

We've Got Mail

■ LETTERS FROM THE FIELD

Point/Counterpoint Part 2: In Support of Certification

Editor's note: In the July *Golfdom*, the cover story featured a *Point/Counterpoint* article debate over the merits of the Golf Course Superintendent Association of America's certification process written by certified golf course superintendent Rafael Barajas and superintendent Christopher S. Gray Sr. We received several letters supporting Gray's point that certification isn't needed, which were printed in October. However, we didn't receive any letters in support of Barajas' point — that certification can benefit superintendents — until after the October letters were printed. Here are the letters we received in support of Barajas' point. They were edited for length.

After reading the letters regarding certification, I feel many of your readers are missing the point of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's certification program. It seems the perception is this program was implemented to provide an ego boost, and it creates an elitism that separates superintendents who are certified from those who aren't. While members can be proud of attaining certification, it certainly doesn't mean there aren't non-certified Class A and superintendent members who are equally competent at their jobs. I submit, though, that the purpose of the GCSAA certification program is an attempt at enhancing the image of the golf course superintendent as a professional by providing standards and qualifications that are comparable to those required in other recognized professions.

At one time or another, we've all been called "grass farmers" or have heard the comment that "there is nothing to being a superintendent." We've bristled at these labels. One of the reasons for this misperception is our industry has, until this program, never had any standards by which to measure our professionalism. Can you think of any other group that is considered a profession that doesn't have standards? That is what the GCSAA certification program is trying to promote.

One reader's letter in your October issue commented that "you advance yourself by your performance day after day and year after

year — not by a test and title given out by the GCSAA." I couldn't agree more. But we advance the image and professionalism of the superintendent by setting and attaining measurable standards. Certification

may not be something you as an individual are interested in attaining, but look beyond your individual situation at the big picture. We, as superintendents, have come a long way and programs such as this can do nothing but enhance our image as professionals.

**Steve Ravenkamp, Certified Golf Course Superintendent
Tenkiller Golf Club, Vian, Okla.**

There are many reasons superintendents become certified. For me, it was not done to acquire status but was done out of necessity. Due to several major changes in college before settling on studying agronomy, I ran out of college funding after 4.5 years and had to leave school. While I had accumulated many credits, I didn't have enough that counted toward a bachelor's degree in agronomy so I left school with an associate's degree in agronomy. But I noticed many openings for better jobs required applicants to have a bachelor's degree, and I felt I needed to become certified to get my foot in the door for the better jobs.

After becoming certified, I believe it helped me open some doors and get some interviews that I otherwise wouldn't have gotten, including for my current position. Becoming certified wasn't an easy process and took time, effort and money. As being certified wasn't a requirement at my previous position, I had to pay for the education and expenses.

Upon becoming certified, the board of directors at my previous position saw the value and began paying for my continuing education to maintain certification. The board also gave me a pay raise. My current position also doesn't require me to be certified, but my employers see the value and fully support and fund the continuing education needed to maintain my CGCS status.

Professional certification is not uncommon



and many professional associations and trade unions have some form of certification to acknowledge their members' continuing education and experience in their fields. Think about our employers: For the most part, they're successful

professionals or entrepreneurs, many of whom belong to professional associations or have done much continuing education themselves to advance their knowledge and skills.

**Chris Thuer, Certified Golf Course Superintendent
Bear Slide Golf Club, Cicero, Ind.**

The merits of certification were well stated by certified golf course superintendent Rafael Barajas. Regarding Christopher S. Gray Sr.'s counter position, I agree with his assessment that "certification doesn't, in any way, guarantee actual job performance success." This is an argument I often hear and I totally agree.

However, I must respectfully disagree with Gray when he states the certification program is "driving a wedge between membership classes." His implication that certification is a classification is incorrect. Certification isn't a membership category. Another assertion from Gray states that "many of the certified superintendents truly believe they're the elite of the association and that the GCSAA supports and encourages that belief." This implies that arrogance is rampant among certified superintendents. This comment disturbs me, and I'd vehemently debate the GCSAA doesn't condone that attitude among its members.

Certification is a personal choice. The program help you self-assess and identify competencies that can be improved. The program challenges you to become a better course manager.

The certification program is a curriculum our forefathers created more than 35 years ago and is constantly reviewed and modified by our peers. Gray's attacks, in my opinion, are directed at individuals and feelings and not the program in general. He missed the point.

**Bill Bieck, Certified Golf Course Superintendent
Heritage Hills Golf Course, McCook, Neb.**