

WOMEN ON THE CREW



The most serious problem facing golf course superintendents and other grounds maintenance professionals is that of labor—not just finding employees, but locating competent, caring people.

Many trade journals have published articles that have explored different solutions to the labor problem. Not until recently, though, has the possibility been considered of using women as the major work force. This idea shouldn't be so novel. What is novel is that superintendents have never considered women as one of the best sources of competent help.

I began using female workers on the Stansbury Park course, a large new town development west of Salt Lake City, during September, 1970. I had thought about using women workers as early as 1966, but was delayed in implementing this idea by a stint in the Army.

In September, 1970, the golf course construction was at the point of laying out the irrigation

Hiring women to work on a maintenance crew is a unique way of solving the labor problem. Norm Graft discusses the advantages (many) and the disadvantages (few)

by NORM GRAFT

SUPERINTENDENT
STANSBURY PARK GC, TOOLE, UTAH

system and filling greens with sandy top soil. The first woman I hired assisted the survey crew and removed debris from the greens mix. She worked out so well that I decided to hire a full maintenance crew made up mostly of women.

Finding women who knew about tractors, growing things and, heaven forbid, that old nemesis, the shovel, was easy because Stansbury Park is located in a predominately farming and ranching community.

This new crew began by installing trees. Some trees were of the five

gallon variety; some weighed as much as 300 pounds. How does a woman manage to handle such a job? The same way a man would. The crew works together to plant it.

As the golf course progressed, the women hand seeded, removed rocks and other debris, dug tree wells and did some tractor driving.

Bringing in new seed is a job in which attention to detail will guarantee a good stand of grass. The women more than fulfilled this requirement. During my 14 assorted years in the grounds maintenance profession, I have never seen any crew handle sprinklers and care more about getting dry spots wet and take more pride in seeing the grass begin to germinate than the women on Stansbury's crew.

As the course matured and new maintenance practices were incorporated, the women were taught rough mowing, fairway mowing, spraying, cup changing and other necessary maintenance work.

When other turf professionals in-



The all-female maintenance crew at Stansbury Park GC can efficiently handle all of the maintenance chores previously conducted by their male counterparts. Duties include mowing, raking, shoveling and operation of the manual irrigation system.



quire about the women, they ask the same curious question, "What do you do when they have to shovel?" My standard answer is that I simply hand the shovels out and tell the women to use them. There is no natural law that says women can't shovel. Nor do they shovel less than men; in fact they shovel more because they shovel steadily.

Some of the important facts about female workers, which in my experience, I found true are:

- ☐ Women can handle manual labor;
- ☐ Women can operate equipment efficiently (Let's face it, most golf course equipment takes brains to operate, not brawn.);
- ☐ Women enjoy and care about maintaining golf courses;
- ☐ Women can work together;
- ☐ They are loyal workers (The Stansbury Park crew is basically made up of married women who average about three children each. These women work to supplement their husbands' incomes, so they aren't looking for other positions.

Their pay averages about \$100 each a week. They were not hired to cut down on wages. The pay scale is dictated by budget. They were hired because the quality of work I can get from them is much higher than the quality I can get from men, who would be willing to work for the amount of money I can pay.);

- ☐ They are personally neat;
- ☐ There is little absenteeism;
- ☐ Women can handle foremen positions;
- ☐ Their most outstanding quality is their pride in workmanship;
- ☐ There are few problems in losing trained help when the late fall layoff occurs. The women enjoy staying home for three to four months and are willing to return each spring.

A disadvantage or two:

- ☐ One woman cannot unload 80 and 100 pound fertilizer bags; two women on a bag do pretty well;
- ☐ They become irritated when golfers take divots; they have worked too hard producing the grass to see it fly through the air;

☐ As I found out recently, they sometimes get pregnant.

The situation at Stansbury is an ideal one and might not work in every section of the country. But if any grounds maintenance professional has a labor problem (and who hasn't) and if conditions permit, he should seriously consider hiring women workers. He is foolish if he doesn't hire them because of the old prejudices. My female workers give a full day's work for a full day's pay. Now, I ask you, what could be better for you men with an ulcer condition brought on by labor problems. Your yearly bi-carb budget should be reduced by at least 80 per cent. The other 20 per cent, even a female crew can't eliminate—these are acts of God, acts of management and acts of golfers.

My crew of women has been and will be a major contribution in building Stansbury Park's 18-hole championship golf course as one of the finest in the western states. ☐