

COVER STORY



FINDING (AND KEEPING) SEASONAL HELP

Tomorrow's leaders are among today's seasonal labor force. Challenging, educating, and having fun with them is one way to insure a bright future for the entire industry.

by Will Perry, managing editor

Like most young American college kids, Gerald Faubel needed a summer job. So between semesters at Iowa State University, the young man jumped at an opportunity to work at a central Illinois golf course owned by a friend's uncle.

So began a life-long love affair with the game and the role of superintendent.

"I really knew I wanted to be on a golf course," said Faubel in a recent

magazine profile. "I was fortunate finding that out early."

Today Faubel is superintendent of beautiful Saginaw Country Club in Michigan. He has been an active member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) for years, working on the organization's Scholarship and Research and Governmental Relations programs. Today, as GCSAA's newly-elected president, he's in a position to

give even more to the industry and the game in the 1990s.

Faubel's association and contributions to the green industry date back to that first summer job on the course. Like Faubel, hundreds of other green industry leaders began their careers with that summer job at a golf course, landscaping or lawn care company.

That time again

At this time of year, when landscapers across the country are gearing up for summer, thousands of young people will seek some of the many opportunities open to them in the green industry. By providing an intriguing, educational, and fun work environment, it encourages their contributions.

The first step in hiring summer labor is finding the strongest candidates. The catch is that if you started looking today, you're already too late.

"If you're looking now, you're probably too late as far as finding the best employees," says Ed Wandtke, senior associate member of All-Green Management Associates, a Columbus, Ohio-based consulting firm that works closely with the green industry. "What you're going to find now is what's still available."

Year-round job

Wandtke says finding the best and brightest seasonal employees is a year-round job. "Most often the ideal time to meet those kids is in the fall," says Wandtke. "If you can bring them on board part time or even for a few days in the off-season, you get a good test of their abilities and give them an idea of what the work is like."

Wandtke warns that by waiting until summer for seasonal hiring, managers run the risk of losing people who feel the job isn't what they thought it would be. "It's a job that requires long hours at relatively light pay, so managers have to work that much harder to find individuals who are willing to start at the bottom of the pay scale and work their way up."

The preferred method of finding people remains referrals from current employees. Wandtke suggests offering employees a \$50 bonus if you hire their referral, \$50 to each after the new employee completes 90 days, and perhaps \$100 apiece if the referral stays on board for the entire season. "From a competitive point of view, there's not a lot of people doing that right now, but there should be," says Wandtke.

Where to advertise

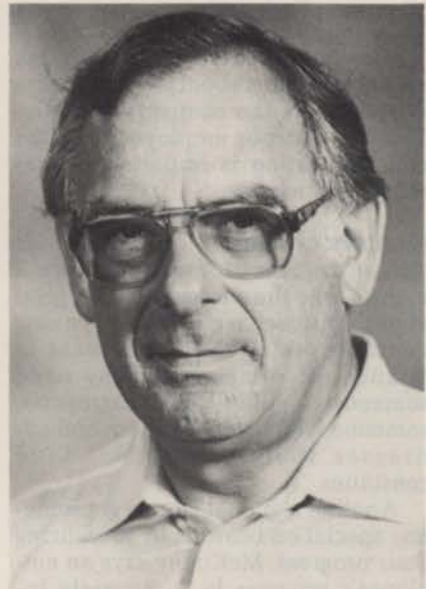
He also recommends advertising in local churches as opposed to news-



Wandtke: Churches are a great source for part time help.



Voigt: Just because they're students doesn't mean you pay less.



Lied: Motivation is a good environment, pay, and overtime.

papers. "People who attend church traditionally offer much more stable employment. It's the transference of the fact that the person has certain values in his or her life. Whether or not you agree with the church they go to is irrelevant. The fact is there's a significant difference between them and a lot of other people."

From Pebble Beach to Augusta, the men and women who have and will continue to shape the industry have often risen from the ranks of seasonal labor.

Michael McKinley concurs. "You recruit every day of your life," says the Eau Claire, Wisc.-based consultant. "You never stop looking for people, even if you have a full staff or plenty of time until spring."

Stay in touch

Even in the dead of winter you can keep prospective employees at hand by staying in contact with them. McKinley suggests inviting them to a holiday party or winter planning meeting. Let them know they'll be an important part



Summer workers interested in landscaping as a career should be given a broad range of work experience and plenty of encouragement.

of your spring operations.

Other stocked labor pools include local community colleges and universities (especially horticulture students), job fairs, area athletic coaches, state career centers, and government training programs.

Seeing a star

Employees who are strong candidates for careers in the green industry display responsibility, dedication and enthusiasm for the work. They should be provided an environment that will give them the broadest range of experience, says Tom Lied, president and founder of Lied's Landscape Design and Development in Sussex, Wisc.

"We do everything we can, and I think all industries should," Lied says. "Give them a wide range of experience and let them test their enjoyment of the industry instead of having to dig holes all day. That's certainly not going to give them an idea of what the industry is all about."

"The students who might be looking for a career in our industry come to us to test their aptitude for the work and their enjoyment of it. They ought to be handled differently and, quite frankly, too often in our industry they're not. They're taken advantage of. They're told they're going to get experience, but what they often get is an experience in futility because they're not allowed to find out what's going on or to challenge themselves.

continued on page 28

They're used as cheap, grunt labor."

The curious employee tends to ask a lot of questions about why things are done or how the company operates. Therefore, strong employee-manager communication is important to develop this person.

Mentors on hand

"Every organization should have a mentor who the student can feel good about approaching with perplexing questions he or she might want to bounce off somebody. They need someone to guide their progression, someone who listens to them and addresses their concerns," Lied continues.

Another sign that you've got someone special on board is by measuring their progress. McKinley says an employee's progress is an accurate indicator of his or her potential.

"We're always evaluating people around us, even if it's in a subconscious way," says McKinley. "As supervisors, there are things that really turn us off, like a kid standing around leaning on his shovel all day. Ask yourself, 'Are these people better employees than they were two weeks ago? What have they done that's special? What have they done to help me make money?'"

Lied adds that the industry could employ more women by restructuring workloads so women can cope with more of it.

"It's not sexist to say that a woman,



McKinley: Reward doesn't necessarily mean a huge monetary effort. Try a special gift as incentive.

generally speaking, is not as physically strong as a man, and probably doesn't have the endurance or stamina a man has for some very heavy work," says Lied. "By the same

token, she tends to be more meticulous, faster, and more complete in work that involves manual dexterity, quickness, tidiness and foresight." Lied says by adjusting jobs to enable them to do more work, by using equipment tailored to make the job easier, or by giving them director-level positions, more women can contribute to the industry.

"Take a look at your job flow charts," adds Lied. "You'll probably find that jobs can be broken out into patterns so that a person with less physical strength can still be a part of the team."

What to pay?

Light compensation for field level employees is a given in the green industry. But educators and enlightened managers realize that employees who demonstrate enthusiasm and aptitude for landscaping deserve a little more.

"We get calls from people who think that since they're providing such an outstanding educational opportunity to the student that they don't think they have to pay them very much. That's just not the case," says Tom Voigt, assistant professor of agronomy at the University of Illinois in Urbana. "They don't have to get what an experienced, full time employee receives, but like anyone else they respond better to a job they're compensated fairly for."

Money as motivation

Lied suggests landscape managers remember that students are working for one reason: to earn money, usually for college. They're interested in a job they can feel good about, while enjoying the highest level of earning capacity, he says. Consequently, overtime is often desired.

But there are a lot of other, more creative ways to reward an employee for a job well done. McKinley suggests giving them the unexpected. It might be as simple as a supervisor taking the time to pull an employee aside and say, "nice job."

"Or better yet, write them a note and send it to their home," says McKinley. "Nobody gets letters like that. It's as easy as 'Dear John, thanks for the good work.' You'll blow people's eyes out!"

McKinley concludes by reminding landscapers that employee turnover is part of the nature of the business. "You're going to have people move on, and I say that's great. Isn't it something when a college student works for you, earns money, goes to college, and is now out there fulfilling their destiny? You can be an important part of these people's lives." **LM**



Employees who demonstrate a special interest in landscaping operations benefit from working with a mentor who can educate them as well.