

# Ability, Not Gender, Makes the Best Superintendent

by Tom Farley,  
Sports Writer, Racine Journal Times

Tara Zabkowicz has found more help than hindrance in her efforts to enter the male-dominated field of golf course management. "I've had a really positive experience getting into this industry," she said. "The attitude seems to be 'welcome to the family.'"

Zabkowicz, 21, is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She was one of 32 college turf students who attended a recent Future Turf Managers Seminar sponsored by Jacobsen Division of Textron. The three-day seminar is an annual event held in Racine, in May.

"I think people in this profession are very supportive," said Zabkowicz. "I think they think it's great what I'm doing."

Zabkowicz said she "grew up golfing along with my mom and dad." She didn't decide until the summer before her freshman year at Wisconsin that she wanted to major in turfgrass science, but after "growing up outside, I knew this is what I wanted to do. First and foremost, I absolutely love the outdoors."

While her first summer grounds-crew job consisted of moving yard markers and watering flowers — "I planted every flower on that course," she said — in the summer of 1995, when she worked at North Shore Country Club in suburban Milwaukee, superintendent Bob Erdahl took her under his wing.

"He's just amazing, phenomenal,"

Zabkowicz said. "He really supports turf students. There were a lot of things he wanted to show me; he really wanted me to see every facet of grounds crew."

She also received a big helping hand from her academic adviser at the university, Frank Rossi. "He really pushed me into this. He helped me get most of my summer jobs."

So what motivates a young woman to go into golf course management? "I tend to be a very meticulous person; I like to pay attention to detail," Zabkowicz said. "I think you've got to have that characteristic in you to be a superintendent."

"In this profession, it's really great that you can see your work in front of

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you. You can go out there and mow a fairway and make it look beautiful. It's great to know that you can transform a course, or that others transform it with your help."

Zabkowicz, who's scheduled to graduate next spring with a bachelor's degree in horticulture specializing in turf and grounds maintenance, said she's been pleased to see a spirit of cooperation in the golf course management industry.

"I don't see a lot of competition," she said. "It seems like everybody's friends; everybody's working together. I think we need to work together."

"So many variables come into play in maintaining a course. It helps a lot when the guy down the street has figured something out and tells you about it."

Zabkowicz said that outside the industry she's encountered an attitude that "you have to be huge and strong," she said. Some women ask her, "You just play with dirt?"

"I felt like I had something to prove," Zabkowicz said. "I think that's pushed me to doing it right, doing it perfect. If anyone doubted me, all I had to do was show them."



UW-Madison turfgrass student Tara Zabkowicz at the wheel of a Jacobsen LF.

*Editor's Note: Tara Zabkowicz is also a member of the UW-Madison women's crew team. She spent the*

*summer of 1996 on the golf course staff at Blackhawk Country Club. ♣*



The Jacobsen college student class of '96!