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Petal TO THE METAL

Taking care of ornamentals
isn't the only thing being asked
of full-time horticulturists these days

By Thomas Skernivitz, Managing Editor

Bruce Williams spent 21 years without a horticulturist and the last eight years with one. Now, the certified superintendent of Los Angeles Country Club is looking for a new one.

Gardeners need not apply.



For every superintendent seeking a full-time horticulturist or thinking about acquiring one, Williams brings good news. While weeding out job applicants this spring, he discovered quite a few possessed more than just a green thumb. Many were certified horticulturists. Others were certified arborists. Some were both.

"I was a little bit surprised at the quality and talents of the people who were out there who were interested in working for me," Williams says.

Surprised but not disappointed.

"Today the trend is what it is with all positions on the golf course: You try to get better than you had before," Williams says. "A lot of places are no longer just hiring a gardener. They're hiring a qualified horticulturist."

That type of quality is abundant these days, according to Williams. At least in his area, the golf course industry, he says, has more to offer horticulturists than other markets. Salaries — even if they're commensurate to that of an assistant superintendent — supercede what horticulturists often earn, he notes. And there's something to be said about being stationed in one location.

"A lot of these people work for companies that manage large properties and estates ... and they have to take care of 20 different properties a day," Williams says. "Driving around in the L.A. traffic is not exactly fun."

Coping without a horticulturist can be dif-

ficult, says Williams, who had to do just that during his 21 years as superintendent at Bob'O'Link Golf Club, near Chicago. Degreed in turfgrass science, superintendents often have to hire an outside consultant or landscape architect in the absence of a horticulturist.

"For the most part, we're grass guys," he says. "And if you've got somebody else you can add to your staff who can compliment your background and training, it only makes for a stronger team."

In absentia

Some teams aren't afforded the luxury of a full-time horticulturist. In that case, the superintendent and his or her crew might want to think twice about begonias and roses.

"They shouldn't do flowers, except for maybe right around the clubhouse," says Kim Wheeler, the certified horticulturist at Chagrin Valley Country Club in Moreland Hills, Ohio. "Otherwise, they're going to be knocking their heads against the wall, trying to keep up with the watering of everything. The guys who are doing the turf have a hard enough time as it is, and they don't want to be messing with flowers. Even low-maintenance perennials require some weeding and dead-heading. I would definitely avoid annuals."

Wheeler, a native of Miami and graduate of the University of Georgia, dedicates most of her spring and summer days to flower maintenance. Nearly all of the 18 tees at Chagrin Valley are flanked by beds that are mixed with flowers and shrubs. The course even has its own 30-foot by 100-foot greenhouse.

"If you have a greenhouse, you definitely need to have a dedicated horticulturist," she notes.

Once fall arrives, Wheeler focuses on pruning, cutting back all perennials and grasses and tidying up beds. The holiday season means installing decorative lights around the clubhouse and making sure all plant orders have been submitted. Finally, in late winter she resumes pruning, knowing there will be little time to do so once the blooming season begins.

"That's why they have me here — for the flowers," Wheeler says. "I'd also like to spend a lot more time than I do on the shrub material and maintenance of that. Otherwise, you'll wind up having to replace a lot of

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**Some clubs discourage
ornamentals on the course.**

**Others, such as Arizona
National (formerly The Raven
at Sabino Springs) in Tucson,
Ariz., emphasize flowers.**

Petal to the Metal

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material. It shows when I spend more time on the shrubs."

Leading the way

Wheeler does direct a small team that helps with her responsibilities. And that's exactly what Williams is seeking back in Los Angeles. His eventual horticulturist will manage a staff of four gardeners.

"In my case that person has to have the ability to lead a team," he says. "They've got to be able to run their own set of books. They've got to be able to not just give four people something to do each day, but they've got to be able to manage those hours. Do I need overtime this week? What's the best schedule that's going to work for the plant material?"

Williams said a horticulturist — especially one who has idle time during the winter — could also focus on the course's status with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and learn more about

government regulations specific to a topic such as underground storage tanks.

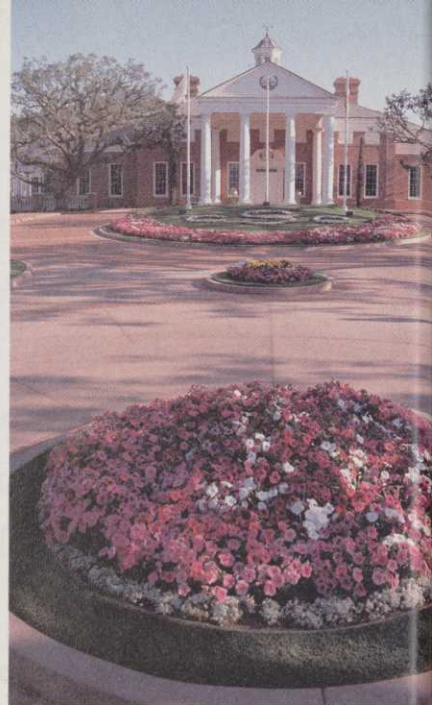
"If you bring in a horticulturist and you're paying that person a full-time salary, they've got to do a lot more than just take care of the flowers," he says.

Of course, that might scare away a few candidates. "A lot of people who are trained as horticulturists will avoid working for a golf course if they think they're going to be doing things besides horticultural things," Wheeler says. "They may not be interested in turf."

In any case the horticulturist should have a game plan that will make an impact on the customer.

"If you want people to come up the driveway past your flowers and say, 'Wow, that's nice,' that's one thing,"

Without a dedicated horticulturist, intricate displays such as the entrance to Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks, Calif., would be difficult to tend.



Williams says. "But if you want them to go, 'That's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life,' that's a different level. You get one by having a couple of guys throw some flowers in the ground. You get the other by having a strategic, logical plan and changing that plan on an annualized basis." ■

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Business Record

Beyond the Green

Think about putting some money into your Web site — Page 60

Business Partners

Course owner passes along "legacy" to son — Page 62

The Priority of Personnel: Why it Matters

BY MATTHEW J. WARD

Turnover and morale: The best facilities do not take them for granted. The ignorant clubs, however, take the approach that the primary emphasis is on turf maintenance — not the people doing the labor. But these out-of-sight and out-of-mind clubs do not factor in how such indifference can escalate to a far greater and more daunting challenge, as in turnover. Clearly, it's hard to fathom how much time, attention and dollars can be allocated to turf maintenance while very little of that is paid to the people doing the work.

Sometimes the work — rather than the personnel — becomes the only important issue. In such a scenario, unfortunately, it's easy for the boss to assume that everyone is on the same page when they're not. Sadly, the boss doesn't realize how corrosive his inertia to personnel

issues can be, and how his staff's resentment for his management style can quickly sap the morale and overall mission of the entire team.

Turnover in the golf course maintenance department is common. Much of a course's help is seasonal and includes high school students and college-age workers. But the issue of plummeting morale and chronic turnover isn't caused by seasonal changes in the workforce — it's prompted by an environment that fails to provide a range of communication tools. Hence, any facility that fosters a high dosage of turnover among its critical personnel will invariably see a steady erosion of trust. Then the desire for workers to give extra effort in all aspects of the operation can also be jeopardized and abandoned.

Once the pattern of isolation becomes the norm,

As long as there are real people doing the dirty work, it's never just about turf maintenance

repairing the rift can take far longer than most can ever imagine.

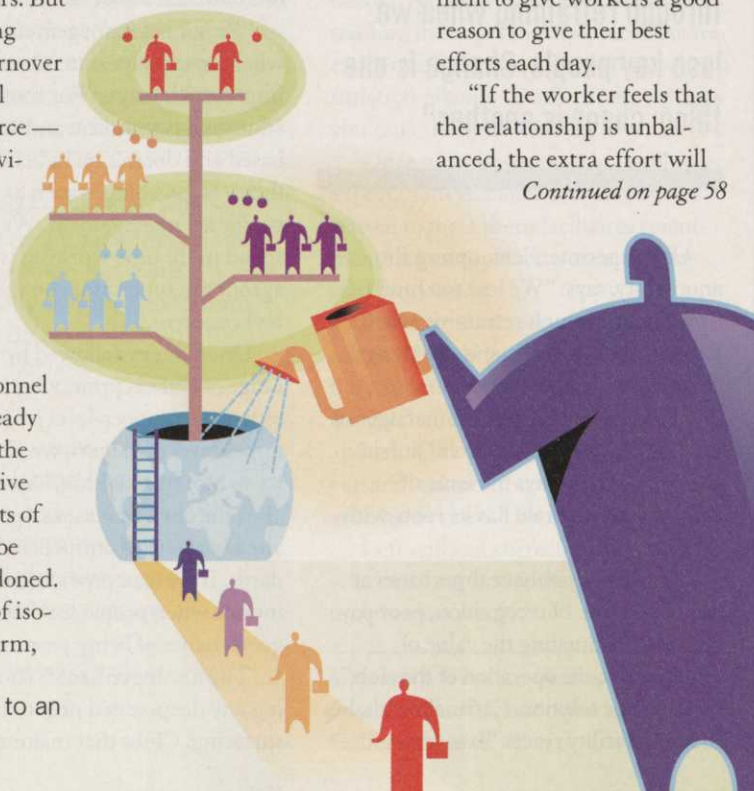
"To me, turnover is the most draining problem that can occur," says Pat Brockwell, superintendent of Black Mesa Golf Club in La Mesilla, N.M. "The time

and energy spent on hiring and training along with the low productivity that comes with the inexperience and errors of new hires keeps an operation in a crisis-management mode."

Brockwell believes it's incumbent upon management to give workers a good reason to give their best efforts each day.

"If the worker feels that the relationship is unbalanced, the extra effort will

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PERSONNEL TURNOVER will inevitably lead to an erosion of trust.

PRIORITY OF PERSONNEL

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never be given," he says. "That extra effort is always at the discretion of the worker — he chooses how much effort he will give. Management's job is to get employees to give more than the minimum."

Employee morale is affected by much more than wages, Brockwell says. A boss' flexibility and sensitivity to an employee's family or personal issues also plays a major part, he points out.

Despite the importance of two-way communication to attain positive employee morale, some bosses might opt to back off and take the denial route when things go bad. They believe it's far easier to tag people who quit as malcontents or simply unproductive. But that reaction is predictable and debilitating, and inevitably the same downward spiral of resentment and withdrawal can spread among crew members.

"We lose too much time going through retraining when we lose key people. Change is one thing; chaos is another."

One superintendent, opting for anonymity, says: "We lose too much time going through retraining when we lose key people. Change is one thing; chaos is another."

Steve Cadenelli, general manager of the Cape Cod National Golf Club in Brewster, Mass., says the issue of turnover and morale has its roots with three items.

"Generally you have three issues at work — a lack of recognition, poor pay and underestimating the value of employees to the operation of the club," he says. The solution, Cadenelli adds, lies in how a facility reacts. "It is very



IN-HOUSE PROMOTIONS encourage company-wide morale and require less training.

important to understand group dynamics and how personnel inter-relationships can make or break an operation. Slackers or negative individuals must be weeded out, or their behavior can have a very demoralizing effect on good employees."

For Jeff Spangler, the senior vice president of science and agronomy for Troon Golf, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based management company, the issue is not one of denial but of better familiarity.

"Personnel management is an area where many superintendents could improve," he says. "For most, their education is technical and agronomy-based and doesn't include other areas of their responsibilities such as financial or personnel management. We actually spend more time working with our key agronomy supervisors on these non-turf concerns."

One strategy followed by a broad range of clubs is promoting from within, especially to upper-level positions. "For upper-level managers, we almost always try to hire from within," Spangler says. "For the obvious reasons, [people] are already aware of our policies and standards. It also can provide great company morale when people see they have a good chance of being promoted."

The key ingredient is short-circuiting any deep-seated negativity from surfacing. Clubs that make assumptions

that "all is well" often miss the subtle cues present and allow them to fester and grow.

"I have found over the years, more often than not, that such problems arise from negative employees who bring down the morale and enthusiasm of others simply by their constant complaining and back biting," Cadenelli says. "Hopefully, the immediate superiors are on top of things in this regard, but if not upper management must look into such problems as a continued loss of one's better employees, which is costly in terms of re-training and productivity."

Brockwell concurs. "It's always better to talk to each other rather than about each other," he says. "Meetings can facilitate this type of exchange and promote a culture of organizational self-examination that is done in a non-threatening way."

The proper integration of all people is a daily task. They must operate with an understanding of the mission at hand and that includes how people relate with one another.

For many facilities the workforce contains a number of employees whose primary language is not English. Oscar Bucaro, superintendent of Bergen Hills Country Club in River Vale, N.J., understands that situation firsthand.

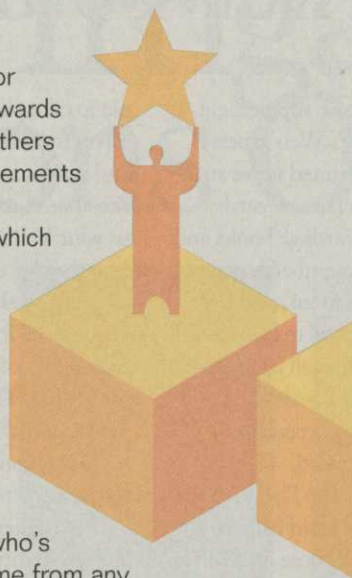
"I have an advantage because I'm

Turning off turnover. Maxing morale. What can be done?

1 SEEK EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS — There needs to be a mechanism for personnel to communicate their most candid comments without repercussion. Management should respond to suggestions made whether they are followed completely, partially or not at all.



2 PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RECOGNITION FOR THOSE ON STAFF — Some facilities opt for employee of the month-type awards or length-of-service awards. Others opt toward annual acknowledgements at a holiday party or the like. Appreciation bolsters loyalty, which intensifies ownership of the work ethic and its correlation to the facility. Pay is not the only consideration that workers value.



3 FOCUS ON RESULTS, NOT HIERARCHY — Too many organizations bog down because of so-called status — fixating on who's been around the longest. Solutions can come from any person at any time, and facilities need to move away from thinking of low-level personnel as drones.

4 UPDATE ALL ESSENTIAL JOB DESCRIPTIONS REFLECTING WHAT'S REALLY NEEDED NOW — Progressive facilities update job descriptions as needed. Job descriptions provide a map for employee and employer. When job descriptions become nothing more than empty words, the possibility exists that some on staff will be doing more and others less.

5 SCHEDULE INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS AS ROUTINE MATTERS — Meeting with key personnel through one-on-one meetings builds awareness before critical issues enter the scene. Don't simply meet only when there are issues. Regular one-on-one meetings alleviate anxiety and build long-term awareness between people. When critical matters do come forward, the relationship that's been built will weather whatever occurs.

6 CONSISTENCY: THE GOLDEN RULE — Want to know how to burn bridges? Be inconsistent with your staff. Consistency provides a reliable road map in terms of process, procedures and outcomes. Those venturing away from that road map are bound to get lost. The amount of time spent to get back on course will drain everyone and only add to the uncertainty that such situations will repeat again.

Editor's note: Information for this story was compiled by Matt Ward from interviews and research.

bilingual. I can speak with any member of the crew without a third party involved."

Such a direct link allows Bucaro to have daily interaction and prevent any misunderstandings. While the idea of having bilingual superintendents is not a mandatory job requirement, it pays to have someone with language command beyond English — particularly for those facilities located throughout the Sunbelt areas where there are many full-time and seasonal Hispanic workers.

No matter how well a communication program is created to deal with turnover and morale, there will be times when a definitive corrective action is needed — such as firing a disruptive employee.

"If a manager doesn't do this part of his job, why should the workers do theirs," said Brockwell. "Getting rid of bad employees also sends the message that good work is appreciated — that management knows the difference between the two."

But before such a Draconian action needs to go forward, it pays to avoid sending messages to employees that are easily misunderstood. Bucaro sees the situation plainly. "Don't promise things you can't deliver," he says.

Once promises are made, employee expectations escalate. The inability or refusal to meet them facilitates resentment that can spread to even the best staff workers.

In the final analysis, good and bad relationships between employees and their superiors may end up showing on the golf course. "I can play a golf course and tell if the management has an adversarial relationship or partnership with its workers," Brockwell says.

Left without corrective action, it won't be long before the paying customers see it too. ■

Matthew J. Ward is a freelance writer from Clifton, N.J., and editor of Jersey Golfer magazine.

How to Create the Right Web Site to Market Your Club

BY HEIDI VOSS

I have very bad news for printers. We no longer need you to print big, fancy color brochures for country clubs. People are turning to the World Wide Web to research potential clubs.

I have assisted in designing more than 100 club brochures, and I can tell you some very simple facts. First, the club rarely looks as good in the brochure as it does in real life, unless you have hired someone very talented to take the photos, and they have digitally remastered them.

Second, the brochure is usually out of date by the time all the "powers that be" sign off on it and it gets produced. Third, even though you proofed it one zillion times, the minute that your board president reads it, he will find a typo that you missed.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when you are creating your club Web site:

■ Your Web image should match up with your club. If you are a Tuscan-looking club in California, your Web site should portray this. You

are going to be supplementing a person's Web experience with printed items such as newsletters, scorecards, yardage books and membership applications, and you need to be sure that all images and fonts are the same for a consistent brand.

■ The Web site should be friendly to those on dial-up.

Yes, there really are people on dial-up. Not everyone is surfing at high speed, and your loading times need to be reasonable. Don't let your Web designer create something that will frustrate those on dial-up. Your site should not have membership fees listed. You may wish to list your categories of membership and a "Frequently Asked Questions," but make them call your membership director to discuss membership fees.

■ Clubs that have successful sites have something that keeps members coming back. Photo galleries are a great way to keep them perusing the site. These need to be set up with catchy captions, and many clubs make photos available for the members to reprint.

■ The Vellano Country Club took the gallery a step further and encouraged peo-

ple to take photos of themselves in club logo apparel and send it in to be put on the site. The club called it "Show us your Vellano." You can't beat that for exposure.

Vellano also created an auction site for members to bid on one-of-a-kind items for charity. This is a kind of "e-Bay twist" that keeps members coming back to see if they need to up their bids.

■ Another new private club in Richmond, Va., called The Federal Club has more than 80 members and has just begun construction of an Arnold Palmer signature

well as social nights out for members to meet and mingle. Members are sent an e-mail notification to sign up online to attend one or all of the events. Events are kept to a manageable size and most are selling out at a rapid pace.

Utilizing a Web site helps to conserve trees and stops the dreadful mailing of flyers that cause members to become numb and pitch all mail in the trash. Many designers can work with your club accounting software for easy bill viewing and for automatic billing when the member books the event.

There are so many benefits to putting your marketing dollars into your Web site. It can be kept fresh, and it's easy for members to tell others about their clubs.

Also, members who miss the club can log on while on the road and get up-to-date info on what's happening there. I know when my family misses me, they merely go to www.bauervossconsulting.com to see my smiling face.

Heidi Voss is the president of Bauer Voss Consulting, a club marketing consulting company. She specializes in new development, conversions from public to private and member buyouts. For more information, visit www.bauervossconsulting.com.

Successful Web sites have something that keeps members coming back. Photo galleries are a great way to keep them perusing the site.

golf course. To encourage camaraderie among members and to also encourage people to join the club during this formative stage the club has set up a monthly schedule of activities. It's offering clinics for juniors and ladies, one- and two-day golf trips to play other fine courses, as

