

# A Personal View of the Immigration Question

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club



In April 1994, my personal involvement in the immigration question began in earnest.

At that same time, my personal involvement in illegal immigration also began in earnest.

Over the past twelve years, this golf course under two different ownership groups has employed well over one hundred different Hispanic men and women...almost all of them illegal. Personally, my signature is on all of those I-9 federal forms that state that documents presented to me upon hiring "appear to be genuine." I am

the common thread over those twelve years. I was the authorized representative of SSNR and now of NCCC. I was and am the guy doing the hiring.

As a part of the annual process of looking for good, affordable help...we have employed many, many Mexican workers. There are thousands of green industry businesses here in ChicagoLand doing the same thing. We are all looking for people who are willing to work hard, be productive for us, fit into our budgets, and perform the work that needs doing. Admittedly, we

don't pay very good wages and are quite stingy with raises in pay. Are we taking advantage of them? Definitely so. Doesn't any employer take advantage of an employee's misfortune...to a degree? A prospective employee...be he Hispanic or Caucasian...applies for a job...needs work...and will usually take the position offered with the accompanying wage offer.

Do we exploit our Mexican employees? Definitely not. We offer very good seasonal work, forty hours weekly plus generous overtime, a very good working



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environment, and an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. In fact, we have a very good reputation locally within the Mexican community. They appreciate the opportunity to be able to earn money, live respectably, and to send money home to their relatives. Exploitation is not paying overtime. Exploitation is paying these men \$300 per week and scheduling them for 60-65 hours. Exploitation is firing them if they object to those working conditions. Exploitation is not having Workmen's Comp for their on-the-job injuries at the local hog killing plant. Exploitation is not helping them to better themselves. We employ them. We do not exploit them.

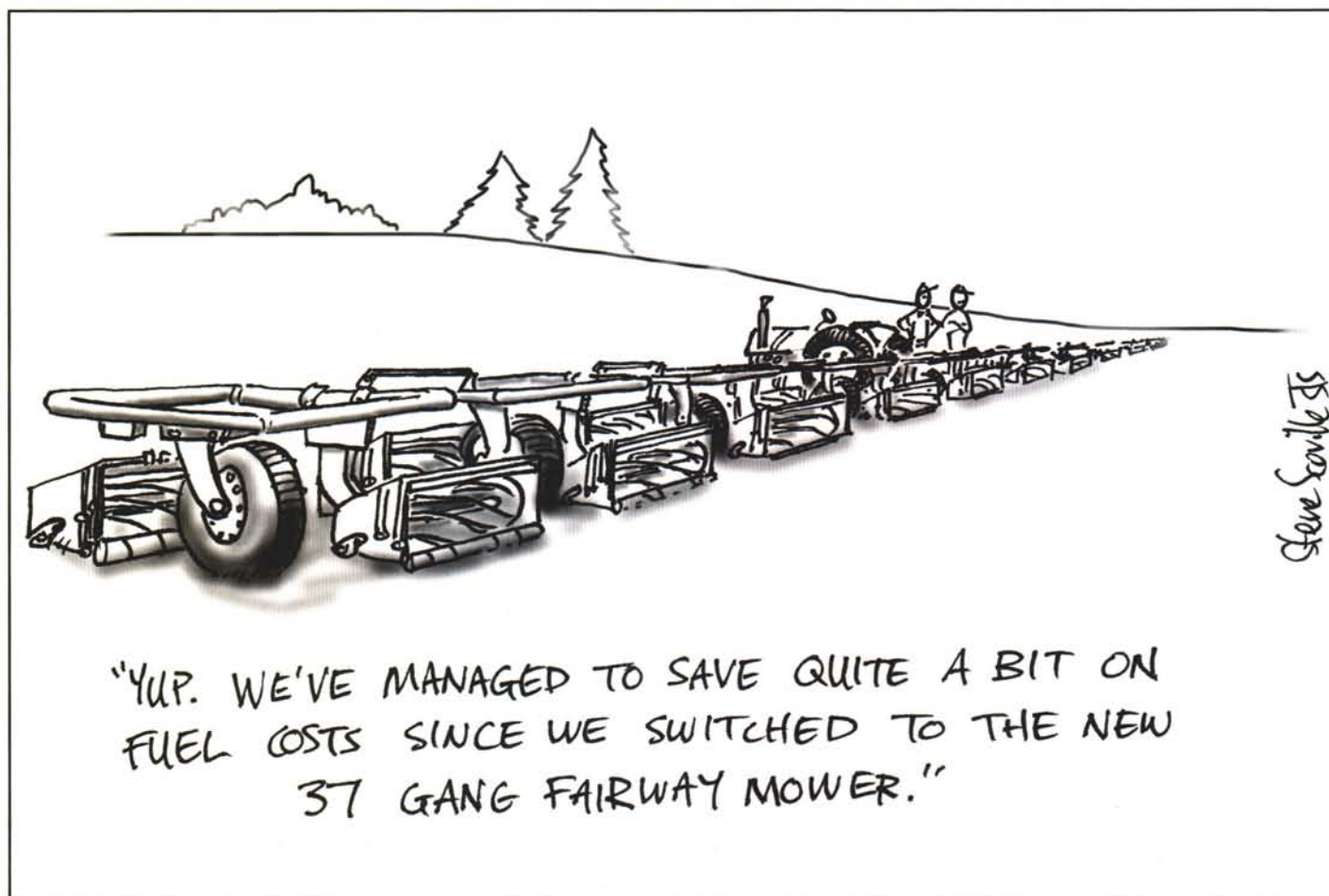
My view is that our company is

going out on a limb...indeed, I am going out on a limb...by hiring all of these people over all of these years. My view is that we are running a mild legal risk...but that it is a situation in which there is really not a better alternative. The only white workers who would hire into these positions...for these wages (\$7.00-\$13.00/hour)...are typically college students or seniors. They need the work and the money. That leaves those who "need" jobs but are not willing to work hard. In general, they are not dependable...hardly the type of people who will show up early, stay as late as is necessary, and be dedicated over the years to helping us provide the best golf course possible. These hard working individuals are filling a

void in our economy by taking on the less desirable tasks in their effort to survive and possibly thrive here in America.

As superintendents go, we here in Illinois have lots of experience with Hispanic immigrants...some legal...but many more illegal. Many superintendents down here have larger operating budgets...and offer their Mexican crew members higher wages and extensive benefits. They also have entire crews of legal residents...and require valid green cards, etc. Believe me, if this golf course could afford it...I would love to pay more generously...and provide all of the benefits that these guys so truly deserve.

But...given our limitations as a public course located out in the boondocks...we do our best. And



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we do not discriminate. Our white employees will gladly tell you that they too...are underpaid...and taken a little bit for granted.

So, given the fact that I really understand the immigration question, lets expand the discussion. The fact is that there is an entire generation of legal Mexican immigrants of my age group...about 40-50 years old. They all work good blue collar union jobs everywhere in America...and many of them have achieved their version of the American dream. There is also a rapidly growing number of Hispanics who have worked very hard for their professional status.

It is the next generation that is in limbo? There is a huge number of people in the 20-40 year old group that are here illegally. They are the ones that we employ at NCCC...and the ones who...despite their talent and work ethic...may not be able to further improve their lives through moving on to a better job than we can provide. It is simple. If a guy doesn't have legal status, there is no gaining the better jobs.

Do all of these people have a right to be here? In the sense that any human...man, woman, or couple... has the right to do whatever is necessary to support themselves and their families...yes, they do have that right. Should they be given a chance to earn citizenship? No, I don't think so. The requirements for US citizenship should not be softened to accommodate these people. What they need is legal status as seasonal guest workers.

And that is basically how I view the whole question. People have the opportunity here in America to work hard and better themselves. Admiration and respect for your fellow man should be given on the basis of work ethic, talent and ability, and determination to succeed in life. Any man or woman who is determined to better them-

selves deserves and will receive my help and respect.

The blame with the whole illegal alien mess lies with a cowardly federal Congress who caved in to the political right instead of developing a valid resident worker program many years ago. Believe me, most Mexicans would love to work here for six to seven months and then go home until the next work season...and be free to re-enter.

And what burns my butt way more than Mexicans entering our country illegally and working like dogs to better their lives...are the close minded folks who heavily populate this county. If you analyze them a bit...what is seen is all of the inherent advantages that citizens of the USA enjoy...have been squandered and wasted. They are usually the same people who complain constantly about the illegal aliens taking their jobs...which is a real crock.

Consider that our ancestors were once immigrants themselves. Consider that they entered this country legally. Also consider that the federal government had better official policy for encouraging and processing immigrants. Consider that some of the current options being debated in Congress are good, while other features are too tough and will never become law. Consider the fact that some of the proposed features call for back payment of taxes and fines...which will be much too expensive for many families.

And finally, consider that there are about 8-12,000,000 illegal aliens here in the USA. The US Congress needs to find solutions to this problem...and sooner rather than later.

Until they do, I will continue to fly under the radar and operate this golf course with the help of the ten Mexican men who have been with us for the past twelve years. ♣

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