

Young hands at work

A 'Green Team' composed of Lincoln, Neb., teenagers brightens city golf courses and parks.

by RON HALL / Senior Editor

Dick Neumann appreciates all the help he can get at the Highlands Golf Club in Lincoln, Neb. This year he's been really grateful.

The 27-hole municipal course he and his crew maintains struggled through the spring and early summer recovering from winter kill. Seven bentgrass greens, including the nursery green, suffered severe damage. Four others required intensive nursing.

The extra help comes from four seasonal workers. They're part of the Green Team, an employment program for 14- and 15-year-olds. The four youths at Highlands are part of a much larger project, but more about that later.

At Highlands, Green Team members tackle projects that Neumann's crew is usually too busy to do.

"Because our crew is spending so much extra effort on winter recovery, we really haven't been able to do anything on our landscape beds or the wildflower beds around the clubhouse until we got the Green Team kids," says Neumann.

Green Team members, because of their age, can't operate heavy equipment, but there's still plenty to do.

Last summer at Highlands, they spread mulch and worked in beds, planted trees and buffalograss plugs, helped compile a list of plants and wildlife for



Thanks to the Green Team, Highlands Golf Course "has never been cleaner," says Dick Neumann.



The Green Team plants wildflowers at the Woodmen Outdoor Classroom. Nhan Le, Julia Eckles, LaShawn Mody, Renee Snoch, Lihn Nguyen, Ryan King, Curtis King, Mike Satorie (leader) and Kelly Williams.

the Audubon Sanctuary Program, and cleaned the maintenance shop. "I don't think it's ever been cleaner," says Neumann.

One project in particular drew appreciative comments from Highlands' golfers.

Green Team workers stripped sod away from the bases of tee marker signs, tilled in organic material and planted wildflowers that had been tagged from the course's five acres of wildflowers.

"The program costs us very little, just the use of some of our tools and the cost of a supervisor," says Neumann. The key to its success, at least at Highlands, is finding the right supervisor to oversee each four-youth crew. The supervisor is also typically a student and seasonal worker.

Neumann says the program teaches the youths valuable work skills. About half represent minorities; about a quarter come from poverty households. Most turn out to be competent helpers, and some develop a genuine interest in the green industry and return from season to season.

Sheila Vrana, who helped start the Green Team program five years ago with Parks Dept. colleague Tammy Casey, says 108 Lincoln teenagers are participating this summer. Each receives minimum wage. The program's budget of \$27,500 comes from donations from businesses in Lincoln, Nebraska's capital city of about 200,000 in the state's southeast corner. The coordinator for the program is Kristi Bornemeier. □

