



What Collar to Wear Today?

By **Jacob Schneider**, Assistant Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

The longer that I'm in this industry of ours, the more difficult our jobs become to characterize. It seems as if most other careers are fairly easy to classify; there are white-collar workers, such as doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, and there are blue-collar workers, including assembly-line factory workers, construction workers, and garbage men. A couple of years ago, a young, naïve Jake Schneider would have said that golf course superintendents are definitely blue-collar workers. At that time, the job seemed to be filled with endless hours of mowing, fertilizing, and irrigating, which isn't far from the usual response ("So, you cut the grass, or what?") when I tell the uninformed what it is that I do for a living. Needless to say, as I've grown older (and hopefully wiser), it's become very obvious that there's a whole lot more to this job than cutting grass.

At a recent meeting, one of our state's most respected superintendents estimated that he spends 10% of his time worrying about growing grass and the rest of the day talking to members, working on the budget, and managing his staff. From this description, it would be tough to call the modern superintendent a blue-collar worker when he or she is spending 90% their time on white-collar tasks. This makes me feel all the more fortunate to have received such a well-rounded education at the UW, but it still leaves me with no answers about who we actually are.

During the most recent presidential election, I heard a lot about green-collar workers, which seemed like the perfect term for those of us in the GREEN industry. As you know, the term "green" has become the catch-word of the newest environmental movement, but I wonder if Obama or McCain knew that OUR green industry existed long before the current green industry. If you were to look up "green-collar worker" on Wikipedia, you'll find a fairly extensive list of trades that are considered to fit this definition; nowhere does it mention golf course superintendent. So, what's the deal; are we not green-collar workers?

According to one dictionary, green-collar means, "Of or pertaining to both employment and the environment or environmentalism." Well, that certainly sounds official enough, and based on my experiences, this sure does seem to fit the role of the golf course superintendent. Wikipedia may not realize all of the environmentally and socially positive impacts of a healthy stand of turf, but contrary to popular opinion, Wikipedia doesn't know all. Most of us are aware that turf performs nearly

equally to the so-called native species (disclaimer: I have nothing against native species) in just about every head-to-head university research study. However, if you were to ask most members of the general public, "Who should be classified as a green-collar worker, someone who maintains 150 acres of native prairie or a golf course superintendent who maintains 150 acres of turfgrass", I'm guessing that almost ten out of ten would choose the former.

I'm almost 500 words into this article, and so far I've determined that, as an industry insider, we can't just be labeled white or blue-collar and that the general public would probably laugh if we called ourselves green-collar. So, what collar should we wear? Well, if we're doing our jobs correctly, we should be able to wear them all at the same time. That isn't too ambiguous of an answer, is it? 🌱



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