

Shades Of Green

OPINION

I was thumbing through *Successories*, a motivational and recognition catalog, when I came across the “Motivational Classics” section. In it was a quotation by Arnold Palmer on a framed painting of a seaside golf course. The title of the piece was “The Essence of Golf.”

I had seen the quotation by Palmer before, but I suddenly realized how well it applied to superintendents, too. Here is the full quotation, substituting the word “greenkeeping” for “golf” and the word “profession” for “game”:

“Greenkeeping is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated. It satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening — it is without a doubt the greatest profession mankind has ever invented.”

Let me explain, point by point, how this applies to your profession.

Greenkeeping is deceptively simple: After all, all you have to do is mow, water, fertilize, spray and cultivate the turf.

It is endlessly complicated: Maintain unnatural mowing heights at or less than one-eighth of an inch. Conduct all management practices to avoid disturbing the playing surfaces for the customers at all costs. Balance growing and playing conditions against special-events schedules. Hire, train, motivate and supervise an increasingly diverse work force.

It satisfies the soul: There is nothing like a sunrise, a grazing deer, a wading heron or simply leaving your mark on the land. There’s nothing quite like coaxing velvet-smooth, fast and true greens from clumps of sprigs or a sea of golden seeds spread on the bare ground.

It frustrates the intellect: You have to deal with the mind-numbingly annoying demands made on you by golfers. You hear them ask: “Why can’t our course look like Augusta National?” You’ll have no sun for days and weeks or no rain for months and months, and you’ll hear, “What’s wrong with the greens?”

It is at the same time rewarding: You learn new skills. You meet interesting people from the worlds of academics, sports, entertainment, business and scores of peers who have pushed the limits of turf management. You have taken a patch of bare ground and turned it into a playing field.

You Work in a Great Profession

BY JOEL JACKSON



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You grow personally as well as professionally through participation in your local associations. You have provided a good living for your family. Subordinates and turf students you hire, train, intern and mentor one day become head superintendents.

It is at the same time maddening: Even when it’s raining cats and dogs (or there is frost on the ground), you’ll still get the call from the pro shop to ask, “When can we let them go?”

You use the same operator, the same chemical, the same sprayer, the same rate, the same program that you always do, and on this day you get turf burns on the overlap.

The day of the special tournament, two employees show up late or don’t show up at all.

The EPA bans an effective and economical product that has never been shown to be a problem except when fed in obscene amounts to lab rats.

The total area of the golf course never changes, but the conditioning expectations keep climbing. You are expected to do more with less during hard times. At the same time, you have to try to satisfy scratch golfers and double-digit handicappers on the same day.

It is without a doubt the greatest profession mankind has ever invented: Amen. Ever since the days of Old Tom Morris, the greenkeeper remains the most important person on the golf course when it comes to having the knowledge and ability to manage the club’s most important asset.

Maybe Palmer was subconsciously paying tribute to his superintendent father when he uttered his famous quotation. But whatever the motivation, I was pleased to discover a deeper meaning for the profession we all love.

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