



The Labor Market — It's Tough Competition

By: Mike Huck, Agronomist USGA Green Section, Southwest Region

HELP WANTED:

Full time, free meals, health insurance, \$8.50 per hour, apply McDonalds of Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

Make up to \$10.00 per hour while training! Domino's Pizza – Various Orange County, California locations.

It is no wonder that golf course labor has been extremely difficult to find this season when fast food restaurants are paying either as well as or better than most golf courses. It is difficult for golf maintenance positions to compete with jobs like this even for the same pay. Just think about it, would you rather work indoors in a controlled climate or be out in the 100-degree heat, smog, rain, frost, etc. If I were someone not interested in golf, I pretty much know the decision I would make! On my recent trips throughout the southwest region, I have been speaking with superintendents about labor issues and here are a few of their comments:

"We have had an advertisement in the local papers for 3 _ weeks without a single response. We are offering \$8.35 starting wage, and now things will only get worse since the summer help is returning to school."

"Our incoming rate is pushing \$10.50 per hour, we couldn't attract anyone at a lower wage."

"The quality of help we have been able to get is pitiful. We have turned over 40 people this season. I have hired people on Friday and they don't show up

on Monday. We had four high school age kids go out to lunch only to return and punch out and quit. They told me they didn't feel like working any more. I know part of the problem is the incoming wage here - it's only \$6.50 per hour."

"We have been operating an average of 1 _ people short on each of our seven courses. In fact there is a new WalMart down the street and they can't open yet because there are not enough people available to completely staff the store."

You can bet there will be more of the same problems next season if the economy stays strong. Now is the time to start planning for the coming year in the budgeting process. Consider ideas such as:

- **Growth regulators** - Growth regulation programs for fairways can be expensive but if they reduce the labor required for mowing by 30% to 50% it may be worth it. Also, you don't have to worry about providing benefits for a bottle of growth regulator or it not showing up on time! Look at growth regulators as a source of "liquid labor".
- **Efficient equipment** - If you have not investigated spinner type topdressing applicators or rotary rough mowers...now is the time! You can cover most greens when topdressing in two to three passes since these units throw sand 30 feet and very uniformly! Rotary rough units can increase productivity over similar sized reel units by 30 to 40% based upon increased ground speed. Rotaries also require less maintenance.

- **Equipment lease packages** - If you have a junk pile for an equipment inventory and are spending a bundle of money on parts and repairs, consider leasing utility vehicles and the primary mowing fleet. Any unit that has an expected useful life span of 5 to 7 years should be evaluated for a lease. Leasing allows you to turn over units before they become mechanical nightmares and then replace them with the most current and efficient technology available. New equipment can keep your operators out in the field mowing instead of watching the mechanic make repairs. In addition, you no longer have to worry about how to dispose of the old unit - the dealer picks it up and takes it away!

- **Seasonal labor bonus contracts** - Once you hire seasonal labor it can be difficult to keep them the entire summer. Consider giving seasonal labor a "contract" that assures them a 50¢ to \$1.00 bonus for each hour worked provided they stay through dates agreed upon in writing at the time of hire. For additional information, see the article entitled, "Once You Get'em You Gotta Keep'em", by Dave Oatis,

USGA Green Section Record, May/June 2000.

- **Part-time labor** - Retirees are often interested in golf course work, especially if you can offer them free golf as a benefit. Also consider recruiting stay-at-home housewives for part-time labor. A few courses have marketed themselves to this untapped labor resource by hiring housewives to walk-mow greens and tees. Their advertisement in the paper reads: *"Ladies: Now you can take your morning walk and get paid for it, too!"*

- **Increase the payroll budget** - There just may be no other way around this problem than to raise incoming wages. It as it appears the days of cheap help for golf maintenance are gone and golf maintenance could be facing some tough competition in the labor market for several years to come.

The point is that you have to pay people well enough to keep them or they will just move on down the road to the next available paycheck. As one wise businessperson once told me: *"The only way you can keep your help is to pay them well enough that they are afraid to lose their job!"*

Welcome New Members

New Members - August

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| Kyle Peigh | B | Robert Weathered | C |
| Patric O'Fee | B | Mike Blume | Affiliate |
| Bill Davis III | C | Michael Madden | Affiliate |
| Miles Hicks | C | | |

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| Tom Unruh | A |
| Miles Hicks | C |
| Dave Smith | Affiliate |