

Golf course equipment care a growing concern

Golf course superintendents are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of equipment managers and mechanics. Equipment operation is so important that 40 percent of those surveyed for LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT by Readex Inc., Stillwater, Minn., said they run equipment training programs.

"It's very difficult to find good people who are trained in the green industry as mechanics. Good mechanics are not hard to come by, but good mechanics that are trained in the golf course business are very hard to come by.

Typically when they find a job, their superintendents pay them well enough that they don't want to leave where they are," says Steve Cook, CGCS, Golf Course Manager, Oakland Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

"We need mechanics in the industry and technicians as much as people with degrees trying to get superintendent's jobs," says W.P. Montague, MG, CGCS, superintendent, Oakwood Club, Cleveland Hts., Ohio.

Bob Foos, superintendent of Lake Shore Country Club, Rochester, NY replies, "At our club we're real big on educa-

With good golf equipment mechanics in short supply, rough turf may be ahead for golf course superintendents.

by SHARON CONNERS/Contributing Editor

tion so any time we can send somebody away to a seminar or a school we like to do that. We're finding out that an equipment manager is probably more important than an assistant superintendent just because equipment is so expensive, it's so sophisticated now, you have to have good maintenance for equipment."

According to Dave Radaj, superintendent of Wokanda Club, Des Moines, Iowa, "The majority of the mechanics I see are coming from other parts of the industry. Our mechanic came from working on farm equipment. . . . The biggest asset to the mechanics are the manufacturer schools for their education."



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Although most say their equipment is maintained on site, occasionally it is sent out for repairs such as grinding.

Drive for support

Some superintendents speaking to LM are dissatisfied with manufacturer/distributor support.

"The people that sell the (equipment) are weak in technical support or in support after you buy something. They spend more money at selling something than making sure it's right after they sell it," says Dan Williams, golf course superintendent of Riverview Country Club, Appleton, Wisc.

"Parts availability is really getting tough. Nobody stocks the parts that we used to be able to get pretty quickly a couple years ago. We've got a cart sitting on the hoist right now that's been here almost two weeks."

In contrast Radaj says, "There's probably three or four major players as far as equipment goes and they're all fighting for our business. They all have good equipment. They know that service will make the difference. For the amount of money that you spend on most of the equipment they should do what you need to have the equipment work right. I've found that all of them that I've worked with will bend over backwards to get the job done right."

No putts about safety

Many golf courses subcontract tree planting and large landscape projects like railroad tie walls. Some subcontract pruning and spring prep on ornamental beds. The top reasons for subcontracting are safety and cost.

Corey Eastwood, CGCS, Stockdale Country Club, Bakersfield, Calif., says, "I don't



Superintendents such as Daryl Decker, CGCS, of Arrowhead CC in Canton, Ohio, help out in a pinch, but they still need good help.

want my guys up in a high lift or climbing trees. It's a combination of expertise and safety. The workman's comp rate on a tree man is pretty high. He would have to have a helper. So we contract out between

\$15,000 and \$25,000 a year to a tree service."

Mark Wilson, CGCS, Valhalla Golf Club, Louisville, Ky., says, "You don't have the expense of gearing yourself up with some of the equipment that these (contractors) use. Usually you're getting an operator that uses this equipment every day."

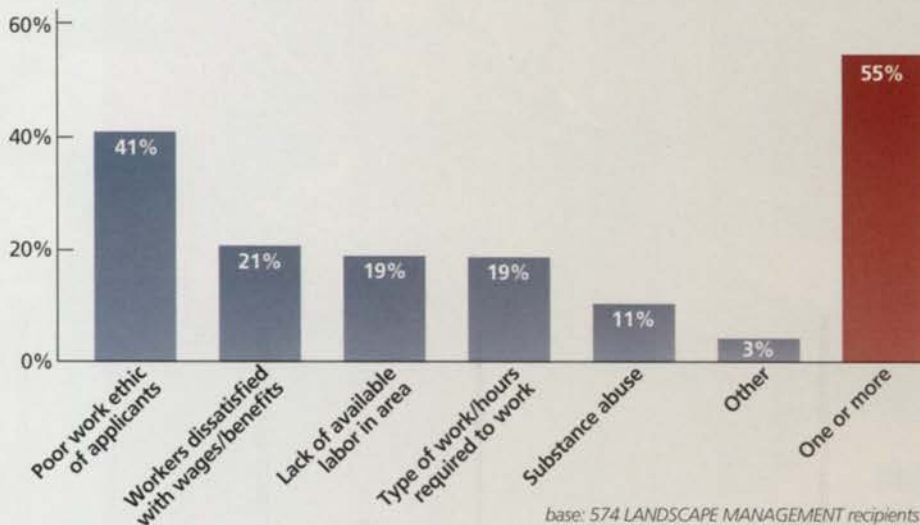
Teed off with wages

Trouble finding good help was a complaint for more than half of those surveyed by LM. Twenty-one percent say it is because workers are dissatisfied with wages and benefits.

Williams says its a problem finding reliable workers. "As the market's dried up, it's so competitive. It's not just wages that's the issue, it's benefits that go with it." Beginning pay is \$6 or \$7 an hour.

Montague says, "In our job market they would rather go

REASONS FOR EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN FINDING DEPENDABLE WORKERS



work for McDonald's and Wendy's where they can work their own hours and be around their friends and not have to deal with [the weather] like we do outdoors."

In contrast, Wilson doesn't find getting reliable workers hard. "I created a system of working a lot of college interns whereas they want to get a career in turf management. The other reason is, I got a pretty strong full-time staff. Also, my third group of people is retirees that have been returning every year."

When asked what their secret to success was, most credited their employees. It's also a matter of managing their time. Radaj says it's important to make sure that employees know what they're supposed to do. "To know what's going on you have to be out on the course a lot during the day," says Radaj.

Budgets are fair

On average superintendents received a three to four



With near full-employment, the need to find workers who take direction well and follow through on the job is especially great.

percent cost-of-living budget increase. They seemed to be content with that.

Eastwood has the same budget as last year. "It's never enough. But, we can work with that to the satisfaction of most members."

LM's survey revealed labor costs accounted for 41 percent of total operating budgets. "The biggest part of any budget is the labor and that is the hardest part to control," says Radaj.

Wilson says he has less

money to work with than last year. "Last year, we hosted a major championship, but we also had a new clubhouse and a lot of construction. We're

different from the average course in several ways.

"A high-caliber golf course is much more artistic, as far as in the maintenance. It's really not

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doing less major projects and doing more just maintenance." Wilson feels that Valhalla is

a job, it's more a compassion, a competitive nature, to be good.

"The average golf course doesn't get the support from the committees they're involved with or the financial backing to be competitive. It's in major sports where you have general management that backs it," says Wilson.

With budgets finally up to par with what they need to be, superintendents will likely be spending more time trying to find good mechanics. Who knows there could be a good mechanic out there who is training right now to be a superintendent.



Equipment care is especially crucial in light of high equipment costs.