



This grounds manager finds that student help is often the answer to a strapped budget and a tight schedule

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Last winter is one that Ken Stanton, Grounds Supervisor of Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, would like to permanently erase from his mind. It seemed his crews had to wage a war against snow and ice on a daily basis. If it hadn't been for Stanton's cache of student help, the hard winter might have broken his crews.

Students to the rescue

"They were very helpful in having the academic buildings ready for early morning classes, on mornings when snow had fallen overnight," Stanton says. "They performed a specific task that would otherwise need to be covered by staff people working on overtime."

And that's exactly what student help does — it relieves budgets and the backs of an overtaxed grounds staff. Stanton devotes 10% of his budget to student wages, and it's well worth it to him. The student workers do everything from string trimming around buildings and shrub beds to washing vehicles — any-

thing that eases the workload of the smaller, in-house grounds staff.

Off to work

The two areas where the student workers contribute the most are snow removal and trash pickup. After each home football game, a group of student workers cleans up the litter left behind in the stands. In coordination with the on-campus student employment office, this group signed a contract with Stanton that outlined their duties and responsibilities, and the amount they would be paid. Stanton sees that the group is

About GVSU

Grounds Supervisor:

Ken Stanton

Location: Allendale, MI

Budget: \$522,000

of students: 19,000

of full-timers: 9

of man-hours per week:
1,120 (in summer)



provided with a grounds department vehicle, backpack blowers, gasoline, and bags for emptying trash containers.

"This system has been in place for many seasons at GVSU and has proved to be a successful method of implementing student help," Stanton says.

A student group is also under contract to remove snow and apply salt to all of GVSU's academic building entrances and steps seven days a week for three months (December, January and February) from 5 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. The group is provided with instructions and maps, as well as grounds department vehicles, hand snowblowers, snow shovels and bagged salt.

Managerial challenge

Student workers may save grounds managers stress on the labor side of the job, but they pose a challenge on the managerial side. Training is crucial since some students either have no grounds experience or, worse, no work experience whatsoever.

"That makes it necessary to train them in some of the 'basics' of having a job, such as following instructions, working in a group with other people or individually, showing

up and being on time for work, and doing a good job while at work," Stanton says.

With this in mind, student grounds workers at GVSU go through a short orientation program prepared and administered by Stanton that's designed to acquaint them with the Facilities Services building, equipment operation and usage, safety procedures, and a checklist of do's and don'ts they're expected to follow. If

GVSU student help tasks

- ▶ Light mowing and string trimming
- ▶ Sidewalk and curb edging/trimming
- ▶ Litter pickup and trash can emptying
- ▶ Weeding and mulching
- ▶ Installing and watering annuals
- ▶ Assisting with tree and shrub plantings
- ▶ Washing motor pool vehicles
- ▶ Shrub bed maintenance
- ▶ Hand snow shoveling and applying salt

At left, GVSU Grounds Supervisor Ken Stanton helps a student start her blower. At right, a student root feeds a tree with liquid fertilizer.

these procedures aren't followed, the consequences can be harsh.

"Students who find themselves in a position where they're horsing around or are misusing the campus equipment or vehicles are asked to punch out and go home for the day," Stanton says. "Misuse of the campus equipment is grounds for immediate dismissal."

Stanton has learned a thing or two in his 25 years of experience in grounds management, and one of those things is that student workers need supervision. That's why, over the last two years, he has hired a student supervisor in the summer to help him with hiring, guiding students through the orientation process, and directly supervising the students.

"If the students aren't given good instructions and proper direction, they'll wander around and not accomplish much for you," Stanton warns. "That's why appropriate supervision of student workers is critical." **LMI**