

Woman On a Mission

A turfgrass professor told me that golf course maintenance was too tough for a woman. That only fueled my desire to be the best superintendent possible

By Kathy Antaya, CGCS

I've always loved rainy days in summer — especially the day-long, soaking kind. As a kid, I would joyfully splash through the puddles, unclog the street sewer grates and watch the water spiral down. I refused to come in out of the rain until I was drenched and the puddles drained away.

Today, as a superintendent, I perform that same routine, but now I get paid for it. By the way, I still love rainy days.

I get the morning chores done, sweep the shop and send the crew home early. Then the fun really begins.

I jump in the cart to inspect the course, draining every puddle I can find. Every superintendent has his or her own secret passions about a golf course — the perfect mowing pattern, a spiral-raked bunker, and the sound of sprinklers throwing water. What a great career we have chosen.

As an 18-year-old college student, I longed to be a superintendent. I met other students at school equally enthusiastic about turfgrass management.

We helped each other through difficult classes and group-studied for most exams — even job hunting became a

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have a desire and study the science, learn the equipment and have the skills to manage people."

But agronomy still hides in the agriculture department, making it difficult for women to access the often male-dominated programs. From her experience in school,



Ann Weaver says colleges don't do enough to interest women in the field.

Ann Weaver doesn't think colleges do enough to interest women in the field. Weaver, a former superintendent, oversees the municipal courses in Sacramento, Calif., as golf manager for Capital City Golf.

"At the college level, [the profession] is not presented in a way that reaches a lot of the female students," Weaver notes.

Joe Vargas, professor of botany and plant pathology at Michigan State University, agrees there's a lack of recognition of the program by women.

"This university has had a population of 50 percent women and 50 percent men for many years, and our turf program has been here for 30 years. But it is only in the last 10 years that women have entered the program," he says.

Karl Danneberger, professor of horticulture and crop science at The Ohio State University, acknowledges that women may find themselves in the minority if they look into turf

management programs.

"With 30 students in a class and only three women, it can be intimidating," Danneberger says. "When I bring in superintendents to talk to the class, they're always male because there are so few women in the profession. There are not a lot of women superintendents, so there are not a lot of role models."

Determination to succeed

Despite these handicaps, some women became superintendents through a determination to work at something they love. When Zelda Baxter joined the GCSAA in 1956 at the age of 45 as the first woman in the organization, she laid the groundwork for other women to follow.

Clay Loyd, a past communications director for the organization who is currently writing a book on its history, reports that the subject of her membership was discussed and debated by the executive committee. But his research indicated no evidence her admission was ever in doubt.

Baxter had a long association with the business of golf as a pro shop operator before taking subsequent superintendent positions in both Iowa and Illinois. She reportedly felt accepted by the association, even though it was dominated by men, and said one of her proudest achievements was having trained nine young men who went on to become successful superintendents.

As with Baxter, women have often apprenticed at courses as irrigation technicians, course crew members and assistant superintendents and view themselves as well-qualified for the jobs, no matter their gender.



Zelda Baxter (kneeling, left) was the first woman to join the GCSAA in 1956.

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group project. I realized there were many different ways to manage turfgrass, and many people willing to help you.

With only two women in the turf programs at Michigan State University, we were a noticeable minority. I don't remember more than two incidents that struck me as gender discrimination, but one cemented my resolve to become the best superintendent possible.

After an awards ceremony, a respected turfgrass professor and a distinguished superintendent attempted to convince me that a superintendent's job would be too hard and I should consider my future family.

They said, "Wouldn't you rather go into sales, where you could take advantage of your feminine wiles?" I politely said no and turned away — while thinking decidedly *impolite* thoughts and more determined than ever to prove them wrong.

As assistant superintendents, my colleagues and I commiserated annually at the winter conference. We shared stories typical of new assistants: forgetting

I look around a group of superintendents and see people just like me.

something the boss said, getting embarrassed in front of the crew, lack of respect from the staff.

All of us worked ungodly hours, heard few thank yous and were underpaid. However, most of us were happily working our way through the system toward the day we would be in charge.

As a superintendent, I have found the same sense of unity and common ground amongst my peers. It's surpris-

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"I didn't see myself as a female or others as males. I saw myself as a professional just doing my job," Beljan says.

Weaver didn't realize how few women were in the field until she entered the job market after college in the late 1970s.

"When I was in school, I believed whatever I put my mind to, I could do, and I never saw [my gender] as an issue," she says. "I never once felt that I couldn't do the work. Although sometimes I may have been tested to see if I could do the job physically, like hand mowing and weeding, I enjoyed being physically tired at the end of the day."

The first day Andrea Bakalyar reported to work as a golf course crew member, she said she was hooked immediately. Since her father once told her that he didn't think girls could work at golf courses, Bakalyar wrote on her application that she could work as hard as any man, just in case her father's comments reflected the prevailing attitude. When Bakalyar told friends and family she was going to school in turf management, they warned her she wouldn't get as far nor move up as fast as a man. After four years working on courses and earning her golf course management certificate

The idea of women as superintendents isn't as unusual as you might think.



People warned Andrea Bakalyar she wouldn't move up as fast as a man. They were wrong.

from the University of Maryland last spring, however, she now is superintendent for Montgomery CC in Laytonsville, Md.

Bakalyar attributes her success to a love of the work and her dedication, not that she set out to prove a woman could do the job.

"Some people say it drove me because I was a woman and had something to prove," Bakalyar says. "They don't understand that it was because I found something I really liked, so I had the drive [to succeed], which possibly opened doors for me."

Find a mentor

Many women superintendents credit their success to the encouragement of a male superintendent who taught them the skills required for the job. Denise Kispert, superintendent of Highland GC in St. Paul, Minn, recalled how her first supervisor, Bob Grew,

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ing how business competitors willingly give advice and loan supplies or equipment.

I am comfortable calling up colleagues for help, and I have received a few SOS calls myself. Despite the obvious gender difference between most superintendents and me, we are more alike than different.

I look around a group of superintendents and see people just like me — enthusiastic about their jobs, interested in sharing experiences and holding a genuine appreciation for the great outdoors.

Rarely am I reminded of my minority status, but it's a fabulous advantage at large professional gatherings — there are no lines for the bathroom.

Driving along dew-covered fairways at 6 a.m., the sound of mowers humming in the distance, I remember why I picked this business. The frustrations of labor issues, unreasonable supervisors, bad weather and broken equipment are just vague memories.

Great satisfaction comes from orchestrating the people and instruments necessary to groom our playing fields. Each day, we start with a clean slate, challenged to bring the course up to prime condition.

Our practical experiences, a little advice from our friends, (and don't forget the help of our dedicated assistants), gets us through.

We should give thanks daily for being fortunate enough to work in this great industry.



Kathy Antaya is superintendent of the Meadows GC in Alendale, Mich.

Terrific Twosome

Jim and Kim Shine prove superintendent couples can have it all

By Frank H. Andorka Jr., Associate Editor

They work vigorous schedules. Long hours prevent them from returning home for long periods of time. They are always on call. Are we talking about doctors? No, we're talking about superintendents.

So who would want to marry a superintendent? Another superintendent, of course.

Jim and Kim Shine, of Jacksonville, Fla., say superintendents need love and understanding, and no one recognizes the challenges of the profession better than a fellow superintendent. Kim is currently superintendent at the Windsor Parke GC

in Jacksonville. Jim is now a landscape professional with the Jacksonville Electric Authority, but spent more than 20 years at various levels of superintendency at Sawgrass CC and Cimarrone GC in Jacksonville, as well as being director of golf operations for Arvida Corp.

"Being a superintendent can be an emotionally stressful experience for anyone, so it's great to have someone who can always relate to what you're going through," Kim says. "If you're having problems at work, it's always good to have someone you can bounce ideas off of and, in a worst-case scenario, actually come out on to the course with you and help you figure out solutions."

"We still do that, even though I'm not a superintendent anymore," Jim says. "It's nice to have someone who will tell you what they really think and not pull punches about what mistakes you have made. It's refreshing."

Kim worked at the now Oakbridge GC as an operations crew member in 1980 when Arivda Corp., of Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., bought the course. Jim was director of golf operations for Arvida at the time. The superintendent at Oakbridge GC had promoted Kim to be his assistant. When the superintendent left in 1980, Jim promoted Kim into the lead job. For five years, Jim was Kim's boss.

"At first, we were just thrown together as a matter of chance, but we got to know each other pretty well during that time," Jim says.

Kim, a widow, liked Jim's sense of humor. Jim, recently divorced, liked Kim's presence and self-confidence. Kim says Jim took the time to train her in all aspects of being a superintendent, and that he still promotes the cause of women in the industry.

"He was one of the first superintendents to hire women on his crews at Sawgrass, and he has done a lot to promote the cause of women in the industry," Kim says. "That's one of the things that makes him so special."

"Like anyone else, we just fell in love," says Jim, who married Kim in 1990. "It's obvious from our choice of careers that we already had a lot in common, and it just seemed a natural fit."

Kim, who served as the president of the Northern Florida chapter of the GCSAA from 1993 to 1996, says Jim's experience in course construction — Jim helped Ed Seay design



FRED SMITH