



## Dr. Feelgood

By Mike McCullough, NCGA Agronomist

**N**ow that spring has sprung, and grass is growing, it is time to recognize some very important people: equipment technicians. These dedicated employees are arguably the superintendent's MVPs (Most Valuable Persons). Considering how much the equipment inventory is worth, the technicians are responsible for more than just checking air pressure in utility cart tires.

If the pump station is the heart of the golf course maintenance operation, and drainage is the skeleton, then mechanics are probably the doctors. Performing checkups on finely tuned equipment requires the skill and precision of a surgeon.

Frequently, I've heard that the best way to tell if a golf course is in good shape is how well the equipment is maintained. If that statement has any ounce of truth or merit, then a premium is placed on hiring or keeping a competent technician or technicians.

Titles such as grease monkey, wrench-turner or knuckle-buster are old monikers that can bring a chuckle to most of us. However, the stereotype of the mechanic being a grease-laden, second-class citizen is long gone. Ironically, the position that bore the wrong end of so many jokes is getting the last laugh.

Many times the maintenance crew workers recognize the head equipment technician as an unofficial assistant superintendent. In some cases, the equipment technicians have gone on to become fine assistant superintendents and some have even become

superintendents.

At Lake City Community College in Florida, a technical program has been developed that has mushroomed in popularity and exposure in a relatively short amount of time. According to John Piersol, Chairman of the Division of Golf, Landscape and Forestry, the Turf Equipment Management program has exploded over the last 10 years. "The demand for our graduates is staggering," cited Piersol. "We routinely get five or six job offers for every person that finishes the program."

The Turf Equipment Management program has a one-year technician certificate or a two-year AS program for individuals who are interested in a career in golf course equipment maintenance.

Why is there such a demand for equipment technicians? It's a good question and one in which a local area superintendent has thought long and hard about. In fact, the superintendent, who shall go unnamed, recently said that if he could do it over again, he would become an equipment technician. He said the hours are better, the stress level is lower, and the pay is very good, especially when you are a highly skilled.

Piersol totally understands why a superintendent would say that. According to a recent salary survey of graduates in this program, most graduates start out earning very nice salaries, considering some have only been in school for nine months. Experienced technicians can command wages that are jaw-dropping, to say the least.

If the wages are so good, why isn't there a more plentiful supply of equipment technicians? Most superintendents would like to know the same thing. If golf courses have an established and experienced equipment technician, so-called equipment emergencies are quickly passed off as a case of the hiccups instead of a full-blown case of ican'tbelievethis ishappeningtome-itis. Inexperienced technicians have a large learning curve, which according to Murphy's Law, comes at the most stressful times of year for growing turf.

One of the biggest problems superintendents face is finding quality individuals who can function at a high level. One superintendent in the Sacramento area said that his hardest position to fill is the equipment technician. Once a good equipment technician is hired, the superintendent is likely to do almost anything to keep him or her.

Some of the benefits that are frequently mentioned are more vacation days, flex time and extra overtime. Speaking of perks, don't forget the ability to play golf. Having a technician that plays golf can and frequently does pay dividends in regards to keeping equipment in top-notch condition.

The Lake City, Fla., program is not immune to problems that are common in California: not enough interested individuals. Piersol claims the program could handle more students, yet he finds himself routinely beating the bushes promoting the program to find qualified candidates. And this is from a program with unparalleled

success in regards to job placement for graduating students. It certainly seems times are tough all over.

Several courses have assistant equipment technicians on staff. These part-time technicians or technicians-in-training, when given the proper training and supervision, have been lifesavers for several clubs. However, getting the general manager or the governing board to agree to the additional position may require the assistance of a good trial lawyer. However, once the extra position is granted the benefits will be reaped sooner rather than later.

With the addition of an extra set of hands, the philosophy of the management staff can become proactive instead of reactive in regards to maintaining equipment. One of the key components the instructors stress at the Lake City program is a preventative maintenance schedule. Establishing and maintaining a regimented PM schedule is paramount to equipment longevity and performance.

Routine checkups with the doctor are usually not a painful experience. Especially when the doctor has plenty of experience and has tons of equipment at their disposal. It's nice to hear, "Take two quarts of 30-weight and call me in the morning."

## Did You Know??

In 1947, the first joint meeting between the NCGA and GCSANC was held at Lake Merced C.C.