




Happy Graduation ... Sort of

'Future Turf Managers' gear up to begin careers in the recession of a lifetime

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief



It wasn't the job Cory Gettemeier really wanted, but he took it without hesitation. This is no time to be picky, after all. It's the Great Recession, and the unemployment rate is the highest it has been in 25 years.

And Gettemeier has the distinction of graduating into this economic mess. The 22-year-old recently graduated from the University of Missouri with a four-year degree in plant science.

"I took what I could get," Gettemeier says, noting he feels lucky to have a job.

Gettemeier is working as an assistant superintendent at a public course in Alton, Ill., across the Missouri River from St. Louis, where he grew up. It wasn't his first choice for a job, but Gettemeier has no complaints. "I'll see where it takes me from here," he says.

Gettemeier spoke about his future — ironically — during an event held by Jacobsen called the "Future Turf Managers." The mower and equipment manufacturer invited 35 students from universities across the country to participate in the three-day event held at its headquarters in Charlotte, N.C. The event allowed the students the opportunity to learn and interact with turf professionals in an educational environment under the guidance of industry leaders.

The students, most of whom recently graduated with four-year, turf-related degrees, were recommended by their professors as being top-level candidates with "great prospects" to become future leaders as they progress in their careers, according to Jacobsen.

Of course, all the graduates agree they face a tough job market. Gettemeier, knowing graduation was upon him, began looking for work last December. He didn't realize how tough the economy was getting until he couldn't find a job.

"Lucky for me, a former boss of mine who was an assistant at another course was laid off," Gettemeier says. "But he found a job at a public course and asked me to join him."

The other attendees of the Jacobsen event also realize what they're up against,

but they remain upbeat about their futures. Shane Tuhy, 23, who graduated in May from North Dakota State University with a degree in turf management, says he applied for a few assistant superintendent positions but didn't get them. He's working for a nine-hole course this summer in his hometown of Killdeer, N.D.

"If I would have graduated a year ago, there was plenty of opportunity for assistant superintendent jobs," Tuhy says. "But that is not the case this year."

With the lack of available jobs, Tuhy thought for a moment about attending graduate school. But he wants to begin his career now. "My goal is to be a superintendent," he says, noting he would prefer to stay in the Midwest.

The graduates realize they must use all the tools available to them to find jobs, including networking. Brian Tencza, who recently graduated from the University of Connecticut with a bachelor's degree in turfgrass and soil science, found a job with a little bit of help from his friends. Tencza began his new job on Memorial Day as the second assistant at Glenarbor Golf Club in Bedford Hills, N.Y. He was helped by an industry connection. His former professor, John Kaminski, spoke with Glenarbor's certified superintendent, Ken Benoit, and told him about Tencza.

"Networking means everything," Tencza says. "I'm very fortunate to have a job."

Ryan Tretter landed a nice gig. He gets to work for Superintendent John Zimmers Jr. at Oakmont Country Club near Pittsburgh. Zimmers Jr. is well known for his mentoring capabilities. Tretter, who graduates in December from Delaware Valley College, began an internship at the club this summer and begins work as its second assistant later this year. Tretter, who says he wants to make a career out of working at high-end courses, interned at Pine Valley Golf Club last year.

Tim Williams, 19, recently graduated with an associate's degree in golf course operation from Delhi State University of New York. But Williams is staying in school to obtain a four-year degree. He hopes business in the golf industry is thriving by then.



Eric Sides (center), Jacobsen's training manager, played a big role in the Future Turf Managers program, whether it was conducting equipment demonstrations during the day, teaching attendees about the nuances of go-carting at night (the trip also included some fun and games), or just talking and joking with them to make them feel at home.

"It seems like we're at our low now, but I think things will pick up again," he says.

Lyne Tumlinson, director of career services for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, spoke to the graduates during the event. She told them they were entering a changing business world because of the down economy. "Businesses are going to look different than they did before because everybody is going through this," she said. "And the golf industry will change as well as every other business."

Tumlinson said taking a first job offer is not a bad thing, even if it's not the job a person really wants. "I don't think it's as much where you work as it is whom you work for and what you learn," she said.

With golf course closings outnumbering openings the past three years, the competition for jobs has only gotten more competitive.

Continued on page 44

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Continued from page 43

Tumlinson said the graduates must find ways to differentiate themselves.

Eventually, course openings will again outnumber closings. That won’t happen in 2009, but it could happen in the next few years. Most of the graduates believe the golf economy will soon turn in their favor.

“Golf will bounce back up,” Tretter says. “The game will grow. You’ll see more golf courses being built in the next five or 10 years.”

Gettemeier, who says he’s still “very concerned” about the economy, says he got the feeling from others at the meeting that things would get better. “I’ve been working on golf courses since I was 15,” he says. “I love working outside and working with people. I hope I can find a decent course where I can make a living.”

Peter Whirr, Jacobsen’s vice presi-

Augusta’s Owen Gives the Graduates Some Sound Advice

‘Future Turf Managers’ tour famed golf club as part of educational program

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Jacobsen’s “Future Turf Managers,” a program which began in the 1970s, bills itself as an opportunity for just-graduated or soon-to-graduate college students “to learn and interact with turfgrass professionals in an educational environment under the guidance of industry leaders, an experience impossible to duplicate in the classroom.”

That’s no lie. The 35 attendees toured Jacobsen’s manufacturing facilities in Charlotte and the E-Z-GO plant (Jacobsen’s sister plant) while on a

field trip to Augusta, Ga. They also listened to several high-profile speakers. And as part of the activities while on the field trip to Augusta, the attendees visited Augusta National Golf Club, where they had a question-and-answer session with Brad Owen, superintendent of the club. Then they got to tour the maintenance facility and part of the grounds and have their photograph taken on the Ben Hogan Bridge.

Owen has been at Augusta since 1986, when he interned as a student from

Penn State University. He began full time in 1987 and worked on the crew. He became superintendent in 1997. “I’m fortunate and lucky to be here,” he told the attendees. “It’s a pretty special place.”

A graduate asked Owen for his advice on getting a job. Owen advised not to take a job just because of its title. It may be that such a job is not at the level of the person’s future expectations.

“If you’re shooting for the stars or want to be at a nice private club that holds a major



dent of product support, doesn't believe the doom and gloomers who say economic recovery will be slow.

"With new technology — and the way the world seems to be that much smaller — I think recovery will be that much quicker," he says. "And when it does recover I think you'll see a totally different industry to what happened just prior to when the recession took place. What will it look like? I don't think it will go back to the way it was, with the changes in technology, alternative fuel sources and lean processes. It will be a different looking industry."

When employers are scanning his resume, Tuhy hopes they're impressed he was selected to attend the Future Turf Managers event, which he considers a feather in his cap. "I hope employers realize how special it was for me to be here when they see it on my resume," he says. ■

PHOTOS BY: LARRY AYLWARD



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"Don't take a position that's not going to get you where you want to be 10 years down the road."

— BRAD OWEN

tournament, you need to seek that early on," Owen said. "If it's not available, don't be impatient. Don't take a position that's not going to get you where you want to be 10 years down the road. Don't take an assistant job at the XYZ Club just because you want to be an assistant."

When asked about how he manages stress and balances career with family while working at such a high-profile club, Owen said he often relies on his faith to give him strength and direction.

"We don't control our lives and our destiny as much as we think we do when we start figuring out our goals and plans," Owen says. "There's somebody else bigger than all of us who knows what that plan is." ■

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