

“The Last Man Hired”



Golf course maintenance has become mechanized.

by TOM MASCARO*

Would you believe that Debbie Winters helps grow grass for a living?—the kind of grass that beautifies America and keeps people healthy. Debbie works on a golf course.

Golf courses have traditionally employed men only in America. This is not true in other parts of the world, but for some reason golf courses in the United States have always had all male maintenance crews.

There have been a few exceptions, but these were rarities. For instance, Mildred Corrie became a tractor driver during World War II at the old Wilmington Country Club in Delaware. She moved with the club to its new location, and became the right hand man for Superintendent Gus DeFelice and then with Harry McSloy, the present golf course superintendent. Mildred is now retired. While on the job, she learned to do virtually everything. She not only drove tractors, she also repaired and kept them mechanically perfect. Gradually she took charge of the course's maintenance shop and issued work orders to the men. With her deep knowledge and love for growing good grass, Mildred unquestionably qualified to become superintendent of her own course. But she chose not to leave the club.

Zelda Baxter of Keokuk, Iowa, became the first woman in the United States to reach full status as a

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golf course superintendent in 1954. Her husband was president of the Carthage, Ill. golf course, across the river from Keokuk. Zelda became familiar with club operations and then her interest turned to grass maintenance. She took over the job of supervising the course at Keokuk Country Club in 1959.

Chet Mendenhall, Superintendent of Mission Hills C.C., Kansas City, Mo., had a lady assistant named Mrs. Barker and two girls on his work crew in 1959.

But these were all unusual cases that were the main topic of conversation at many golf course superintendents meetings. Now this is no longer true. Girls—girls are everywhere! They are driving tractors, wheeling triplex greens mowers, raking traps, washing down equipment, digging ditches, planting trees, spraying—you name it and they can do it. South Florida apparently leads the nation's golf courses with female maintenance crews. Larry Weber, Superintendent of Inverrary Country Club, Lauderhill, Fla., has had as high as 12, with about five or six still on the payroll. Tom Grondski, Superintendent of Ocean Reef courses, has four girls on his crew. Arlin Grant, Superintendent at Innsbrook Country Club, at Tarpon Springs, Fla., had at last count, 22 girls working on his course.

Some golf course superintendents, like Otto

Schmeisser at Indian Creek, have daughters who work on the golf course in the summertime. Woodlands Country Club, Ft. Lauderdale, has had as high as 25 girls, but with college terms arriving, the crew will stabilize at 11 or 12.

Joe Yuzzi, golf course superintendent at Woodlands, looks at it this way: "The mere presence of female help on the golf course changes the total environment. Everything is cleaner and neater. The language is civil and a happier atmosphere prevails. Girls are generally perfectionists—certainly more so than men. They are neater and more careful in their work."

Although it may not appear so to the average golfer, maintenance of the grass on greens, tees, fairways and even roughs, is an exacting profession. Extra care is needed to determine the grass's nutritional requirements, mowing schedules, irrigation and general overall maintenance. Millions of dollars are invested in our South Florida golf courses. Professional people are required to protect this investment, which not only provides wholesome recreation for Florida residents, but is also virtually the backbone of the tourist industry.

Superintendent Joe Yuzzi goes on to say; "Girls seem to obey orders better than men. They listen carefully to detailed directions and then carry them out to the letter. A ten to twenty thousand dollar green leaves little room for mistakes or shoddy work."

Joe is so pleased with the work that the girls have done he promoted Debbie Winters to an assistant superintendent's position. As a result, Debbie is now a working assistant directly under Joe. She issues orders, makes decisions on her own in some areas of the operation, and shoots down problems



Joe Yuzzi and Debbie Winters, assistant superintendent.

before they start. Three male mechanics back her up with a superb preventive equipment maintenance program.

How did Debbie get into this line of work? "Just looking for something to do," she says, "I thought I wanted to be a Physical Education teacher. After completing Broward Junior College I went to Florida Atlantic University. It looked like I was on my way to



Superintendent Joe Yuzzi, Woodlands C.C., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla, and his crew.



Brains, rather than brawn, are now in demand.

becoming a professional student. Then, I suddenly lost interest in phys. ed. I heard that Woodlands was hiring girls for golf course work, applied, and got a job on the crew." As Debbie puts it, "All of a sudden my whole outlook on life changed. I looked forward to each day. I suppose I was out to prove something in life and here was the opportunity of a lifetime. I wanted to do everything. I drove tractors, cut grass, sprayed for insects and diseases—you name it on the golf course and I can do it."

Debbie hails from Charlotte, N.C. She has found her place in the sun, here in Florida. Like many of the other girls I have talked to that have chosen this line of work, Debbie loves the challenge of a male-dominated profession. She enjoys the outdoor work, in any kind of weather. Her work day starts at 6 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. In the cool of the morning, before the golfers start banging away, the big grooming jobs are completed without interference. She likes the fact that there is no pressure when you work with nature.

Debbie wants to pursue this line of work until she learns it well enough to become a full fledged Golf Course Superintendent.

There are, of course, many reasons why girls have chosen this field. Perhaps the biggest reason is that in the last 10 years, golf course maintenance has largely become mechanized. Slow, tedious, back-breaking hand work and walking behind machines have given way to sophisticated riding equipment. Dragging and lifting heavy hoses to irrigate the grass has been replaced with automatic watering systems. There are few laborers needed on the golf courses. Trained technicians who can operate modern equipment are needed now. Brains, rather than brawn are more in demand, hence this evolution to girl operators.

There are other reasons too. "Office jobs cost

money," as one girl put it. "Almost everything I made went back into clothes for the job." The biggest attraction is the money. As Debbie puts it, "I'm already making twice as much as my former teacher." Golf courses pay well, generally speaking. Opportunities are also good for summertime work, which gives some girls needed extra income to complete their college education.

All the girls at Woodlands are single, with the exception of Gladys Saski. Her job is to groom the play equipment, (ball washers, tee towels, etc.) before play starts. Their ages average in the mid-twenties.

The Woodlands Green Committee is also unusual in that it has two women helping make club decisions. As a result, according to Superintendent Yuzzi, Debbie and her girls are well represented in policy matters.

When I asked Debbie if she had any hobbies, she smiled sheepishly and said, "I paint." "Are your preferences portrait, landscape or other areas?" I asked. She looked straight into my eyes and with a broad smile that is much a part of her personality, responded, "I didn't mean to imply that I was an artist, I paint houses!"

With this Superintendent Joe Yuzzi laughed and said, "They are all originals too—she never gets invited back." This is the kind of rapport that Yuzzi has developed with his girls and men.

My own observations are that it takes a special type of personality to relate to girls in this type of work. Some superintendents have tried female help and it has not worked out for the girls or the club.

It also takes a special kind of girl to become successful in this line of work. Speaking to the gals who might read this article, "Debbie Winters has it—do you?"

Note: This article originally appeared in the South Florida Green, Oct., 1974.