



Superintendents can benefit from the way management companies do business

BY GREG PLOTNER

As a long-time superintendent and past president of the Florida GCSA, I watched the debate about management companies up close for many years. Sure, there were plenty of horror stories, but there were also plenty of examples of superintendents benefitting from this new way of doing business. So why did I decide that International Golf Maintenance was the right choice for me?

First and foremost, IGM is a maintenance company. We are hired to manage an owner/operator's No. 1 asset — the golf course. IGM will maintain the course with a team of experts that specializes in agronomic services. Our goal is to allow course owner/operators to focus on improving other club operations that will, in turn, put money in their pockets.

I would like to answer some questions that superintendents may have about our operations, such as:

- How does your company solicit new business?
- When IGM comes on board, is the superintendent dismissed?
- If IGM does hire the current superintendent, what will his benefits be?
- If you don't cut salaries and benefits, how does IGM stay in business?

Let's talk about soliciting business, since this is the first step in the process. IGM has a successful marketing campaign in place. It relies on focused advertising in several national publications, as well as word of mouth. These sources draw many inquiries from course owners and operators. When owners/operators contact us, we provide them with information over the phone, through company literature, from our Web site or conducting an on-site visit. If we do go on-site, we encourage the owner to inform the superintendent.

We also call on courses when we hear that their superintendents have left. These cases are treated as a typical sales call, and our company profile becomes our resume.

As for recruiting, we are always in the market for good, knowledgeable people. IGM will almost always offer the superintendent the opportunity to work for it at that course, and becoming an IGM employee gives superintendents benefits that individual courses may not offer them.

For example, security, as well as opportunities for advancement, abound at IGM. Superintendents can move up the ladder without having to change bosses, benefits or companies. We encourage them to enhance their job skills by furthering their education through programs sponsored by IGM or by attending seminars through GCSAA or its regional chapters.

IGM will save a superintendent time and money when there is a problem. Instead of spending fruitless hours to find a solution themselves, superintendents with IGM can turn to the regional manager or peers at other IGM-maintained courses for advice. Odds are, someone at IGM has experienced similar problems and has solution suggestions. Also, should the need arise for a special type of equipment that the course doesn't own, the superintendent can turn to IGM to borrow the tools necessary to get the job done.

Because IGM is a turnkey maintenance operation, owners and operators can concentrate on profit-producing areas of the golf course, including marketing and retail.

Which brings me to the "How does IGM earn its keep?" question. IGM can do many things in-house that individual golf courses can't. The company has a network of preferred vendors and reviews bids and proposals to negotiate the best possible rates. It has contracted with all kinds of companies that deal with everything from mower repair to water drainage. Contracting with these preferred vendors results in preferred pricing. IGM passes these savings on to its clients. It's one way the company earns its management fees.

Continued on page 22



WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

Some superintendents suggest that industry associations unite and establish an accreditation program to regulate management companies. Those willing to follow a set of standards and guidelines for accreditation would be endorsed by the associations. Do you agree?

"What's the point?" For a great superintendent, life in a management company is preferable to life in the private club community. In a management company structure, [the person's] job performance is evaluated by professional peers as opposed to the green chairman's wife. Our superintendents are not slaves and indentured servants."

— *Mike Heacock, vice president of agronomy/director of maintenance, American Golf Corp.*

"The idea of regulation of golf course management companies has absolutely no merit whatsoever. The livelihoods of superintendents, owners and other golf course employees depends on how much value they bring to a company and on the normal supply and demand of employment."

— *Mike Hughes, executive director, National Golf Course Owners Association*

"Management companies are the wave of the future. Eventually, mom-and-pop courses aren't going to be able to compete. Will there still be mom-and-pop owners? Sure, but most of them are going to seek cover, either under a brand name or a management company."

— *Tom Schlick, director of agronomy and grounds operations, Marriott Golf*

"There needs to be some protections in place for existing employees at the clubs that are being taken over by management companies.

— *Max Bowden, CGCS, Cleveland CC, Shelby, N.C.*

"I work for a management company now, and I worked for another management company in the past. There are pros and cons of management companies. However, there are pros and cons of working for a single owner. I think some management companies would go for the accreditation just for looks, and others would elect not to try for it"

— *Steve Cronin, superintendent, Pinecrest GC, Holliston, Mass.*

"The accreditation program would be a good idea, except I don't believe most management companies would sign on. What benefit would they get from the extra requirements set by this program? I'm sure that pay scale would be part of the program because most management companies pay less than the average golf course or country club. The endorsement by the associations is a big benefit"

— *Bob Tillema, CGCS, Sherwood Forest GC*

"It would be nice to see an accreditation program, but are management companies willing to abide by it? They'll do what they want. This is America."

— *Dennis Petruzzelli, CGCS, Lakeover National GC, Bedford Hill, NY*

"You can't do it legally. You can't have somebody looking over them. It sounds good, but the courts would eat you alive."

— *Dave Fearis, president, GCSAA*

Yea

Continued from page 19

Hiring a company like IGM certainly makes it easier for the owners/operators to budget for their maintenance program. The person knows up-front the costs for the year. Unpredictable factors, such as weather, illness and equipment failure, that can shred budgets into waste paper, don't come into play because of the fixed maintenance fee.

A golf course maintenance company like IGM will turn maintenance into nearly an exact science, often saving the owner/operator money. Everybody wins, including golfers, who can play well-maintained courses at rates that aren't driven higher by unmanaged maintenance costs.

Companies like ours can help turn maintenance into a more exact science, often saving owner/operators money and producing better playing conditions. We can also provide our team members with great support, better benefits and an opportunity to grow. Under these circumstances, everybody wins — including the superintendent and our profession as a whole. ■



Greg Plotner is vice president of Florida operations for Lakeland, Fla.-based International Golf Maintenance.

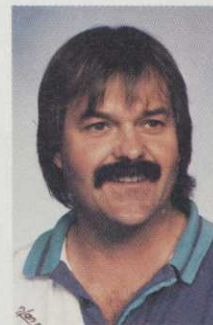
Nay

Continued from page 20

for the villains because they refuse to challenge the unethical practices of these rogue management companies. Maybe it's because they fear the loss of membership dollars or legal action, or they simply feel there's nothing that can be done.

The GCSAA, the USGA, the PGA and the CMAA could get together and regulate the business of management companies to an extent by setting up an accreditation program. Any management company that's willing to follow a set of standards and guidelines for accreditation would be endorsed by these associations. It would be a huge advantage for a company to be endorsed by the governing bodies of the industry. If I were a course owner, I would be more inclined to hire a company that was backed by the industry than one that said it could do the job cheaper.

Past superintendents worked relentlessly to raise the standards of our profession. Unless today's industry professionals do something to slow the current trend, we will all have horror stories to tell. ■



Mike Hamilton, CGCS, is superintendent at Foxfire CC in Naples, Fla.