

## The New "Assistant"

by Michael J. Gilmore

I was on the phone last week with a florist, on the eve of Secretary's Day, when I began to chuckle to myself about what I was doing. I wondered if anyone would be surprised that a Golf Course Superintendent was ordering flowers on Secretary's Day for their secretary, or in our case, our "Administrative Assistant." But the more I thought about it, the more I wondered why all of us were not doing the same thing.

When you got to any of the local suppliers, General Manager's office, or any other office where business is conducted, there is someone there who greets you and helps you find your way or announce your arrival. When someone comes to the Superintendent's office, what do they find? Too often they find an empty office and no sign of when anyone will return. When you call the office of a Golf Course Superintendent, how often do you get an answering machine? As a Superintendent, how often do you get to

check your messages, much less return calls? These are questions that are probably asked on a regular basis. I strongly believe that the answer to these problems are obvious. You need someone who can answer the phone, greet visitors, be a central point for communication, and do a lot of the paper work that bogs us down, when we need to be on the golf course (not to mention where we would rather be)!

I have been fortunate to have had an Administrative Assistant for the past two years and there is not a day that goes by that I don't think how much harder my job would be without her. The biggest worry I had going to the GM's office two years ago to discuss hiring this person was not how much was I going to pay this position, but convincing him that this was a vital need for our operation. It was amazing to him that I, a Groundskeeper, needed a secretary. After a brief period of silence and a stunned look on his face,

we had a conversation on the value of this position. I pointed out some things that I felt were the obvious reasons and he had to agree. I said that I am always reminded that my budget was the biggest in the operation, that my salary was the highest and how important the golf courses were to our business. If all of these are true, what would you rather have me spend my time on? Should I be riding the courses, supervising the staff and agronomic programs, meeting with members, and managing my department, or should I spend my time filling out vacation request forms, chasing down a price or a delivery ticket for a \$15.00 shovel, answering phones, doing schedules, filing, placing generic orders, waiting for a call back on something that is not really that important and in general, be a prisoner of my office? With a budget that is steaming towards a couple of million dollars and 1,000 acres to

continued on page 7

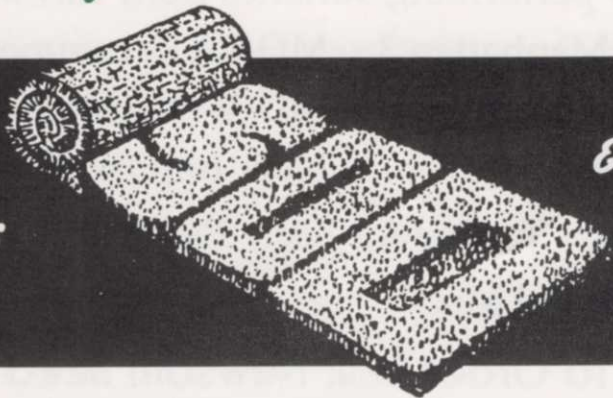


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## Assistant

continued from page 5

cover, not to mention the housing and hotel additions, etc., he was convinced that I had a point.

Not every Golf Course Superintendent has 54 holes, 65-70 employees, a diverse golfing clientele and 1,000 acres, but in relation to the size of your operation, all of these things are true for you as well. The expectations placed on the Golf Course Superintendent today have grown by leaps and bounds. The tools to meet the growth on the agronomic side of the game have been growing as well to help us meet the challenges. However, on the administrative side, we are way behind. From having a secretary to working in a maintenance building that dates this century, the owners and members of the clubs seem to have forgotten the "back of the house." I firmly believe that if the people who sign your checks were to spend a couple of days with you, they would appreciate this need. Watching the juggling act that is required to handle all

of the demands that you are faced with, they would find a way to take some of the burden from you and free you up to do what they hired you to do and that is to be the Golf Course Superintendent.

How do you fit this in your budget? I would ask you to think what would be a bigger value to you, a nine month seasonal employee who uses a weed whacker and seems to be getting lost in the woods on a regular basis, or someone who takes the paperwork out of your hands, can screen calls, make calls, arrange appointments, and always be there as the center of information? In my mind there is no choice. I am more effective on the golf course. I am absolutely horrible when it comes to paperwork. Amazingly enough, there are people who call that I really do not want to speak to, for whatever reason. I have reduced by required time in the office by at least 50% and that helps me do my job 100% better. I am not afraid to hire someone who is strong in areas that I am not. If

they help the operation and help me in retaining gameful employment, they are more than welcome. My Administrative Assistant does that and has been possibly the best hire I have made! I have excellent Assistant Golf Course Superintendents and they are effective because they too are on the golf course, not stuck in the office. They come and they go that's the nature of the business but, an Administrative Assistant will probably last longer.

While the cost in hiring a good person for this job might be a bit higher than the nine month employee, the return will far exceed the investment if you have a quality person in the office. Whether you are at a public course or the top private clubs, this position can only help you be a better Golf Course Superintendent. I hope that more people will get the opportunity to order flowers, or buy lunch, (or if you are smart, both) for our Administrative Assistant next year on SECRETARY'S DAY!