

The Changing Face of Golf Course Management

Presented by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

As sure as the azaleas blooming at Augusta National, the start of each golf season brings new technology that the marketing gurus say is guaranteed to improve one's game.

But come 2003, the newest advancement will not be a longer-flying ball; a lighter, yet bigger oversized club head; or a more flexible shaft. In fact, to take advantage of this new innovation, golfers will not have to take a lesson, make a purchase at a pro shop or spend extra hours at the driving range.

As of July 1, 2003, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) members will have to meet more rigorous standards. Other associations have created stricter membership requirements, and like those associations, GCSAA recognized a void in the world in which its members functioned. Today's golf course superintendents are being challenged by golfers and employers to produce at unprecedented levels, and there is no reason to believe those demands will wane in the future. The new standards will provide golf course superintendents with the tools to manage a facility in a manner that enhances the golfer's enjoyment of the game.

"The game and the business of golf have changed tremendously in a relatively short time period," says GCSAA President Mike Wallace, certified golf course superintendent. "There are economic and course management pressures that did not exist 10 years ago. Competition between golf facilities is more intense and the expectations for premium conditions on a daily basis have combined to put the onus on the golf course superintendent to perform like never before."

Recognizing the continued need to keep pace with the marketplace, GCSAA members in February 2001 approved a membership standards bylaw amendment that will showcase the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the golf course superintendent. Class A members will be responsible for completing entry-level and ongoing requirements for continuing education and service, tenure as a superintendent and possess pesticide application credentials. The pesticide license requirement speaks to the core makeup of the golf course superintendent. In addition to a love for the game of golf, superintendents choose to enter the profession because of a desire to work with nature. The combination of standards and the pesticide license support the commitment of the profession to environmental stewardship.

A key feature of the continuing education program is development of individual occupational core competencies.

The establishment of these competencies will provide focus and enhance the education GCSAA provides to golf course superintendents and the golf course management industry. These competencies include communications, leadership, operations management and resource utilization. The competencies are broken down further into specific skill sets. For example, the resource utilization competency is evaluated on such subjects as the rules of golf; golf course and grounds construction/renovation; soil management; turf management; and staffing, among others.

The competencies also will serve as the guiding foundation for the Class A requirements and the advanced voluntary level of Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS). There are approximately 9,000 Class A GCSAA members and 1,800 Certified

Golf Course Superintendents. The certified requirements will still be substantially more challenging than those of Class A. Certified applicants must pass a six-hour exam and have his/her course evaluated by two other certified golf course superintendents before achieving this status.

"The membership standards dictate a prescribed level of education and experience for the GCSAA golf course superintendent," Wallace says. "This will no doubt advance the superintendent profession,

but the ultimate benefactor will be the golfer. A better educated golf course superintendent means a better golf experience."

For the past 75 years, GCSAA has provided education, representation and information to the men and women who maintain golf facilities. During this time, golfers have witnessed unprecedented advances in the quality of golf's playing field. Golf course superintendents have been able to overcome the ills of weather, disease and traffic that afflict their facilities. Events that used to close facilities for days or render large portions useless for weeks upon end are now a rare occurrence. Regular maintenance activities that once called for courses to be closed for a day can now be performed during play, resulting in little or no interference with golfers.

In fact, many golf industry experts - including the legendary Byron Nelson - contend that the greatest advances in the game have come not in the playing implements, but in the science, technology and education employed in maintaining golf courses. The new standards for GCSAA superintendents will continue the improvements the game has witnessed over the past 75 years.

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