

Simply the

Top clubs covet those who acquire proper skills

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR

It doesn't happen often, but recently Cary Corbitt needed a superintendent for one of his five courses at the breathtaking Sea Pines/Harbor Town Resort in Hilton Head Island, S.C. With his Harbor Town Golf Links course regarded as one of the best in the world, Corbitt knew he had to be selective because of its sterling reputation.

Corbitt, director of sports for Sea

Pines Co., which owns the resort on Hilton Head Island, S.C., received 50 résumés for the position. He looked at 12 — and none of them came from a superintendent outside of a 150-mile radius of the resort. Selective? Corbitt admits it might sound as if he's even being downright discriminatory, but it's important for such a course to recruit someone who understands what it takes to grow grass in a place where temperatures often reach 105 degrees during the sum-

mer and humidity levels range from 50 percent to 100 percent.

"We're *all* judged on how the course looks and plays," Corbitt says. "It's important for a superintendent to understand the growing season here and what it takes to maintain a course under those conditions."

Top courses, top skills

Top courses demand top skills, and owners aren't afraid to wait until they find the perfect candidate to fill a vacant superintendent's job. At the highest levels, it's not just about the course; it's about protecting reputations those courses have worked hard to build. At today's best courses, the ability to grow grass is a given; now multiple responsibilities require more skills.

"There has been a distinct change in the profession over the last six to 10 years," says Dick Kopplin, president of Kopplin Search, a job placement firm in La Quinta, Calif. "It's a credit to the superintendents who have worked hard to improve the image of the profession, but it has made it extremely competitive out there."

Kopplin Search usually fills 20 to 35 positions in the industry each year, including as many as 12 superintendents. Kopplin says course owners respect the profession far more than they did 15

FIVE SECRETS TO GETTING YOUR RÉSUMÉ READ

- 1. Write a personal cover letter.** The cover letter demonstrates to a prospective employer the type of work you are capable of doing. Spelling and grammar count, so double and triple check your work (or, better yet, have someone else proof it).
- 2. Limit your résumé to one page.** In today's world of instantaneous communication, anything more than one page will turn off a potential employer. Do not package your résumé in a fancy binder. It should be easy for a potential employer to fax it (or e-mail it) where it needs to go.
- 3. Outline your accomplishments and achievements.** Keep the accomplishments to bullet points. Don't overwhelm a prospective employer with information; let the accomplishments stand on their own merits.
- 4. Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.** Don't exaggerate your accomplishments and don't hide jobs from which you were fired. Employers will appreciate your honesty, and if they don't, you probably wouldn't want to work for them anyway.
- 5. Include an "attaboy/attagirl" section.** Use this section to personalize the résumé with accomplishments of which you are most proud. Trumpet awards and recognitions you have received. This is a better use of space than listing your birth date, marital status and your children's names.

Best



STAN GORMAN

The Makings of a Super Superintendent

years ago and pay top dollar for someone with proven ability. "Salaries are definitely moving upward," he says.

Salaries for the leading jobs range from \$85,000 to \$100,000, with the best jobs commanding even larger salaries, Kopplin says.

Sea Pines/Harbor Town Resort has one private club, two daily fee resort courses and one PGA course that hosts the MCI Classic each year. For Corbitt,

superintendents need experience hosting a tournament (at least for the PGA course). They also need to understand that the job requires a long-term commitment and cannot serve merely as a stepping stone to somewhere else. Corbitt says his company mandates a minimum of six years experience and demands at least a five-year commitment to stay once a job is offered.

"It's one of the first things we talk

about in the hiring process," Corbitt says. "Turnover isn't something we like, and we haven't had turnover in a long time."

Frank Jemsek, owner of Cog Hill GC, a private club in Chicago, says he also looks for someone with a proven track record.

"You want to look for someone who did a good job elsewhere before you hand your course to him," Jemsek says. "I wish

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I knew how to hire a guy who's 25 years old and a great superintendent, but sometimes you don't have the portfolio."

Tommy Cuthbert, director of golf for Kiawah Island Golf & Tennis Resort in Kiawah Island, S.C., says turnover at his five courses is minimal. The least-tenured superintendent has worked there eight years.

Cuthbert says familiarity with the region is high on his priority list for superintendents. It's not easy to grow grass in South Carolina, so it helps if a superintendent has already done it, he adds.

WWLD?*

*(What Would Latshaw Do?)

Paul R. Latshaw's résumé reads like a Who's Who list of the top courses in the United States: Congressional CC, Oakmont CC and Augusta National GC, just to drop a few names. Now at Winged Foot CC in Mamaroneck, N.Y., Latshaw says working at one of the top 10 courses in the country isn't always as glamorous as some might think.

"People believe it's great to work at one of those courses, but that's not necessarily true," Latshaw says. "When a course finally breaks into that upper echelon, it can become hallowed ground. No one wants to let you work with it."

Latshaw says his ideal job would include:

- a large budget;
- a small committee so decisions could be made more quickly;
- a course that kept its rounds to between 10,000 and 30,000 per year, depending on the number of holes;
- free rein to set the maintenance agenda; and
- the freedom to shut down the course periodically to do the necessary maintenance work without having to worry that golfers will be champing at the bit to play.

"Ideally, you'd love to work for a course where no one would play at all," Latshaw quips. "But that would kind of defeat the purpose."

Sea Pines' Corbitt says superintendents should probably pick a region in which they want to work and stay there. Expertise in maintaining regional courses elevates superintendents to leading positions within that geographic area.

People skills paramount

Since growing grass in South Carolina is challenging, Kiawah's Cuthbert says superintendents who want jobs with his resort must also possess great people skills.

"When the conditions get stressful — and because of where we are located, they will — we can't have someone who's flying off the handle at the crews," Cuthbert says. "You've got to handle stress because it will be part of any job where golfers expect perfect conditions every time they play."

Good communication — with employees, employers and golfers — can squelch some of those problems before

they surface. It falls under those "people skills" the best clubs look for, says Jerry Faubel, president of Executive Golf Search in Saginaw, Mich.

"You have to be able to talk to the owner and the golfers about what will happen depending on what they decide to let you do," Faubel says. "If the membership has an understanding of what's going on and why it's happening, members may be more willing to let the superintendent do his job with minimal interference."

Top courses seek superintendents comfortable with high visibility, Kopplin says. Superintendents shouldn't wait for members to come to them with suggestions about the course — they should invite input from club members and owners, he adds.

But Faubel says top courses don't want constant confrontation.

"The courses aren't worried about

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

A wise man once said, "Be careful what you wish, young man, for someday you shall surely receive it" The advice applies to deciding whether to move from one superintendent's job to another. Jerry Faubel, president of Executive Golf Search, says money shouldn't be the sole factor in deciding when to take a new job.

"I would caution superintendents against just chasing the money," Faubel says. "Money's nice, but there are a lot of other factors integral to the top jobs that may make them less attractive."

For example:

• **Cost of living.** What it costs to live in Saginaw, Mich., where Executive Golf Search is located, is not the same it will cost you to live in Los Angeles, New York or other cities where the top courses reign.

"A lot of people don't take that into consideration when they make a decision," Faubel says. "They just look at the number." (For help in calculating cost of living differences, check out <http://homefair.com/index.html>. The site will help you decide in which job you will be better compensated.)

• **Increased stress:** As might be expected, the best jobs also incur more stress (see "Lights, Camera ... Angst!", pg. 50). Be sure you're ready to accept the scrutiny that comes with keeping a top course in top condition all the time.

• **Curtailing of family time:** Top courses expect superintendents to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Free time, already compressed for all superintendents, becomes nearly nonexistent. Such constraints often put further strains on marriages and relationships with children, Faubel says. "Your family life often goes right out the window," he adds.

Faubel isn't suggesting superintendents shouldn't pursue better jobs when they have the opportunity. He just advises them to do so cautiously.

"There are many factors that go into a decision about pursuing a top job," Faubel says. "Weigh them all carefully before making a final decision."

someone who stands on principle as long as the person isn't constantly in a fighting mood," Faubel says. "Tact and diplomacy are a premium at the top courses."

Top superintendents should stay flexible to handle challenges as they arise, Faubel says. Kiawah's Cuthbert says the best superintendents hire good support staffs, and they should be open to the latest thinking, especially that of the younger generation.

"You have to be willing to talk to young people today and not be threatened by what they have to say," Cuthbert says. "The more exposure you have to new ideas, the better the course will be."

Faubel says great superintendents should never fear asking advice about solving problems. "One of the beauties of this industry is how willing people are to share information," he says.

Business savvy necessary

At the highest levels, superintendents need business skills to handle budgets, Kopplin says. They must relate budgeting needs in terms owners will understand. Corbitt says budgeting experience is a must at his courses because his company isn't running the courses as a public service — they expect to make money.

"Our superintendents have to be willing to stick to budgets," Corbitt says. "As we've become more of a business, margins are growing thinner, and superintendents have to know how to deal with that."

Finally, as with other professions, education and certification pare down the list of superintendents who can compete for jobs at the highest levels. Kopplin says the educational level of today's top superintendents far eclipses that expected in the past. Sea Pines requires a two-year turf management degree as minimum educational experience and expects its superintendents to be certified, Corbitt says.

Cog Hill's Jemsek says owners' money is best spent enrolling superintendents in local associations.

"Superintendents need to increase their knowledge regularly and being a mem-

ber of the local organization is a perfect way to do that," Jemsek says. "They build relationships there that can help them learn about maintaining golf courses."

The emphasis on education has grown exponentially, Kopplin says. "People are realizing that this is a multimillion dollar enterprise they're handing over to a superintendent. They

won't just take anyone," he says.

But even in a competitive market, a superintendent with the right skills is worthy of reaping the rewards for his hard work.

"Top-quality superintendents command top-quality salaries," Corbitt says. "If they're good at what they do, they can command whatever they want." ■

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