

February 22, 2010

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The Golf Course Superintendent

The profession (or role) of Golf Course Superintendent used to be largely misunderstood by golfers and the general public alike.

Now, most understand that one person is responsible for the playing conditions of today's golf courses. The titles may vary, but usually they're known as Golf Course Superintendents.

The current respect Golf Course Superintendents enjoy was not easily achieved. In the early 1900's golf course greenkeepers - as they were known - adapted their agricultural knowledge and experiences to maintaining golf courses.

In 1998, National Occupational Standards were adopted for superintendents throughout Canada.

Education Required

Young men and women aspiring to become Golf Course Superintendents prepare for the technical and managerial aspects of the profession by attending specialized programs offered in colleges and universities throughout Canada.

A Superintendent is expected to use skills in personnel management, communications, purchasing and financial management, as well as possess a thorough understanding of the game of golf. The Superintendent must know and understand the complexities and interrelationships of soils, irrigation, plant pathology, entomology, plant fertility and drainage hydrology. Superintendents must have a thorough understanding of the safe use of agricultural pharmaceuticals such as insecticides, herbicides and fungicides - plus a general understanding of various tools and equipment ranging from hand tools to complex, hydraulically operated machinery. The Superintendent must also have the knowledge required to deal with problems related to roadways, trees, flowers, buildings, tennis courts, skeet ranges, swimming pools, golf car fleets and other facilities related to golf.

Responsibilities of Superintendents

Local conditions and factors - ranging from the geographic-climatic locations and the size of the golf course to the history and organizational arrangement of each course - must be considered whenever a Golf Course Superintendent's responsibilities are discussed. There are many areas of responsibility common to all Superintendents, but there are also many localized aspects dependent on clientele, type of operation and the regional vagaries of nature.

In many private clubs, committees of members advise on policy as it pertains to each segment of the total operation. There may be interaction between the Superintendent and other committees including a Green Committee. A Green Committee is a group of members that oversees the management of the golf course and club grounds. The Golf Course Superintendent may respond to the general advice, guidance and suggestions of a Green Committee or in some cases may report directly to the Chairman of the Green Committee.

The Superintendent usually works together with the Golf Professional and Clubhouse Manager to coordinate efforts at a golf club. These three professionals normally report to the club's Board of Directors, or the owner or General Manager.

Superintendents must be able to secure, train, supervise and communicate effectively with employees. The Superintendent must ensure that accurate records are kept covering data from weather reports to short and long term financial projections and budgets. He or she must know how and where to obtain information relating to all aspects of golf course management and must keep up-to-date with the ever increasing technical advancements in turfgrass science.

Working with the forces of nature requires that Superintendents be flexible in their planning and actions. Superintendents know full well that the best planning can easily be altered or reversed by natural phenomena, such as drought, flood, insects, or disease - or by the human phenomena of the marketplace or economic conditions - and they must be prepared to alter plans to accommodate these factors.

The Superintendent's areas of operational responsibility may include:

- Management of all golf playing areas, which includes all tees, fairways, roughs, greens and surrounding areas.
- Management of the grounds surrounding the golf playing areas, which includes entrance roads, parking lots, the practice putting green and the driving range.
- All landscaping, which includes planning, planting and removal.
- All the golf course structures, which may include buildings, fences, bridges and shelters.
- Management of all golf course equipment and materials, which includes purchasing, storing and inventory.
- Management of golf course personnel, which includes hiring, firing, training, retaining and supervising.
- Financial management of the golf course budget, which includes preparation, explanation and execution.
- Management of golf course records, which includes cost accounting, weather conditions, material applications and inventories.
- Knowledge of golf, which includes playing regularly and being familiar with golf rules and regulations.
- Maintaining sound communication with the public, members, management and employees through such means as meeting with various committees and the Board of



Directors, attending membership meetings and outings and speaking regularly to a variety of groups.

In general terms, it is the Superintendent's primary responsibility to ensure that the golfer is provided the finest possible playing conditions and surroundings. The methods used may differ from person to person and course to course, but the common goal will not.

Professional Needs

For a Superintendent to perform at full potential he or she needs to have the opportunity to assist and advise in the planning stages of major programs.

Another need of the Superintendent that will prove to be advantageous to both the golf course and the Superintendent is to have an agreed-upon, long-term golf course development program or master plan that provides for continuity. By establishing reasonable, time-related objectives for major course improvements and establishing a procedure that affords the Superintendent the resources to implement the program, a definite pattern of improvement and performance can be fairly measured.

The opportunity for continuing professional education is another need that is important to Superintendents. Because the demands of managing a golf course are dynamic, no individual can remain effective in meeting these demands without continually working to keep updated on the latest technology and innovations.

To maintain continuing education requirements, Superintendents must attend educational conferences and meetings where the results of current research findings are reported and discussed. Additionally, to help supplement college and university education, continuing education opportunities are available through universities and colleges and professional organizations.

CGSA offers continuing education to its members and others across Canada. Membership in this professional organization is invaluable to the Superintendent because he or she can exchange experiences and practical, problem-solving techniques with other golf course management professionals.