

Education Does Not End in the Classroom

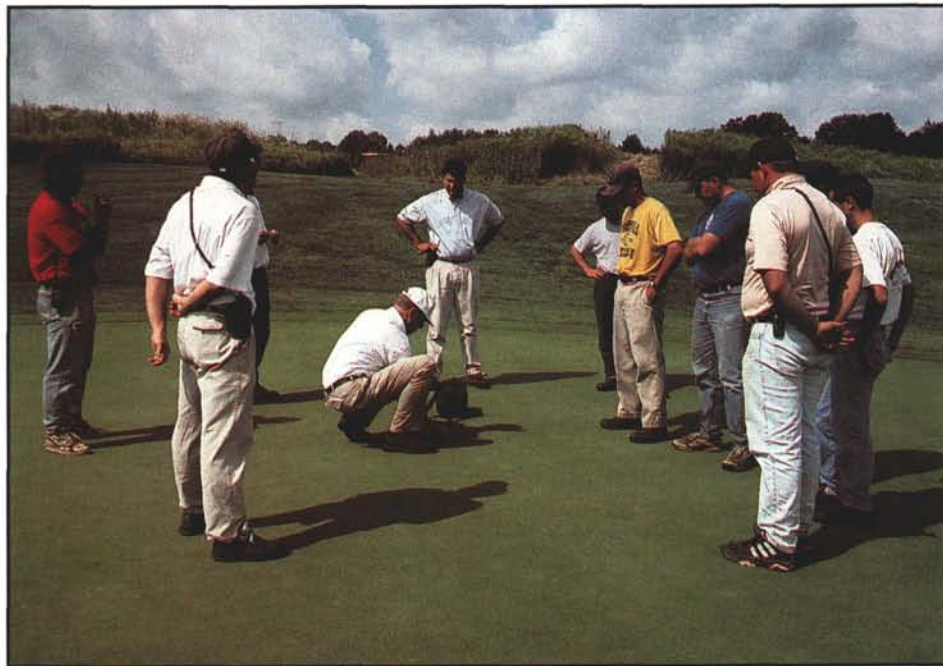
Developing a quality student internship program.

by TODD VOSS

TODAY, more and more students are entering the field of agronomy and are selecting a career in turf-grass management. In turn, the job market is becoming much more competitive, and graduates are being evaluated for job positions based on both their education and practical job experience. Internships and summer employment on a golf course are essential to building a strong resume, and students who wish to build their resumes are taking a careful look at where they are working. Whether you are trying to attract one student or many, we hope that the programs we have developed at Double Eagle will help give you some ideas to develop your own program or add to your current program. As superintendents, we are faced with many challenges, and turf students have made it easier for us to produce a quality product.

Turf students in general tend to be some of your best employees. They display a great interest in learning as much as possible, are willing to tackle many jobs, and take on responsibility. As a result, careful consideration needs to be taken not to offend your core staff. Jealousy can develop, which can make for a poor work environment. Still, students need an opportunity to gain experience in all aspects of golf course maintenance. Our policy is that there is no seniority when it comes to job assignments. The day-to-day routine changes greatly, and employees are encouraged to take pride in whatever task they are assigned. We do not want staff to get into a rut by doing the same job every day.

Not only do the turf students learn from participating in the program, they also learn from each other. We have found that it is beneficial to attract students from the many different turf management programs throughout the world. Each student brings a different perspective to the table and is able to share common practices from their region. Your current students directly impact the future of your program just



Turf students can be some of your best employees on the golf course. They not only have the opportunity to learn from the golf course superintendent and their interaction with one another, but also they learn from Turf Advisory Service visits.

through positive or negative word-of-mouth feedback to fellow students and professors.

To get quality student help, networking with professors is a great advantage. Professors want their students to go to golf courses where valuable work experience is gained and they are not just treated like seasonal help. Most interns are now receiving college credit, and, in turn, superintendents should take the time to teach these students. Because many professors are taking such an interest in where their students are placed, it is beneficial for you to invite them to come and see your facility. This enables you to build an ongoing relationship with them. They will be knowledgeable about your golf course facility and, hopefully, will refer students to you in the future.

With qualified help, especially turf students, getting more difficult to find, Double Eagle is very fortunate to be in close proximity to the Ohio State

University. We have utilized many turf students through the university, and this has helped develop our student program. In addition, the college offers an international agricultural intern program. Mike O'Keefe is the coordinator of this program and has been very helpful in placing many qualified students throughout the United States from Myerscough College in England.

Students placed at Double Eagle live dormitory style in a Turf House on the property. It is almost a necessity to house these students, especially if you wish to attract international students. It is very difficult for a student to find affordable housing for a six-month internship or for the golf season. It also is very important for you to keep in mind the cultural differences that students face coming from different parts of the world. Someone on the staff needs to spend time acclimating them to the area. They will have questions concerning banking, driver's per-

mits, groceries, and, of course, the local hot spots.

In addition to providing housing, Double Eagle designed an optional Turf Club program. This program complements the turf student's opportunity to work on the course. The Turf Club is dedicated to reinforcing their classroom studies, as well as giving them practical experience that they will find useful when they are out on their own. The Turf Club is voluntary, and students are not paid for their attendance. They meet weekly with the superintendent and are offered a forum to discuss many topics. Past topics have included budgeting, event preparation, irrigation, disease identification, IPM, equipment calibration, and resumes. On occasion, guests are invited to speak to the Turf Club about various related topics. Past speakers have included Eric Psolla of Brookside Labs, Dick Warner of the Scotts Company, Tom Campbell of the Toro Company, Dr. Trey Rodgers of Michigan State, and Mike O'Keefe of Ohio State.

During the annual Turf Advisory Service visit from the USGA Green Section, the students follow Bob Brame throughout the inspection of the golf course. The students take notes and ask questions during the visit. This small group format has been extremely beneficial because everyone participates and shares ideas.

In our eight-year history at Double Eagle, after the first two assistants were hired, all subsequent assistants have been promoted from within. Each of our management assistants was at one time a part of the intern program. Having them know our management routine has paid great dividends in our success. The assistant knows the dedication and hours it takes to produce a quality golf course, and also knows the importance of properly training new interns.

With assistants constantly moving on to superintendent jobs, it is especially important for the second assistant to have a grasp on intern candidates who could be promoted in the future. In addition, many superintendents begin by encouraging golf course employees to go to school to advance their careers in the turf industry. They then return to your course to do their internship and promote your golf course to other students while away at school.

After spending the time to educate our interns, we like them to stay on or return for a second season. This method has proved advantageous for

both the club and the intern. Our golf course management team does not have to retrain them, and they are able to step right into the program. More than 60% of our interns have returned for additional seasons.

A major topic of conversation in the business world, including golf courses, has been attracting quality, new employees. There are "help wanted" signs outside just about every business. Fast-food chains even are paying signing bonuses. Good, quality employees are in demand. As a golf course superintendent, it is extremely important that you portray an accurate picture of your golf course when recruiting turf students. In addition to the items that we have discussed, you need to offer a competitive wage, determine golf playing privileges, and be able to explain, in detail, the level of training and education that the student is going to receive during the internship. Money is certainly an issue with the students, but their level of involvement and being made a part

of the team can ultimately influence which golf course they select to fulfill their internship requirements.

In conclusion, these shared ideas may be of use to you as you evaluate your current program or build a program from scratch. Once you have attracted a student to your course, superintendents have an obligation to work with students to expose them to all aspects of golf course management. We are continually receiving support and education from organizations and universities. In turn, we should share our hands-on experience with the next generation of the turf industry.

TODD VOSS has been the golf course superintendent at the Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio, since 1996, and also is a member of the USGA Green Section Committee. He was first assistant at the golf course from 1991 to 1994 during the construction and grow-in. He shares his experience with multiple student interns each season.



The policy at Double Eagle is to expose employees, especially the turf students, to all aspects of golf course maintenance. The day-to-day assignments are changed regularly, and the students are encouraged to take on the responsibility of completing each task thoroughly, with attention to the details.