from a larger area and can be done by selecting from written applications.

### **Interviewing**

Determine first the applicant's qualifications. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the average greens chairman to determine if a man is qualified in the technological aspects of course maintenance. Indeed, it would be difficult even for a superintendent to judge an unknown, because opinions, methods and practices differ from man to man and course to course even among recognized experts.

What you can determine is: 1) The extent and nature of any formal turf education; 2) Attendance and interest in university short courses and field days; 3) Membership and activity in local, state and national turf associations; 4) Practical experience and background; 5) Reputation in the trade (references); 6) Condition of present course; 7) Special skills in construction, irrigation installation, labor management, or any talent which might hold special interest for your needs; 8) Attitude toward his craft; 9) Military service status; 10) Physical condition.

Many applicants will have this information in their resumes, with copies for each member of the interview group. Thus, discussion can be planned and orderly.

Because one applicant can be successful, it is obvious many will be unsuitable in one way or another. In all fairness, hear each man fully, then confer in private at the end of the interview. If the man is unacceptable, simply inform him at once that other applicants are more qualified, and should the situation change, you

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## DDT PANIC

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intersects the Beverly layout. There was an immediate complaint from quite a large group of irate motorists. The police were called in and Paul was placed in 30-minute custody, but it was one of those technical arrests with no charges being filed. The upshot was that the Beverly ground crew had to clean 20 cars. The maintenance employees found that soap and water alone don't wash off DDT; it takes a wax job.

Some superintendents who switched from DDT to methoxy-

chlor this spring say they did so because momentarily they expected a state law to be passed requiring it. Officials at a few clubs thought it was a good neighbor gesture that they should make, considering that the cost of the changeover wasn't prohibitive. Quite a few superintendents feel that DDT will be ruled out for a few years, then reinstated when the beetles and bugs rapidly multiply again and re-infest the land. Then the hue and cry will come from the opposite direction and the anti-insecticide forces will be outshouted. If DDT isn't brought back, something just as effective will have to be. □

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will get in touch with him.

Should the applicant be a likely prospect, resume the interview and discuss your needs, the area of responsibility, to whom he will be responsible, condition of the course and equipment, annual budget, special problems and finally, salary range.

It is a seller's market for good superintendents, and you may now be faced with selling what you are offering. No man worth his hire will accept vague promises such as merit raises of unspecified amounts at some unspecified date, a "sizable" Christmas bonus and items that will be taken into consideration at some future time. A good superintendent will be a good businessman (he will be spending your money) and will expect specific and accurate information. In addition to salary (he will likely know the job's potential), there are fringe benefits that for tax or personal reasons can offer special inducement. Some cost the club little or nothing.

These benefits include: housing and utilities, housing allowance, room and board, medical plan, pension plan, cost of living in-

creases, club membership or use of club facilities, meals free or at cost, expenses to local, state and national conferences and meetings, pay while on reserve duty, gas and oil for personal car, use of club vehicle off the property, Christmas or incentive bonus, and life insurance.

It seems hardly necessary to remind anyone that most of these items are offered in industry, guaranteed by labor unions and enjoyed by the armed forces of the United States.

I have not mentioned vacation time, though an *exceptionally* long winter vacation would come under the same heading.

The following is from the GCSAA Professional Code and deserves your attention.

1. Seek counsel for local chapters when applying for a position in a new district.

2. Recommend only GCSAA members.

3. Ascertain the salary levels in the district in which you are seeking employment; then uphold that level.

4. Be sure the position of golf course superintendent is open before making an application.

5. If possible, talk with the man who last or now holds the position of golf course superintendent. □