

Evolving Roles in Golf

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I WANT TO TAKE a broad perspective on the superintendent's evolving role as keeper of the game. Golf has been around longer than any of us. The game itself has evolved greatly over the centuries, and so, accordingly, has the role of the person in charge of the playing field.

In the earliest years, natural maintenance went hand in hand with natural architecture. Sheep cut the grass and rabbits dug cup holes. As the rules became more formalized, so did the maintenance of the course. Greenkeepers tried to keep livestock off the course, and they cut the grass by hand or used horse-drawn mowers. Then came tractors for mowing, carrying irrigation water, and spreading topdressing and manure.

Golf course maintenance standards have changed phenomenally in recent years. Televised coverage of pro tour events has had a lot to do with that. Regular golfers saw the lush, impeccably manicured courses that the pros played, heard the announcers discuss the lightning-fast greens, and decided that was what they wanted at their home club. Of course, these golfers didn't want to hear that the courses on television were tour stops, groomed to peak for a weekend. They didn't seem to understand that these courses weren't sustained at that level for the whole season.

The golf course superintendent responded to the club membership's mandate by employing intensive maintenance practices: course-wide irrigation systems, complex fertility and pest management programs, daily or even twice-daily mowing, and so on. Roughs started being maintained as fairways had been. Fairways started being kept as greens had been several years before. And greens started being manicured as no turfgrass had ever been maintained before.

Of course, today's golf course management standards and practices would not have been possible without the past 50 years' advances in petrochemicals, equipment technology, and computers. The 20th century's explosion of technology lit the fuse for a revolutionary change in what it means to be a golf course superintendent.

Before these advances, greenkeepers typically had to spend some 90 percent of their time on actual greenkeeping: mowing, fertilizing, watering, cultivating, and so



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forth. That's not to deny the challenge of greenkeeping. It was — and is — challenging.

But today, greenkeeping is only one element of golf course management. Nowadays, the breakdown of the job is more like 10 percent greenkeeping and 90 percent other stuff. The recipient of GCSAA's 1992 Old Tom Morris Award and the captain of the 1993 U.S. Ryder Cup team, Tom Watson, once observed: "In this day and age, a golf course superintendent has to be an educator, scientist, agronomist, and economist, and a good people manager. If you put all this together with a love for a piece of earth, then you've got a good golf course superintendent."

Today's professional golf course superintendent does indeed wear many hats:

Agronomist — The golf course superintendent directs a sophisticated turfgrass management program. Because every golf course is unique, this program must be uniquely designed to provide the playing surface that meets the club's aesthetic and playing standards, while preserving environmental integrity.

Scientist — The golf course superintendent needs to know not only about agronomy, but also about meteorology, chemistry, entomology, soil physics, mechanics, etc.

Environmentalist — Many golf course superintendents are first drawn to the profession by a love of the earth and growing things. But good land stewardship requires much more than a warm feeling. Today's superintendents must understand the complexities of the golf course ecosystem and its interrelationships with the larger ecosystem.

Golf Strategist — A love of the game itself draws many more to the superintendents' ranks. A superintendent must understand the rules and strategies of the game in order to provide a course that is fair and delivers the right mixture of challenge and entertainment. Without the playing field, there is no game — so as manager of the playing field, the golf course superintendent is indeed the keeper of the game.

Resource Manager — The golf course superintendent masterminds the allocation of the facility's resources — including labor, equipment, and supplies — to deliver a playing field that meets agronomic, aesthetic, and playing standards. The superintendent is the project organizer and the leader.

Administrator — The superintendent's administrative functions include budget development, purchasing, cost control, inventory control, and payroll — plus keeping records of weather, course conditions, and management practices. In addition, the superintendent is responsible for achieving and documenting compliance with the federal, state, and local laws and regulations that affect the golf facility.

Educator/Communicator — The golf course superintendent communicates with subordinates, superiors, the rest of the club management team, the club ownership, the club membership, vendors, suppliers, architects, builders, other superintendents, the media, and the community. The superintendent's goal often is to educate the other party — especially the club ownership, the golfers, the media, and the community at large — about golf course management in today's rapidly changing world.

The way the business management aspects of the job have grown, the golf course superintendent's performance affects the club's bottom line more and more.

Obviously, the superintendent's success in providing a golf course that meets aesthetic, agronomic, and playing standards is crucial to attracting players. And players mean in-

come: green fees, golf car rental, a new glove and a sweater at the pro shop, lunch at the grill, drinks at the bar, and so on — not to mention membership dues. The course's landscaping and the clubhouse grounds also can help sell lots in a real estate development.

And, of course, the golf course superintendent's skill in controlling labor, equipment, and supply costs also has a direct impact on the club's bottom line.

You may not realize how much the golf course superintendent's risk management and regulatory compliance efforts can influence the club's bottom line, as well. Let me illustrate:

Suppose the golf course superintendent fails to properly train a pesticide handler, and this individual accidentally causes a chemical spill that shuts down the golf facility for a day. There's nobody playing, so there's no revenue coming in. The whole organization is affected: There's nobody in the restaurant and nobody going through the pro shop. Then it turns into a media circus, and you have the uphill struggle to turn bad news into good PR — not to mention the possibility of liability for pollution damage or injury. This can get horrendously expensive.

This example is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the regulatory compliance issues that American golf course superintendents deal with day after day. There are also regulations dealing with underground fuel storage tanks, hazard communication, emergency planning, and on and on. And, of course, as long as new laws keep passing and new regulations keep coming, our jobs will continue to evolve. At least we have GCSAA's government relations program to keep both us and the regulators informed about each other's activities.

The continuing evolution of our role as superintendents, as keepers of the game, will keep having an impact on the organizations we work for. Our profession is perhaps the most dynamic one within the entire golf industry. Our profession and our role within the golf facility have evolved over the years. Our earliest forerunners were generalists who made greenkeeping one part of their job as keepers of the game. Then came the greenkeeping specialists, who changed forever the image of golf's playing fields. Now here we are, multitasking members of the golf facility's top management team.

Superintendents today are responsible for the care, maintenance and improvement of what is usually a multi-million-dollar property. They are highly educated, highly skilled, and highly professional individuals. Their performance is crucial not only to the success of the individual golf facility, but



Golf course superintendents today are mindful of wildlife and the environment (Bedford Golf and Tennis Club, New York).

also — in the long run — to the vitality of the game itself.

In fact, *Golf Digest* magazine has called the superintendent "the game's pivotal on-the-course employee" — which is another way of saying that we are indeed the true keepers of the game.

Golf Digest has also noted that GCSAA has "risen steadily in terms of influence and credibility." GCSAA has achieved this recognition as a sidelight, through years of striving creatively, diligently, and with vision to fulfill its primary mission — to advance the art and science of golf course management.

You may not be aware that when the organization that is now the GCSAA was being formed 70 years ago, there was some discussion about whether it would be better to organize as a trade union or as a professional association.

Today, we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who chartered our organization, for

their foresight. Without that early vision and continuing dedication to advancing the profession, golf course management might never have become such a sophisticated, challenging career. Without that vision and dedication, golf's playing fields might never have achieved the kind of aesthetic and playing standards that today's golfers seem to routinely expect. Without that vision and dedication, we might not be the valued keepers of the game that we are today.

Of course, GCSAA's programs today reach far beyond what our charter members probably imagined back in 1926.

As the superintendent's role has evolved into such a complex mix, the association's continuing education program has similarly evolved.

Today, GCSAA's curriculum includes more than 60 different courses on a wide variety of topics — from technical turf topics to advanced management concepts, like



Understanding sophisticated irrigation systems is just one of the superintendent's responsibilities.

those covered in the Executive Development series of seminars.

Our seminars are not just one- or two-hour overviews on a given subject. They are intensive, full-day — or two- or even three-day — classes on specialized topics that are germane to today's practice of golf course management. GCSAA is also adding more and more correspondence courses for superintendents who wish to complete course work at home at their own pace.

All courses are continually updated to ensure that participants are exposed to contemporary issues within the industry, state-of-the-art technology, modern teaching methods, and the latest printed and audiovisual materials. We're even looking at satellite uplinks to provide video teleconferencing in the future. We could hold a seminar at our headquarters education center and beam it out to multiple locations across the country. These would be two-way setups so that, for example, if a bunch of you go to Anaheim, a bunch to Chicago, and a bunch to Philadelphia to take part in this, all of you can see and hear the instructor in Lawrence, and he or she can see and hear

you. So you can ask questions and it's almost like being there. That's obviously a ways down the road yet, but it's something we're looking at very seriously.

And, of course, we'll always have our regular seminars at conference and in different regions throughout the United States and Canada. We had 54 seminars earlier this week here in Anaheim, and we will offer nine at our first Pacific Rim Conference and Show this March in Singapore.

Singapore... You know, since we opened our extension office in Singapore last July, we've offered a number of educational programs — in Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan, to name a few places. There is such hunger there for the kind of education and training that only GCSAA provides. And the entire operation is self-supporting, paid for by international members' dues, Pacific Rim trade show booth rentals, seminar and Singapore conference registration fees, and so on.

Here in America, we've already started providing technical training for the superintendent's staff, too, because we know that the evolving role as keeper of the game has

placed many additional demands on the superintendent's time and expertise. We're offering 30 spray technicians training programs around the country this season, plus we'll be piloting four sessions of irrigation specialist training in the next couple of months. And we held our first conference special session for equipment managers this year in Anaheim. Part of their discussions concerned the course content for a training program for equipment managers.

You know, too, that as an organization like GCSAA evolves, it goes beyond its traditional responsibilities with its own current members. An organization with an eye to the future must realize that it does have some social responsibilities and may have to make some extra efforts in terms of enhancing its role as a good citizen in society at large.

For a few years now, the public has been looking very critically at the environmental impact of golf. While many of us view ourselves as nature conservationists and stewards of the land, our public image doesn't quite measure up — at least not yet. A recent national survey found that golfers were about evenly divided on whether they thought that the fertilizers and pesticides used on golf courses pollute surface waters. And golfers — perhaps because they know us better — tend to give us more credit than non-golfers do. In a 1991 survey, golfers were about twice as likely as non-golfers to give a positive description of the overall effect of golf on their community.

Government has been responding to high levels of public concern about the environment by enacting laws and promulgating rules to make sure that superintendents take their environmental responsibilities seriously. Issues like the environment, however, are seen as "too big" to be tackled by government alone — at any level. That is why government is starting to forge more coalitions with business, educational institutions, and the non-profit sector — including organizations such as GCSAA and the USGA — to work together to solve the environmental problem.

GCSAA has asserted a leadership role in addressing the golf community's environmental responsibilities. One of our regular contacts at the Environmental Protection Agency actually says that the EPA now treats golf as an entirely separate entity from agriculture — thanks to the relationship we have developed with them. We are regularly invited to submit formal comments on proposed legislation and regulations that affect golf course management. And I personally have had the honor of representing the association and the golf industry at two Senate subcommittee hearings on golf

course and lawn care chemical use issues. We share what we know with those who make the rules and regulations affecting us.

We also share what we learn from key legislators and regulators with our members so that they can prepare for changes and achieve compliance. It is vital that our association's involvement in this area be backed up by environmentally responsible action by individual golf course superintendents. A single superintendent's environmental mistake carries a huge negative impact on the entire golf community's public image. Every one of us must shoulder this environmental responsibility carefully because, like it or not, each of us represents our entire profession. Each of us is a keeper of the game.

GCSAA's Environmental Management Program, or EMP, was developed to meet the complex training needs involved in environmentally responsible golf course management today. Superintendents participating in the EMP complete a series of relevant courses to earn a certificate in one of six distinct specializations. This credential demonstrates to the community the superintendent's strong commitment to preserve and protect local resources.

GCSAA is also strongly committed to supporting research on the environmental impact of golf. In recent years, GCSAA has provided several hundred thousand dollars to the USGA to help fund turfgrass breeding projects, studies on the fate of pesticides and fertilizers, and so forth. This important work will help to develop new grasses that are resistant to drought and disease, and answer questions about many environmental concerns. All of these studies and others, including assessments of wildlife habitat, will serve the golf industry well.

GCSAA also continues to independently assess the overall research arena and supports research that complements the USGA work. We look forward to continuing cooperation between our two organizations for the future benefit of golf.

Since it was founded in 1956, GCSAA Scholarship & Research has funded more than 150 independent research studies, such as the groundwater monitoring study now known simply as the Cape Cod Study — truly significant research for our industry. This study showed that even in worst-case scenarios, such as the sandy soils of Cape Cod, proper maintenance practices can prevent fertilizers and pesticides from leaching into water supplies. Other studies important to our profession have looked at how to solve black layer, localized dry spot, and many other golf course management problems.

Today, we see the need for more research in areas outside the current scope of the

USGA's work. There are additional crucial areas of importance in the day-to-day management of golf courses that need scientific study. And as the association of the individuals involved in day-to-day management who would benefit from such research, it is GCSAA's proper place to make sure that it gets done.

So now GCSAA is re-emerging as a major sponsor of independent research. As one example, we will be setting up a network to compile the findings of ongoing environmental monitoring programs at golf courses across America. This will help document the

environmental impact of real-life golf course management practices.

Another vital project GCSAA S&R will be funding — a project of monumental importance to our profession — is a series of studies examining the human health effects of pesticide exposure. The studies will be used to document worker safety, address public concern about pesticide exposure, and guide future GCSAA research and continuing education programs.

In October, we called a panel of distinguished experts to help us frame the questions we think are most important and what

The superintendent's role in managing major course construction projects ensures the best value for the club and its golfers (Upper Montclair C.C., New Jersey).



kinds of research will be most effective in answering them. The participants in this meeting included representatives of the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency's Health Effects Division, and the Colorado State University Department of Environmental Health, as well as representatives of turf chemical manufacturing companies. We are now beginning to evaluate proposals so we can select the researchers for this multifaceted project, which will include a mortality study of GCSAA members and a toxicology study. We are also soliciting funds to pay for this ground-breaking research. I want to extend our sincere thanks to our individual Golden Tee Club members, who give \$100 a year; our club and chapter Golden Tee Club members, who give \$1,000 a year; and our Platinum Tee Club members, who give \$5,000 a year. Their generous contributions are important investments in the future of golf. If you too would like to make a personal, tax-deductible contribution to the GCSAA S&R, please contact our development department at headquarters.

But the environmental issue is not our only social responsibility. We must address issues of social justice as well. Unfortunately, the image of golf as a game for wealthy white men still lingers among many non-golfers. That's sad, but sadder still is that that image also lingers in the clubhouses of some of

the game's most prestigious courses. If you read the *New York* magazine story called "Invisible Man," you know what I'm talking about. The story was written by a \$105,000-a-year Manhattan lawyer, a Harvard graduate, a black man, who went undercover as a busboy at an exclusive club in New England — not even in the South, mind you. It's not my place to say whether what he did was right or wrong, but the racist, anti-semitic, and sexist remarks and treatment he witnessed and reported surely didn't do much for golf's image. Now the word is that there will be a movie — I think a TV movie — version of his experiences.

We, as superintendents, may not be in a position to do much about the membership policies of the old-school private clubs. But there are strong social pressures for them to change. We're seeing more and more women, minorities, and people with disabilities out there on the course all the time. And government at all levels is getting more and more into the act here, too. In my home state of Michigan, an amendment to the state's civil rights act says that all private clubs fall under the definition of public accommodations. This means that all classes of membership must be offered without regard to sex, race, religion, marital status, or national origin. Further, all adults included under the membership must be granted equal access to club facilities. So with family

memberships, you can't give husbands the prime tee times and access to the bar and grill and keep the wives out. Of course, you can offer different membership classifications with different privileges, but the categories can't discriminate by gender.

I think we can expect to see similar things happening in other states, and maybe nationally. And I think that, as time goes on, this will be very good for the game.

As keepers of the game, though, there are some things we can do to increase the diversity in our profession.

The labor force today is characterized by greater ethnic diversity and a larger percentage of women than ever before. We don't have figures on the number of women or minorities who are golf course superintendents or members of GCSAA — we haven't asked because we will not allow discrimination. But if you look around at our conferences or if you think about whom you saw on that trade show floor, I think you'll agree we can be pretty sure that our profession does not reflect anywhere near the diversity of the labor force as a whole. We know that women outnumber men in the general population, though obviously not in our profession. And we can be fairly certain that racial and ethnic minorities are substantially under-represented in the ranks of golf course superintendents.

We have a social obligation to look at ways to actively recruit more women and minorities for our profession. It's part of our responsibility as keepers of the game. GCSAA is working to promote the golf course management profession to high school and college students who are beginning to explore career choices. We need to see what we can do to enhance women's and minorities' skills to make them a more available labor resource for golf course management. We may need to consider developing new educational opportunities in order to fulfill our social responsibilities in this area.

We might even look at scholarship programs. Since the GCSAA S&R foundation was created in 1956, we have awarded nearly 1,000 scholarships to promising turf management students, many of whom have gone on to become leading golf course superintendents, architects, and turfgrass researchers. S&R is an important element in our commitment to the future of the game.

At GCSAA, we are the professional association of the keepers of the game. We remain steadfast in our commitment to securing the best and brightest future of the game. At the same time, we take the pulse of what is going on in the world around us so we are able to make the most of the opportunities that are available for us to fulfill that mission.

Keeping up with research is a high priority today.

