

Certification: What Good Is It?

By RANDY DAYTON, CGCS

Having recently completed the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's requirements for re-certification, I have had ample opportunity to consider the values of being a certified golf course superintendent and the reasons for working toward that title.

It is easy to come to the conclusion that the GCSAA has oversold the program in some regards. Earning the title will not guarantee your future success or safeguard your career. Then again, neither will a degree in agronomy. Both, however, will open doors that might otherwise remain closed.

Like a college degree, certification does enhance your perceived value in the eyes of employers. The GCSAA feels that adding the "CGCS" designation to your name says you've gone the extra mile to become the best superintendent you can.

It says you are not satisfied with what you learned yesterday, last year, or last decade, but instead, that you strive to remain up to date with industry practices and technology. It says you are willing and able to take advantage of any development or procedure available to keep your golf course in the best condition possible. That perception (and fact) can make the difference in a job interview.

The GCSAA has done an excellent job of promoting the certification process within the industry, and many employers are now aware of its significance. Prospective employers often show a preference for certified applicants and often make certification a requirement of available positions. You can expect that to be the case more often in the future.

Even so, there are aspects of certification that (at present) do not achieve some of the GCSAA's loftier claims. Compensation surveys, for instance, have repeatedly demonstrated that certified superintendents earn (on average) more than their non-certified colleagues, but becoming certified will not automatically guarantee an increase in your salary. Likewise, you may not immediately earn the respect and adoration of your employer and peers when you become certified, and the grass in your care will still die on occasion.

Over time, however, certification will increase your earnings potential and will improve the perception of professionalism you receive from the people with whom you work. In addition, today's golf market is highly volatile, and you can find yourself unemployed on a moment's notice. If that happens, you need every competitive edge you can find to secure a new position as quickly as possible — certification can be a "difference maker" in that situation. It can also be a difference maker if you decide to relocate to another region of the state or country where you have no established professional reputation. Again, the "CGCS" designa-

tion says "professional," and that's frequently what a prospective employer needs to hear.

The cost of certification is very reasonable, especially when compared to similar programs in other professions (such as the PGA). The application fee is \$200, and the complete set of study materials for the test costs \$370. Re-certification is required every five years, at a fee of \$150.

There are also a variety of seminars required to earn the Continuing Education Credits for certification or re-certification. Each is accompanied by a fee, of course, and those can add up to become one of the program's primary costs. With the implementation of the Professional Development Initiative, there will be a number of new means for earning CEUs, and not all of them will require attending a conference or taking a class.

When the PDI kicks in during 2003, however, certification requirements will change. The GCSAA Certification Committee is in the process of redesigning the certification test, and the goal is not to make it easier, so now is the best time to consider working toward certification.

The decision is yours, but the basic fact is this: becoming certified can help your career prospects, and will never work to your detriment.

Free Compost-Quality Publication Available

Not quite sure how to evaluate the quality of compost? Check out the California Integrated Waste Management Board's new publication "Compost: Matching Performance Needs with Product Characteristics."

This document helps you to evaluate compost based on your specific needs and guides you in the types of questions you should ask compost producers. The publication is available free of charge. Contact Bertie Mora at (916) 255-2708. You may also locate suppliers of compost on the Organics Outlook Website.