

# The Super's Future in Golf

*Unless Clubs Make Supers' Jobs More Attractive, They Will Lose the Cream of the Turf College Crop to Other Fields*

By JACK KOLB

*(Editors Note: The following is an article that was written by one of our MGCSA members and appeared in the May 1967 edition of GOLFDOM. While some of the figures may be out of date, many of the concepts still hold true today.)*

In this age of mass disobedience let me stumble into an area where angels tremble and express a few thoughts about the mechanics of the contemporary golf club. Whether it is the curse of modern affluence or just maladjustment of a fast changing industry, which contributes to the present situation, I am not absolutely sure.

Andrew Bertoni tells the story about newly elected club president who meeting the golf course superintendent for the first time, asked how long he had been at the club.

"Twenty years," was the reply.

"That's odd," said the club president. "I have belonged to this club for that many years but you do not look familiar."

This is not an isolated case. It is safe to say that at least 60 percent of the membership of the average club do not know their superintendent. The blame for this does no lie with the member or the superintendent. The golf course superintendent is no engaged in personal contact as is the golf professional and the club manager.

Your golf course superintendent is probably a humble man, for hard work plus the uncertainties of working with nature teaches a man a measure of humility. This is not to say that he is "confused" because he very well could be the only employee on the entire staff of golf club employees with a college degree, and more than likely, it will be an agricultural Bachelor of Science degree.

Golf clubs are in a golf course superintendent supply squeeze. Most older established golf clubs are reaching maturity along with their superintendent. The rate of retiring or dismissed older superintendents is alarming and most are being replaced with very young men who have some form of college training, either the two year associate degree or the full four-to five-year courses leading to a BS degree. Besides the retiring and dismissed superintendent replacement, there is the need for more men in the 450 new courses being built annually.

What are golf courses doing to attract good men? - A report on a study of 300 of the nation's agricultural colleges, published this year by McGraw-Hill, says: "The heads of some of the departments of horticulture, agronomy and soil science . . . report that they are unable to fill more than one-third of the demand . . . for BS graduates."

Why aren't more men zeroing in on the myriad opportunities available in agriculture in general and turf work in particular? One problem is "image."

Turf work is associated with the term "greenkeeper" which is further associated with subservient work. Image, however, is not the only deterrent.

The bidding for graduates of agricultural colleges has not yet reached the frenzied pace set by the Green Bay Packers for football talent. However, fertilizer, chemical and allied companies are scrambling as never before to keep up with the growing need for technical personnel. The result is a rising salary scale and a wider job selection for the graduate with golf courses running a poor last in the bidding.

Professor Ralph E. Miller, Placement Director for the Institute of Agriculture at the University of Minnesota, says, "There are at least five and, most times six jobs for every graduate of agricultural sciences." Professor Miller also points out that recruiting and interviewing of graduates is on a year-round basis (not just spring graduates), and has increased 75 percent in the past year. Throw in the bidding of highway departments, institutions and government and the results for golf courses are inevitable.

According to the National Golf foundation, in just twenty years there has been an increase of approximately 4,000 new golf courses in the United States. The present day superintendent is expected and can deliver a high degree of professionalism and technology. He can deliver a higher level of turf grooming. He demands better help, more mechanization and a more disciplined operation. A superintendent will have to deal with more rapidly advancing technology - and he is ready.

But now! Who is he working for and what are the club's plans for his future? This is the area into which few superintendents ever delve. He is so engaged in his own work, struggling to improve his quality of turf that he seldom looks with retrospect and critical eye at his employers. After watching older superintendents turned loose at age 50 plus and 30 plus years experience, he may ask himself, "What is to prevent this happening to me?"

What should a superintendent's income be? In today's spiraling economy, the first question a person seeking position asks is "How much does the position pay?" How much should a superintendent make? Well, this could be dependent on a lot of factors. However, for the sake of argument, let's first look at what a milk truck driver makes.

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The milk truck drivers of Minneapolis (Local No. 471) have a contract that calls for \$9000 base salary at the end of 18 weeks experience, plus commissions. Commissions, of course, are determined by the type of clients the driver calls on, plus his ability to sell, but they do as high as \$6,000.

It is ironic that this "Wholesale Driver Salesman" (this is a technical description and title for a milk truck driver) should be better off than the supervisor of a million dollar plus plant such as the golf grounds.

If the truck driver is able to live within his income, he has a satisfaction that not one golf superintendent in the Minneapolis are can enjoy after 40 years experience and that is financial security. But, he has more! He has a security, which says he cannot be fired from this position except for drunkenness, cheating customers, malicious destruction of property and other well-defined acts of malfeasance. Fringe benefits won't even be mentioned for fear of mass resignations of technically trained superintendents and a rush on the "low pressure" job of being a milkman!

It behooves all golf clubs to re-examine the conditions under which their superintendents are hired and how easily they are fired to realize that the sooner this situation is improved the sooner the golf industry will draw astute men to fill the many vacancies which exist in superintendents' ranks.

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, from its national office in Des Plaines, Illinois, runs and Employment Referral Service which is available to both golf clubs and golf course superintendents. This is an excellent service for both parties, and it should be more widely known. Some interesting facts can be gathered from the "Positions Available" sheets and a few shall be cited here:

1) A top club in the Miami Valley area of Ohio offers \$10,000 per year with 14 days vacation and dues pair for membership in GCSAA. No mention is made of a retirement plan, insurance plan health insurance, regular salary increase or sick leave.

2) A 36-hole golf course in Indiana lists "Salary of last man in position \$5,000". This course also sponsored a recent national tournament.

3) A municipal course, Dayton, Ohio, list the following for all employees: a) Retirement plan; b) Paid annual sick leave; c) Paid vacation; d) Health insurance and life insurance; e) Overtime; f) Living quarters; g) \$250 general increase per year.

Which of these clubs is doing its utmost to secure and hold its key employees? - Of course, the municipal club is accused of spending taxpayers' money, but this is not necessarily so. Most municipal golf courses are set up on a "pay-their-own-way" basis.

A good share of the members of any club receive salary plus such fringe benefits, yet will not consider offering the same deal to the key men on their golf course staff.

The above citations of employment are a cross section of the typical opportunity for the golf superintendent, and the \$120,000 figure represents the highest salary offered. Do you believe these clubs will attract capable men? Do you believe that the golf industry will encourage a high degree of education and technical skills with opportunities like there? It is much simpler to join a unionized organization with little educational requirement and absolute security.

A superintendent is a family man - The new breed of superintendent is going to be a family man as will be most of his permanent crew. Whether it is the general upgrading of the profession, or whatever the answer is, the bachelor transient type of employee is gone.

As a family man the superintendent has an estranged relationship with his children. Vacations are usually winter oriented when the children are in school and during the summer he is gone from daylight to dark or rarely sees his children. It is hard for his children to believe that the airline pilot two houses down the block even works for a living since his schedule gives him considerable time at home.

A club could easily help this dilemma by making certain social facilities available to the superintendent's wife and children such as tennis and swimming pool. There may be some uneasiness for his family as far as social status is concerned but certainly they would feel at ease on an intellectual level - and who know what one's social status is while in a swimming suit?

What is the most vicious factor affecting club-superintendent relationship? - Whether golf clubs admit it or not the most destructive and debilitating factor in strained "club-superintendent" relationships is the gossip/complainer. This name-dropping member wants everyone to know he is able to pay the most exclusive club in America and complain, "why can't we have a club like that?" And he never does bother to check the budget or work to increase it.

It is my pleasure to work with an exceptional golf professional, but there are those who contribute their gossip on the first tee, in the grille or bar.

The gossipier does not only hurt the superintendent but can cause thousands of wasted dollars in projects that are instigated by anyone, including the Board of Governors.

To illustrate a case in point, a few years ago I was approached by a Dr. "B" who had Board approval to construct a pet project. Dr. "B" met with me on five different occasions, each time to relocate the building site to satisfy some faction of the membership.

Finally, after much frustration it was decided that a corner of the parking lot would be best and that it might even hide some of the blacktop with its oil spots and barren look. The project was erected, improved the décor of the are and, since it was new was even colorful in appearance.

The project was just completed when Dr. "B" started taking abuse to the where, as he complained, "people

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were becoming personal" in their objections. One week later Dr. "B", without further consulting the Board, ordered the project removed and dismantled.

Some time later the \$3,000 worth of material was given to a local private school. Fortunately from me, all the abuse was heaped on Dr. "B", but my heart went out to him.

All clubs are similar in respect to gossip. The difference is in degree. You can get the pulse of any club in the area by talking to one member. One way to keep informed of the pulse of your own club is to become friendly with the locker room boys, the bartenders or the reservations clerk. The only problem with this is when the personal accusations become vicious or serious, your friends cease to tell you about them.

How can this problem be subdued? - The astute or strong greens chairman is the man who stands between loose tongues and fact, and soon subdues all rumors and untruths. This is done by the choice of a good greens committee, by good public relations and by an occasional tongue lashing of the chronic complainer. Two of the most respected greens chairmen it has been my pleasure to know were experts at the latter. The greens chairman who wants to cause the demise of a grounds superintendent need only hold back on information and let the tongues wag. In this situation the indictment belongs to the greens chairman alone.

It might be appropriate here to list those who, in the writer's opinion, are the best members of a greens committee. In general, the more desirable are all forms of engineers, building or store managers, medical and dental doctors and small business executives.

An incident of a few years ago which may point out the value of careful selection of greens committees follows:

A problem of an inadequate water supply was under discussion and the need for a much-increased amount of water was definite. To get approximately four times the amount of water it was decided that the old two-inch supply line be abandoned and a new four-inch line be installed. One adamant member insisted that this was sheer extravagance and that another two-inch line should be installed paralleling the first and that this would give a total of four inches in diameter!

Without an engineer present who represents authority on such subjects, it was difficult to point out the fallacy of his thinking, but eventually an authority did get things straightened out finally.

To summarize, members should be more aware of the people who develop their fine turf. The superintendent is going to have to be paid commensurate with his skills and responsibilities.

He doesn't look for profit sharing as most labor does, because his is working for a non-profit organization.

The man in charge of your golf course is undoubtedly prudent and thrifty. His salary should be adequate enough to help him carry his own insurance-mutual fund investment type of retirement plan, which his national association has worked out for him. He must treat his program as if he were self-employed since so few are inadequate provisions are offered by his club.

If you were lucky enough to persuade him to work for an organization such as yours, when he could have been a truck driver with a high salary, more security and summer vacations, then count your blessings.

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