

has amassed a large amount of native grass germplasm, and is quite far along on the production and release of an improved alkaligrass he has developed.

Dr. Charles Mancino, of the University of Arizona, is studying mesquitegrass, a native Arizona strain that hasn't been used for golf. Research efforts will focus on seed quality and improved germination through selection and imposed treatments. Other primary goals, according to Dr. Mancino, are the reduction of leaf texture and plant stature, and the development of soil-stabilizing plant materials.

DR. MILTON ENGELKE, of Texas A&M, is also working to improve creeping bentgrass. Specifically, he is selecting for high-temperature stability,

resistance to pythium, resistance to thatch development, wear tolerance, and sustainability for commercial sod production. Dr. Engelke uses a heat bench for screening creeping bentgrasses with advantageous characteristics. He reported his research team has developed two synthetic varieties that should have superior performance under both high soil and air temperature conditions with improved quality, resistance, and color. He will test his new grasses under various environmental and cultural conditions in the near future.

At the University of Minnesota, Dr. Donald White has been collecting and, through breeding studies, attempting to improve annual bluegrass, or *Poa annua*, for use on golf course greens, tees, and fairways. Often considered a weed, *Poa*

annua has many positive turf characteristics that Dr. White hopes to focus on. For example, he has found plant types that survive under much higher temperatures than thought possible with this cool-season grass. At present, he has 7,000 crosses that need investigation, so the variation in his plant material is tremendous. Dr. White noted: "We're just beginning to discover some of the basic mechanics of *Poa annua*. We're surprised at what we're finding."

As the turfgrass breeders concluded their 1988 reports, there was obvious enthusiasm. There is growing confidence that this is one research project likely to achieve its objectives. Turfgrasses for golf that will have reduced water requirements and maintenance costs may be a reality in the not too distant future.

Employee Development: Management's Responsibility

by **GREG YOUNGS**

Superintendent, Milwaukee County Parks & Recreation

MILWAUKEE County's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture administers to and operates 62 swimming and wading pools, 16 golf courses, 134 tennis courts, nature centers, boat launching sites, marinas, the Mitchell Conservatory, and the Whitnall Botanical Gardens. In all, the park system spans 14,754 acres and encompasses 137 parks and parkways, three beaches, and extensive roadways. Staffing requirements to maintain the park system include 700 full-time employees and 1,200 seasonal or part-time employees. Obviously, it is important that each individual understands his role in achieving department-wide success. But how is success achieved? The answer is through a well-trained work force.

In any large organization, management has a responsibility to provide resources necessary to achieve successful results. However, when budget cuts are mandated, training programs are considered as expendable, and they're the first to go. In Peters and Waterman's book, *In Search of Excellence*, the authors studied private and public organizations in the

United States, and found successful organizations had an obsession with employee training. They concluded that this obsession maximized the organization's productivity, effectiveness, and employee growth levels. Therefore, the training we offer our employees ensures they are aware of what to do, when to do it, and how to do it well.

If an organization properly identifies needs and formulates training programs that address these needs, it can expect positive results for its efforts. These are some examples:

1. Improved employee morale: Proper training reinforces the employee's status as a member of the team, critical to the success of the organization.

2. Increased employee versatility: Employees can fill vacated positions with confidence, because they have a clearer understanding of what is expected.

3. Reduced turnover costs: This is directly associated with lack of training during early employment period. Often, the employee does not understand what is or isn't acceptable job performance, and then, when subsequent disciplinary

action is taken, he is disillusioned and often quits.

4. Less direct supervision: A well-trained staff allows the supervisor to spend time fine tuning the operation.

5. Improved user relations: Proper training equips employees to deal with public inquiries with confidence, relaying information in an intelligent manner.

6. Better utilization of resources: Trained employees take better care of equipment. They handle materials and supplies carefully, avoiding costly mistakes.

7. Improved quality results: The natural outcome of knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to do it well is efficiency.

8. Reduced complaints and grievances: Labor unions and associations expect an organization to provide its employees four things:

- a. Reasonable compensation.
- b. A safe working environment.
- c. Proper training to do the job.

d. The appropriate tools and materials necessary to complete the assignment. Proper training satisfies three of the four.



Author Greg Youngs, on the left, discusses maintenance operations with Bob Stock, golf course superintendent at the Brown Deer Park Golf Course.



The 18th green at the Grant Park Golf Course on Milwaukee's south side. This high and dry course is often the first to be opened for play in the spring.

9. Improved communications: Communication is the key to organizational power. It allows for the exchange of information, vital to organizational success.

10. Fewer accidents and injuries: Effective training programs include safety information that ensures the well-being of the employee.

11. Less downtime: Proper training increases the employee's level of knowledge in areas of procedures, processes, and equipment troubleshooting, keeping the flow of work continuous.

What kind of programs has Milwaukee County developed and how have they proved themselves beneficial to the system, and more specifically, to the operation of 16 golf courses?

A series of training programs has been developed to aid course supervisors in dealing successfully with day-to-day responsibilities. The programs developed through the employee development officer and golf course superintendents center on getting back to the basics. J. Sterling Livingston describes effective employee training as that which is relevant and applicable. A measurable payoff can result over time if organizational support is present and training activities concentrate on these principles. Some of the

programs evolve around the use of outside sources, training manuals, videotapes, formal education, and professional studies.

IN 1985, the department sought the services of a professional golf course architect to evaluate our courses. The architect was asked to prepare improvement plans that would solve many of the physical problems that plague our courses. At present the system has seven redevelopment plans, and is currently making recommendations to the county board for support.

This may not seem like a training activity, but the recommendations supported the course supervisors' beliefs and left them more confident in their own evaluations. Also, during the formulation of the plans, course supervisors took an active role in discussions with the architect.

Danny Quast, a highly successful golf course superintendent, led an in-service turf maintenance training program for county park employees. Included in the schooling were course supervisors and lead laborers. The inclusion of the laborers made them feel important to the

operation, and it was fascinating to see that most of the questions came from laborers in each class. Supervisors reported that participating laborers asked more questions and showed more interest during the subsequent golf season.

In 1988, Milwaukee County subscribed to the USGA for the Turf Advisory Service to analyze our methods and philosophies. In most cases, the TAS report validated practices and offered suggestions for improving the maintenance of golf course facilities. The TAS adds credibility to the system and supports the course supervisors' approach to the complex field of turf management.

Even the PGA has entered the picture. The Wisconsin Section of the PGA has been working with management in solving policy problems, developing programs to improve service, and then working with supervision to implement the program. The organization has also been instrumental in evaluating the playability of our facilities.

Supervisors at first were reluctant to deal with the PGA for fear of leasing facilities, but once the fears were eliminated and supervisors understood the organization was another resource of



A view of the Brown Deer Park Golf Course. This north-side course has been the site of three USGA Public Links Championships.

help to them, a more cooperative effort has taken effect.

THE DEPARTMENT is subject to following the policies initiated by the county board. Obviously it is concerned with the safety of citizens and employees alike. In Milwaukee County, as well as in other communities, pesticides are a continuous hot issue. To that end the parks department has requested that any employee handling pesticide materials be licensed by the state of Wisconsin. Additionally, a pesticide manual has been developed that contains specimen labels, employees' right-to-know law, MSDS, and a safety check sheet that is reviewed by the supervisor and applicator. The manual satisfies the ordinances and policies of the county board, and goes well beyond the state's mandated requirements. The manual gives all the necessary information to the employee, thus eliminating the fear associated with pesticide application.

THE DEPARTMENT has made a series of videotapes available to each park region describing equipment maintenance procedures and operation. This

training technique is already paying off. Equipment repairs are down, and routine maintenance is improving. The tapes identify general maintenance items. Training sessions using video programs will soon become a normal routine. Aerifying, cup changing, fertilization techniques, and endless other processes can be filmed for future use and reference. These tapes could be the basis for an entire winter training program. The possibilities are endless.

Course supervisors were paid to attend an intensive turf management program at the University of Wisconsin — Madison. They were asked later to share their information with their peers, having them act as course instructors.

This experience enhanced their confidence as golf course supervisors, using their recently acquired knowledge. One of our employees has even gone on to receive a two-year turf management degree from Rutgers University. To that end, the department made available a leave of absence, thereby keeping employee status intact.

Milwaukee County has also supported active membership in the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendent's Association, a

body committed to the field of turf management. The involvement with the association has produced a mutual understanding between private and public sectors. The relationship points out the problematic similarities between the two operations.

As indicated before, these programs are only a sample of the possibilities that exist for employee training, but they are programs that Milwaukee County has tried and proved successful.

The point to be made, however, is that these progressive training programs were initiated within the past three years. Why? A philosophical change in administrative thinking.

Department leadership realizes the importance of employee training, and has committed resources to accomplish this goal. Throughout the budget process, training resources were kept intact, and will continue to be a budget item.

Employee training has a high priority in the parks department of Milwaukee County. Management is meeting its responsibility to all parties concerned by providing employee development programs.