



Two Editorials

By Monroe S. Miller

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This issue's feature might better be titled "Two Opinions From Across The Country" since they are editorial pieces.*

And they do come from across the country!

Charlie Cross is the golf course superintendent at The Meadowbrook Club in Jericho, New York. He's also the editor of "The Hole Nine Yards", official publication of the Long Island Golf Course Superintendents Association. It's a truly superb publication. I have discovered, as I've gotten to know him, that Charlie is an excellent editor and

golf course manager and a great guy. His editorial offers food for thought for a lot of WGCSA members.

Pat Finlen is the golf course superintendent at the Quivira Lake Country Club in Quivira Lake, Kansas. Pat is the relatively new editor "Heart Beat", the official publication of the Heart of America Golf Course Superintendents Association. Pat succeeds long time "Heart Beat" editor Dave Fearis and is doing a terrific job.

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It's All in Our Title By Pat Finlen

Much has been done in the past few years to increase the professional status of the golf course superintendent. We have certification, television and radio ads, charitable work, and the list goes on. But it seems that we overlook one critical area, and that is our name, golf course superintendent.

How many times have you been asked what you do for a living and your obvious answer is, "golf course superintendent?" If the inquirer is not a golfer, his first reply is, "So, you're a golf pro." After much explanation, you finally get across to the individual what you really do. But by then, he's most likely associated the word superintendent with someone who is a caretaker.

If he is a golfer, his reply is, "So, you're the greenskeeper." Either way, your image is not all that flattering. The word superintendent portrays very little professionalism, and it is synonymous with "building superintendent," "construction superintendent" and "public works superintendent."

Among non-golfers, our image is virtually zero. In fact, it is negative because of all the chemicals we use. Among golfers, we are the ones who work in the shack off the fifth fairway. Again, what great credibility! We seem to be fighting a losing battle with our introduction when we use the word superintendent. Our counterparts in the golf business are changing rapidly.

Golf pros are now becoming Directors of Golf. Club managers are becoming General Managers. But where are we? We're still superintendents in the shack off the fifth fairway.

I remember an article that once said our office should be side-by-side with the club manager's office and the golf pro's office. That way, our status would be clearly seen. No longer would we be seen as Carl from "Caddy Shack." That would be nice, but not very practical. One better way to increase our image and professionalism would be to drop the word superintendent from our titles.

Many superintendents have done just that. They are the Golf Course Manager, the Golf Course and Grounds Manager, the Director of Golf Course Maintenance and, even, the Director of Golf. Our responsibilities are much more than caretakers, and that is what the word superintendent refers to.

Our jobs encompass much more than taking care of the golf course. We are environmental stewards. We manage thousands of dollars on any given day. We are much more accountable for the profitability of a facility than the pro or club manager. But our title puts us at the bottom of the list. Maybe the time has come for a change to a more progressive title than "superintendent."

Fifty and Out

By Charlie Cross

The golf course superintendents profession has changed dramatically over the past twenty years. Once known as "grass cutters" or "greenskeepers" the golf course superintendent is now viewed as an educated professional who plays a vital role in the success of any golf operation. Educational programs offered by local golf course superintendent chapters and by GCSAA are readily available. These educational programs play a major role in helping the golf course superintendent continue his education; he is abreast of changes, innovations and trends in golf course maintenance.

A trend that bothers me is that once a golf course superintendent reaches the age of fifty he has to start looking over his shoulder to see who is nipping at his heels. Many times what the inexperienced green chairman wants done on the golf course is to satisfy himself while giving no thought to what has been going on for twenty years. These two occurrences go hand in hand.

A golf course superintendent who is 50 years old has years of experience to offer his club. That's a wealth of knowledge. When it comes to golf course maintenance there is no substitute for experience. None!

If the golf course superintendent is neglecting his duties, then it doesn't matter what age he is. He should lose his job. Clubs that use excuses such as "we're on a youth movement", or "we need some new blood", or "our experienced golf course superintendent's salary is too high" are in most cases being unrealistic. What can be done to avoid the so called "Fifty and Out" situation that affects golf course superintendents?

From a club standpoint, education budgets should be adequate. Funds for national and regional conference attendance (there are numerous educational programs available at the conferences) should be available to the golf course superintendent. Funding for local and national superintendents associations memberships should also be made available. The education line in a golf course maintenance budget is the single most important line on the budget. There will be a good return on the investment.

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Clubs should strive for continuity when changing green chairman or directors. Going from a chairman who may "just want it green" to one who is "more concerned with playability and the overall health of the turfgrass" is a tough transition. Green chairmen should understand what will be best for the membership and not just good for them. Changing green chairman frequently makes it tough for everyone. If a new chairman could hold the position for five years that would be great. I'm sure he would find the experience rewarding. Having long range plans and sticking to them will help smooth a transition from chairman to chairman.

From a golf course superintendent's perspective he should make use of all available educational avenues. No sticking one's head in the sand and thinking "I don't need this" or "I don't need that". Participate at conferences, seminars and at local superintendent association meetings. Delegate authority. Take the time to make sure all the daily tasks on the golf course are being done properly. Give your assistant responsibility. Supply him with a list of things to do that will make his head spin. You'll be surprised how much he

will accomplish. Train him to be your second set of eyes.

The golf course superintendent must play golf. He doesn't have to play well but playing his own course will help him realize how the members feel about the golf course.

How long should a golf course superintendent remain at the same club? That's a good question that I'm sure could be discussed for hours by golf course superintendents. If the golf course superintendent feels he has been doing a quality job and is not being recognized by the club then he should consider looking for another job. If the club is satisfied with your performance and you are happy with your job then there is no reason to change.

GCSAA could be playing a major role in the "Fifty and Out" situation but to my knowledge nothing is on the table at this writing. I feel that GCSAA is golf oriented and not people oriented. Granted, the educational programs available to golf course superintendents are excellent. Improving the image of the golf course superintendent through media relations, an excellent publication in "Golf Course Management" and trying to make the public more aware of who we are and what we do are excellent avenues in

promoting the golf course superintendent. But something is missing. GCSAA should be investigating how counseling could be available to members who lose their jobs. Helping those who have lost their jobs and providing assistance in locating another job should be at the top of the agenda for GCSAA. A seminar or two which address issues the older golf course superintendent faces on a daily basis should be a reality. GCSAA should be putting less emphasis on the international scene and more emphasis on the national scene, us! Good will is nice to spread but good will starts at home.

The "Fifty and Out" situation is an interesting subject that warrants further discussion and scrutiny. I've seen a number of good older golf course superintendents become pressured with outrageous expectations at their golf course. A number of experienced golf course superintendents have lost their jobs for reasons I will never know.

The clubs, golf course superintendents and GCSAA all need to take a closer look at the "older golf course superintendent" issue. Remember, nothing replaces experience when it comes to golf course maintenance. Nothing!

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