



WOMEN AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE: AN EXPERIMENT THAT WORKED

One of the biggest complaints coming from superintendents nationwide is the problem of recruiting responsible grounds crew members. One superintendent has found an answer: hire women

Like many superintendents around the country, Arlin Grant, superintendent of Innisbrook Resort & CC in Tarpon Springs, Fla., has suffered his share of labor problems. "We were having trouble getting men who would stay," recalls Grant, who has been with the 960-acre community since its development in 1969. "There are a lot of transients in this business. They work

for a while, then drift on to something else."

About a year ago, Grant began an experiment, which he hoped would counter the high turnover rate among his grounds crew. He hired women to tend the course. Today, he has 31 women working for him, and he expects that soon all of his 60-member field crew will consist of women, a testament to

the success of the experiment. In fact, Grant reports that there has been a decided improvement in the over-all appearance of the course and grounds since he hired the women. Production, he says, has increased and mishaps and injuries have declined, conditions that were intolerable to Grant when he had to rely on "transients."

His enthusiasm for the capabil-

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of his female crew clearly are demonstrated by his statement, "It's simply a matter of getting the job done the way I want it done, and the girls are doing it better. There is no task here they can't perform as well as any man. And that includes lifting bags of fertilizer. They work harder and are more conscientious than most of the men we've had working here."

The women operate all of the powered grounds maintenance equipment, including the huge gang mowers, and perform a variety of other jobs relating to the care of the golf course, the condominium grounds and a nursery. They also clean the filters and complete a daily routine of checks and adjustments in pumping stations that are part of a complex system of underground irrigation, lakes and water hazards.

Grant said that he was not surprised at how quickly the women learned their respective tasks, even the operation of the big machines. They are particularly adept, Grant reports, in the operation of the Sandpro, a three-wheeled vehicle

used for raking the many and variously-shaped sandtraps.

The women also operate hand-propelled fertilizer applicators and spraying equipment for insect, disease and weed control and patch the greens and fairways with sod from the sod farm.

One of the women, Karen Oelschlager, formerly of Detroit, has become a gardening specialist and is responsible for the care of all the plants, flowers and shrubs near the number three clubhouse.

"They've never had such tender, loving care," Grant declares.

Not all the girls Grant has hired in the past year have been able to meet his performance requirements. After a period of instruction and on-the-job training, each woman is allowed two weeks to demonstrate proficiency in all her assigned tasks. "If they can't do the work, the way we want it done, we invite them to leave," Grant says.

The women making up Grant's crews come from a variety of backgrounds and from different parts of the country. They range in age from 16 to 39 years of age. Some are

married and have children. Some previously worked as waitresses or in factories in the nearby Tampa-Clearwater area.

Jerri Munro, who moved to Florida with her parents from Detroit, Mich., says she "hated" living in Florida until she started working at Innisbrook, as one of the first female crew members.

Barbara Nevins, 21, whose parents have owned a condominium apartment in the complex since last April, left secretarial school in Milwaukee after seeing, during vacation visits with her parents, how much the other women enjoyed their work. She started at Innisbrook last January.

Carol Van Duyne, formerly of Summit, N.J., remarks: "How else could I spend all day in the sun and get paid for it?"

Grant recognizes that the Florida weather has helped him attract his new breed of groundskeepers. But he believes that the women find satisfaction "from the beauty they help to create," as he does. He adds, "I suspect some of them get a kick out

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countered with questions of their own. What kind of game did I shoot? Was I a big hitter? Did I keep the ball in play or was my tendency to hook or slice? When I revealed I was a bogey golfer with tendencies to hook and slice occasionally, two of the three suggested low compression. The third, however, suggested high compression. The other 11 respondents really had no opinion other than suggesting experimenting.

In most instances varied opinions seemed to be standard procedure. For instance, from store to store rationales for using leather grips were balanced by those favoring rubber. Usually the reason given was that leather or rubber, depending on who you were talking with, was less likely to be slippery.

There was some excitement, and possibly a salesman gleam, when carbon/graphite was mentioned. Most retail outlets had heard of the new shafts, of course, and were anxiously waiting for their introduction on a mass produced level. "We'll wait," one retailer said, "un-

til they're proven on the pro tour. It's inevitable they'll be produced cheaper than they are now. We'll get our share of the market."

Although most of the retail outlets canvassed on specific questions about equipment would not have given the average serious golfer much confidence, they did offer other things that might be helpful in the pro shop.

Most use excellent display techniques. Stock is plentiful and prices clearly marked. Individual attention, due to the volume of business, is almost never at hand, but any shopper can at least select his price range before seeking help. Inevitably, all retail outlets offer charging privileges, which make large purchases easier. Often being able to "charge it" makes the difference between a browser and a buyer. Large printed signs announcing specials, sales and closeouts are commonplace. Specials featuring a set of clubs and a bag for one price are a common device used to clear out mid-season merchandise. In the retail scene the special sale is a way of life.

The answers to all our questions

reveal an interesting and challenging situation for the professional. Assorted opinions and reactions on these and other queries, as well as close observations of retail and discount sales departments all point to one key factor in understanding your competition. You have the advantage, generally speaking, and to put it bluntly, they don't know what the hell they're talking about!

Any professional concerned with competition from discount houses, shopping center bargains and retail advertised specials owes it to himself to do a little detective work. A few hours at random times is all it takes: observation, mental notes on display and sign work, which you feel are eye catching enough to be potentially useful; a few key questions in any golf section of a sporting goods department. When you hear some of the responses to legitimate questions on equipment, most of which are motivated by commissions rather than the desire to help golfers, you'll be hard pressed to keep a straight face. You'll walk away wondering why you've been so worried. □

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of proving they can do a man's job as well as, or better than, a man."

Although the Florida sun might be a fringe benefit, along with the free oranges and grapefruit growing on the hundreds of trees kept intact from the former citrus farm from which the courses were carved, the groundskeepers' work schedule is far from leisurely. On weekdays, they start at 7 a.m. and finish at 4:30 p.m., with a half-hour for lunch. All work a half-day on Saturdays, and using a rotation schedule, a few must be there from two to three hours each Sunday to mow the greens. The work week averages about 50 hours, with time-and-a-half pay after 40 hours.

The women average about \$125 a week, slightly higher than they could earn in other occupations in this area.

Three of the four first four women he hired now are foremen—Jeri Munro, Nancy Sizemore from Tarpon Springs, and Diane Dunn from Flossmoor, Ill.—a title that Grant feels he should change, perhaps permanently. □