

His Acute Attention to Detail Makes a Lasting Impression

BY MARK LESLIE

When Kirk Carls decided to make a midlife career change into turfgrass management, he was very fortunate. The Michigan State University professor he called for advice connected him to Kurt Thuemmel, certified superintendent of Walnut Hills CC in East Lansing, Mich., one of the country's foremost mentors of golf course assistant superintendents.

Seven years later, and now head superintendent at Spring Lake (Mich.) CC, Carls says: "Everything I have today is because of Kurt Thuemmel. He's been invaluable to me. You always have one guy who brought you along, gave you advice and helped you in time of need. He has been that guy for me."

"One of the things you immediately learn from Kurt is the importance of attention to detail, as well as keeping your nose to the grindstone and minding every detail on a daily basis," says seven-year Thuemmel assistant Curt Grost, now head superintendent at Willow Wood CC in Portland, Mich.

For his dedication, Thuemmel is a recipient of *Golfdom's* Keepers of the Green Award, sponsored by Floratine Products, for being one of the nation's best superintendents/mentors.

Carls and Grost are among at least 10 former Thuemmel assistants who are current head superintendents, according to Jim Johnson of Green & Grow, a Floratine distributor who nominated Thuemmel for the award.

"It's very rewarding (to mentor), especially when you get a phone call and they tell you they are doing some of the same practices as you, and they are very happy with the results," Thuemmel says. "You see yourself reflected in their work."

Proud of the success of his pupils, he says, "If a person does not move on and

become successful, you have to wonder if you have not contributed enough to his or her development."

A 1971 Michigan State University graduate and past president of the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation and West Michigan GCSA, Thuemmel lists "dedication to your employer" as the No. 1 priority he tries to instill. Also important, he adds, are "a good work ethic, integrity, being meticulous and responsible and being able to make decisions that aren't always necessarily popular but you believe are the right things to do. You take a stand."

"Golfers judge your work on a daily basis," Thuemmel says. "I tell my assistants that what sets us apart from other golf courses is the fact that we pay attention to the little things, which are often the sources of negative feedback from the golfers. It could be the towels and ball washers aren't as clean as they should be as opposed to the fairways being cut too long or too short. Or trash lying around may bother an individual more than a bunker not being raked. Since everyone can view what you do daily, you have to look at the whole picture and not just focus on the obvious." ■

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Kurt Thuemmel

Certified superintendent of Walnut Hills CC in East Lansing, Mich.

