

# Wanted: More Workers

What is the biggest challenge you face in your job?



\*Irrigation/Ownership issues  
Ownership Issues  
Resources  
Unrealistic Owner Expectations

**R**on Ross, CGCS of Quarry Oaks GC in scenic Ashland, Neb., recently lamented about the difficulty of finding employees to work on his crew. When the unemployment rate is low and your course is located about 30 miles from a metropolitan area, it's difficult to attract potential workers, Ross says.

A whopping 58 percent of superintendents participating in our Superintendent State of the Industry Survey agreed with Ross that labor is the biggest challenge they face in their jobs. The second-biggest challenge is the weather, according to 23 percent of superintendents in the survey. Ten percent note that unrealistic golfer expectations is their biggest challenge.

Since other businesses, such as fast-food restaurants, offer employees better wages and benefits, the golf course maintenance industry has problems attracting laborers.

"We've had a lot of turnover the past few years," says John Cummings, superintendent for Berry Hills CC in Charleston, W.Va. "Our entry-level pay rate is less than some fast-food restaurants."

Keith Ihms, superintendent of Bent Tree CC in Dallas, says his golf course upped pay rates from \$5.50 to \$6.50 an hour this year to better compete for employees with fast-food eateries and car-wash operations, which are paying up to \$8 an hour.

"We had to make major adjustments with our budget to be competitive," Ihms says. "We also put a 401k plan in place. We're looking at

how we can entice employees to work here."

Cummings says another problem is that there aren't a lot of skilled employees available. "I hate having a \$5.75-an-hour employee running a \$40,000 fairway mower," he adds.

But superintendents realize they must hire unskilled workers and train them because of the shortage of employees. That includes Cummings, who says he's hoping to introduce a better pay package in 2001 to attract more help.

Ihms notes that a government crackdown on illegal Hispanic laborers reduced the labor pool in the Dallas area. Many Hispanic laborers have been shown the door because they don't have the proper documentation to work in the States. "The timing is difficult because the labor force is already small," says Ihms, noting that he's helping some of his Hispanic employees obtain proper documentation.

Bruce Rickert, CGCS at Medford Village CC in Medford Lakes, N.J., says weather and unrealistic golfer expectations combine to present him with his biggest challenge. Rickert explains that golfers underestimate the weather's impact on his course and therefore expect first-rate conditions every day. For instance, a golfer doesn't understand that a half-inch of rain will slow the greens, and a superintendent can't do anything about it, Rickert points out.

"I get discouraged with golfers," he adds. "The overall conditions of golf have improved dramatically over the years. There's more money going into maintenance, but [golfers] don't understand that." ■

— Larry Aylward