

HELP NEEDED: *Equipment Manager*

*Training candidates
to fill open positions
in the golf turf industry.*

by TINKER CLIFT



The shortage of students in the Turf Technician Specialization program is surprising in light of the high entry-level wages paid to graduates. For every graduating student, there are an estimated 10 to 15 positions as an equipment manager waiting to be filled.

ALL SUCCESSFUL golf course superintendents have one very important trait in common, and that is the ability to find and train good employees. Without good employees, the daily operation of the golf course would be paralyzed by individuals standing around waiting for direction or, worse yet, acting solely on their own accord.

One of the most difficult positions for golf course superintendents to fill is that of equipment manager. This individual is a key member of the staff and plays a central role in the daily operations of the golf course. Not only does this person maintain the equipment inventory in sound mechanical condition, but he or she plays an important role in the overall dynamics of the maintenance facility. Imagine a maintenance facility at 6:00 a.m. with a group of employees drinking their second cup of coffee while waiting for a disorganized equipment manager to adjust the fleet of walk-behind mowers. If it happens to be the morning of the club championship or another important golf event, the situation would best be described as a disaster.

In addition to keeping the equipment running smoothly, good equipment managers also provide strong leadership by maintaining high professional standards. The ability to lead by example is very important because the equipment manager's office is often situated in the middle of the mainte-

nance facility where several times each day he or she is in direct contact with nearly every member of the maintenance staff. If the equipment manager has a habit of showing up late for work or has a general demeanor that is unproductive, the entire crew's attitude can quickly sour, and the subsequent condition of the course could decline.

Finding good equipment managers is usually very difficult because there are rarely more than one or two competent candidates in a local community. So scarce are the candidates that, in some instances, superintendents have found it necessary to coax equipment managers from other golf courses to apply for a vacant position even at the risk of damaging a long-term relationship with another superintendent.

Turfgrass Technician Specialization Program

In the fall of 1997, the Board of Directors of the Texas Turfgrass Association wrote a letter to the president of Texas State Technical College (Waco, Texas), requesting that the staff take action to fill the void in the job market for trained equipment managers. Upon receiving the request from golf turf industry leaders, Texas State Technical College added a Turfgrass Technician Specialization Program to the Golf Course and Turfgrass Management Technology curriculum. Students receive an associate's degree upon completion of this two-year program.

In May of 1998 several college representatives, including representatives from Texas State Technical College, met with members of the golf turf industry at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America headquarters in Lawrence, Kansas. At this meeting an advisory council was formed to address the nationwide shortage of equipment managers.

The first task undertaken by the advisory council was to develop a skills requirement profile, learning objectives, and instructor profiles. Since the program at Texas State Technical College was already in place, the information developed by the advisory council was simply used to adjust the Turfgrass Technician Specialization Program.

The curriculum at Texas State Technical College was assembled after interviewing ten prominent equipment managers from across the state of Texas. During two days of intensive interviews, facilitators developed a list of valued skills for a person in this position.

Skills Requirement Profile

- Perform reel maintenance on mowing equipment.
- Operate all golf course equipment.
- Perform preventive maintenance on equipment.
- Repair golf course equipment.
- Interpret and maintain technical manuals.

- Order specialized parts and keep inventory records.

- Maintain accurate maintenance records.

- Maintain an equipment maintenance facility.

- Lead maintenance crew activities.

Additional skills not necessarily related to the completion of the equipment manager's specific job description also were identified as necessary and valued.

Valued Skills

- Management skills.

- Golf-specific skills that emphasize a basic understanding of the superintendent's role and course managerial structure, the game of golf, agronomy and horticulture, and the effects of agronomic practices on the game of golf.

- General education skills.

In developing a curriculum, Texas State Technical College also tried to keep the future of each student in mind by adding turfgrass science and golf course management to the list of required courses. The additional courses of study are intended to provide each graduate with an opportunity to accept a position as an assistant superintendent or superintendent, should an appropriate opportunity present itself.

At this time Texas State Technical College also offers an Associate of Applied Science Degree. As for the future, the College is in the process of

establishing a one-year Certificate Program and getting it approved by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Having a successful Turfgrass Technician Specialization Program requires a large pool of resources in terms of equipment teaching aids. To meet these demands, the college is grateful to several equipment manufacturers for their generous support. They, too, realize the need for well-trained equipment managers who are capable of maintaining and repairing an ever-growing list of sophisticated mowers and specialty inventory items.

To facilitate training on all outdoor power equipment, the Equipment and Engine Training Council and Texas State Technical College have joined forces. At present, the College has certified two instructors with the Equipment and Engine Training Council and is awaiting accreditation for the program.

With high entry-level wages brought on by a shortage of good equipment managers, it is surprising that there is a shortage of students in these training programs. Currently, approximately 20 students per year graduate from our program with an associate's degree. For every graduating student there are an estimated 10 to 15 jobs waiting to be filled. Perhaps the perception of being a low-paid, unappreciated golf course mechanic instead of a valued equipment manager is at least partially to blame.

As a group, the turf industry has done little in the way of addressing the perceived status of equipment managers. In response, Texas State Technical College and one major turf equipment manufacturer have put together a video that is distributed to high schools throughout Texas and military base transition offices. The objective of this video is to demonstrate the level of professionalism displayed by successful equipment managers.

Since the need for good equipment managers is a national problem, the solution must be addressed on a national scale. Every golf facility needs to recruit potential students in the local community and bring to their attention the opportunities available at colleges that offer legitimate educational programs. For a list of such colleges, contact the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America at 800-472-7878.

To afford students an opportunity to study at Texas State Technical College, scholarships and financial aid are available to qualified applicants. More than eight out of every ten students receive financial assistance at some level.

For The Future

The equipment manager of the future will need better skills to keep up with advancing technology. The extensive use of global positioning and computerization are on the horizon for turf machinery. Unfortunately, some turf machinery manufacturers have decided to withhold new technology from production because it would create problems that could not be easily solved in light of the shortage of qualified equipment managers.

Texas State Technical College is in a position to teach all of the new and emerging technology that turf machinery will be equipped with in the future. The College has electronics, laser, computer, and robotics technologies that boast reputations of excellence. In addition, there will also be top-notch programs for automotive and diesel technology.



A successful training program for equipment managers requires a large pool of equipment and teaching aids. To meet this requirement, Texas State Technical College has benefitted from the support of several equipment manufacturers and local dealerships.

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