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(president's message)

Securing the next generation

Those who know me well are keenly aware of my passion for the golf course industry, and the absolute joy I feel being able to do what I love every day as a golf course superintendent. They also know that I'm not shy about sharing that enthusiasm and the many positive attributes of the profession with others.

Although the industry and society have changed significantly since I was first introduced to golf course management in the late '80s, I've never had any regrets or second thoughts about my career decision. I cannot imagine a more gratifying profession or a more enjoyable working environment.

Despite that, I do think our industry is at a crossroads. During my travels as a representative of GCSAA, I have heard stories about labor shortages, in particular the challenge of finding motivated and qualified assistant superintendents. And while I don't claim to have all the answers to the complex societal and generational issues at play, I believe it is up to all of us — GCSAA, individual superintendents and the golf industry as a whole — to take the initiative to introduce young people to this great profession. Furthermore, it is my hope that, once introduced to the industry, many will become as enamored as I was, and will want to make it a career.

GCSAA will continue to embark on efforts to introduce potential employees to the profession. We have produced promotional materials and work regularly with universities to help recruit turfgrass students. We are reaching out to high school guidance counselors, participating in job fairs, forming alliances with groups such as the Future Farmers of America and our recently announced merger with The First Green in an effort to connect with and educate young people about our industry.

Increasing awareness doesn't end there. GCSAA is also engaged in advocating on behalf of those already working in the industry. The "Thank a Golf Course Superintendent" campaign and this month's National Golf Day activities in Washington D.C., are two examples of external efforts that boost awareness of the profession and, hopefully, position it as a rewarding career option.

GCSAA's external advocacy efforts have also educated employers and golfers on the value of hiring and retaining a qualified and

dedicated superintendent. And, depending on who you ask, this can be a positive or a negative, as the time head superintendents are staying at a facility has significantly increased. As one of those superintendents, I believe it's a positive — the increased tenure demonstrates the respect facilities have for their superintendent. However, I certainly understand the frustration assistant superintendents feel as they aspire to take the next steps in their careers.

Many industries experience ebbs and flows that have an impact on upward movement, and golf course management is no different. What we are experiencing is not unusual — it's a function of supply and demand, and there will be a market correction. My advice to assistants and others in the industry who desire to be a head superintendent is to hang tight. Stay positive, continue your professional development, be engaged, and do anything you can to differentiate yourself. Your time will come.

To help assistants and others do just that — to differentiate themselves and increase their potential for upward mobility in our industry — I encourage them to explore GCSAA's newly launched Assistant Superintendent Certificate Program (www.gcsaa.org/education/certifications-exams/assistant-superintendent-certificate-series). This program is the product of feedback and suggestions from GCSAA members. Certificates in agronomy and business are already in place, with other disciplines to follow in the very near future. I believe this is a fantastic step forward for our industry, and I hope many of you reading this will take advantage of the program.

It is up to all of us currently in the business to ensure the future of the profession. The hours can be long and the work hard and often thankless, but at the end of the day, I cannot imagine doing anything else. Golf has been good to me, and I will go to my grave encouraging others to follow in my footsteps and enjoy the great career and life I have been blessed with.

Darren Davis, CGCS, is the golf course superintendent at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., and a 28-year GCSAA member.