



# Changing Faces

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

We in the Midwest are usually a few years or decades behind our friends around the country when it comes to change. Technology, fashion, fads and slang usually start on one of the coasts and work its way towards the Badger State. One example of slow change is the changing race demographics of Wisconsin. The United States has long been known as a large melting pot of nationalities, but most of those nationalities were of white descent.

That is changing rapidly as a more diverse group of races is immigrating to the United States. At the same time ethnic neighborhoods and towns are becoming a thing of the past as jobs, marriage and family have us working and living together.

Truth be told, outside of a few large Wisconsin cities, 20 or even 10 years ago the number of residents of African, Hispanic or Asian heritage living in less urban areas were small in number. That is quickly changing as the racial demographics of small towns and villages are becoming more diverse. You can see the changes at the store, in the schools, at parks and at festivals. However, one place we do not see the changes in race diversity is checking out at the pro shop counter or playing the links we provide. Golf for the most part in Wisconsin is a white persons game.

Is this a talk on racism and prejudice? Not at all, but rather a belief our industry needs to realize that a large segment of our population does not play golf on a regular basis. The percentage of per capita golfers is higher for white residents than it is for non-white groups.

Quite a few of the First Tee programs are located in the inner city and have made tremendous gains

allowing children of all races to enjoy the game of golf. However, that effect will take years to trickle down to more players for the average golf facility. Clearly, having more golfers is the goal of the 99% of golf courses.

In spring of 2006 I attended the GCSAA Career Development Committee Meetings in Lawrence KS. Diversity in the golf industry was a major topic of discussion and meeting at the same time was the GCSAA Diversity Task Group. Our two groups spent time discussing the benefits of increased ethnic diversity in golf and the challenges to overcome to reach greater diversity.

We are fortunate in the Midwest to have a large number of employable people looking for golf course jobs. In my own case, most of my seasonal staff has been retirees and students. There are ample numbers of bodies available for work throughout much of our area. However, I see more managers turning to a seasonal Hispanic or Asian workforce, as babysitting teenagers has become a challenge not worth undertaking. Our staffs are starting to resemble our diverse society but the players have not yet reached that point.

Is this simply a message on discrimination? Not really, and I assume you know and believe discrimination is wrong and has no place in America today. However, diversity in golf goes beyond employees. Diversity in golf has to include the customers. As the business of golf becomes more competitive, we need to realize golf facilities are missing a large segment of our population for customers.

As golf course superintendents, we have a limited ability to grow the game. We do not give lessons and most of us do not choose the advertising plans or beginner programs at our courses. We can provide for less experienced golfers with forward tees and less forced carries but there is more we can do to expand racial diversity in golf.

We employ workers from various backgrounds and have the unique opportunity to grow the game through our employees. Over and over again, research has shown that golfers like to play with friends and associates. When a golfer has friends to play golf with, they play more. They more they play golf the better it is for the entire golf industry.

Regardless if your staff is 3 old guys and 2 students or 15 Hispanics or a mix of races and backgrounds, you have a captive audience to teach the game of golf

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and instill in them the enjoyment and competition that can be found.

Staffs are as diverse as golf operations, so every situation is different depending on the type of course you have and the club rules. It is not possible at all clubs to take the employees out for a round of golf and that is not an appropriate way for true beginners

to learn the game. However, many of us can find some time for a staff outing to the driving range with some donated or lost and found clubs. Invite one of the golf professionals out to lead a quick group lesson or perhaps someone on staff can lead them in the basics.

A mix of staff interaction and the enjoyment of playing golf has

the opportunity to be a fun way to grow the game and crew camaraderie. Many of us started in the golf business because we enjoyed playing the game of golf. Take an opportunity to show your staff how enjoyable the game is and you may hook some of them on a life-long sport. 

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## Coming Events

**December 9 - GCSAA Seminar, Operations Management**  
Ramada Plaza Hotel, Fond du Lac, WI

**Jan 13 - WTA Turfgrass and Greenscape EXPO**  
Boerner Botanical Gardens, Hales Corners

**Feb 2-7 - Golf Industry Show**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

**Feb 5 - WI Hospitality Room**  
Cafe' Giovanni, New Orleans

**March 2 - WGCSA Spring Business and Education Meeting**  
Ramada Hotel, Fond du Lac, WI

**March 4 - Northern Great Lakes GCSA**  
Spring Symposium, Wausau, WI

**March 11, 12 - Reinders Turf and Irrigation Conference**  
Waukesha Expo Center, Waukesha, WI