



Equal Opportunities

By Mike McCullough

There is a movement under foot that may shake the foundation of golf course management: women working on crews and serving in leadership positions.

As more and more superintendents struggle with hiring men for the open positions on their crews, the transition of having women fill those positions is becoming an increasingly viable option. Several superintendents in the area are utilizing women on their crews and have found the experience to be incredibly positive. Most superintendents have found the predominantly male crews making a smooth transition to having women on the crew much sooner than expected.

Rich Northcutt, superintendent at Stevinson Ranch, has five women working on his crew. When asked why they hire women, Northcutt said, "we increase the pool of applicants, which allows us to hire the best candidate for the position, regardless of gender. "If a woman is our best candidate, then that is who we are going to hire."

Northcutt noted that his crew has adapted well to the diverse makeup of the workforce. "Our maintenance facility is equipped with the appropriate facilities, both rest rooms and showers, so there aren't any problems logistically," he said. "We have a no-tolerance policy on harassment, which translates into a very professional atmosphere on the crew."

Dave Sexton, superintendent of the Meadow Club, is also no stranger to having women in the workforce. He currently has one female employee at his club and will soon have a female NCGA intern on board. Sexton likes the diversity the females bring to the workforce and believes having women on the crew changes the way people act. "The overall atmosphere has improved, no doubt about it," Sexton says. "Whether it is the behavior of crew members, the use of inappropriate language, or a cleaner shop and break room, the addition of women to the crew has rounded out the Meadow Club golf course maintenance family."

For all of the encouraging progress women have brought to the respective maintenance crews, there have been some proverbial bumps in the road. Northcutt has seen some apprehension in some women to learn how to operate equipment. "Most of the time they are not accustomed to the equipment and are a little tentative about learning how to operate the larger pieces of machinery," he says. Northcutt is quick to point out the women being more conscientious about the treatment of equipment and in how well they operate it. He proudly states that a woman on the crew is as good an equipment operator as any male employee he has on his crew.

Sexton has noted an area of concern with women on the crew - women in a supervisory capacity. On more than one occasion, male crew members have refused to take instruction from a female co-worker. This gender bias is not the only limiting factor for some of the crew members. Sexton noted that the individuals who showed animosity

towards the women were not the kind of workers that he wanted to keep around.

The worker stability issue is always one of the top concerns for superintendents, yet it hasn't been a concern for these superintendents that employ women. Both superintendents have been impressed by how long the women have been employed at their respective clubs. The longest current tenure by a woman at Stevinson Ranch is three years with several other ladies having multiple years of service as well. The Meadow Club boasts a female employee with 12 years of service. This kind of dedication should be the norm yet in today's ever-changing workplace it is sadly the exception.

When it comes to producing a high-quality product on a daily basis with a crew who has a great attitude and outstanding work ethic, superintendents will have to disregard traditional gender roles and occupations.



Jim Stark, Golf Course Superintendent at Ridgemark G&CC takes a moment out of his busy schedule for a photo with the entire winning team from the Northern California Women's Cup Match Play Championship. The top PGA lady club professionals gave Jim a big round of applause in appreciation for his dedicated work in providing the perfect venue for the 2002 Northern California Women's Cup Match Event.