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Today's superintendent is also an educator, and in my opinion, focus needs to be placed on educating the leaders of tomorrow on the benefits of golf courses.

(president's message)

Still sowing the seeds of knowledge

"The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next generation."

I wholeheartedly believe in this sentiment, and I have used this quote on numerous occasions. While I and others have attributed it to Abraham Lincoln, its author is unknown. Regardless of its origin, I believe that, as it relates to our industry, educating the leaders of tomorrow will reap dividends for the future of golf course management.

Think of it this way: In just 11 years, a current fifth-grader could have graduated college and be in a position of influence. Further, in just a few additional years, today's fifth-grader could have the authority to dictate policy to the golf course industry.

In last month's President's Message ("The value of a slice of 'Duich Pie'"), I expressed that the job of a superintendent goes well beyond managing turfgrass. Today's superintendents must be environmentalists; they must possess strong interpersonal communication skills, be able to manage a well-trained and team-oriented staff, be well-versed in risk management and have excellent organizational and business skills.

Today's superintendent is also an educator, and in my opinion, focus needs to be placed on educating the leaders of tomorrow on the benefits of golf courses. If we don't, someone else will, and the information an outsider gives might be inaccurate or misleading. More important, the children that you enlighten today could be future EPA officials, politicians or members of your golf course.

Introducing the younger generation to golf course management could help create our industry's future workforce, which as I explained in my April President's Message ("Securing the next generation") is desperately needed. We are truly at a crossroads in the industry, and the labor challenges we are facing are real.

In the early '90s, I was challenged by a good friend of mine, Tim Hiers, CGCS, the 1995 winner of GCSAA's President's Award for Environmental Stewardship, to provide tours of my golf course to local students. I wrote about the experience in the December 1996 issue of *GCM* in an article titled "Sowing seeds of knowledge" (www.darrenjdavisgcs.com/bin/41.pdf). Several of my peers also hosted tours and/or gave presentations in the

classroom. However, without a structured format and the necessary connections in the schools, the process was a daunting one, and the movement gained minimal traction.

That is one reason I find GCSAA's recent partnership with the First Green Foundation so exciting. First Green is a powerful tool for bringing together key influencers within the educational, environmental and business sectors. The program provides online lesson plans and other resources for superintendents and facilitates connections between golf courses and local schools. By having the community's young minds shaped by teachers and local leaders, First Green helps students apply knowledge to real-world scenarios.

First Green is based on STEM education — science, technology, engineering and mathematics. By bringing STEM learning onto the golf course through First Green, GCSAA members can showcase the positive impact golf courses have on the local community, economy and educational system.

First Green lesson plans, which GCSAA will provide to its members, contain all of the information needed to host a successful field trip to the golf course. Each golf course can tailor the program to their site, but a routine visit might involve testing water quality, collecting soil samples, identifying plants and wildlife habitat, measuring square footage of areas such as a putting green, as well as some fun things like a putting contest.

GCSAA's field staff representatives have been working with superintendents in hosting First Green events, providing on-site training and helping to facilitate the field trip itself. I am confident that once you get involved in this effort and begin to sow the seeds of knowledge in your own community, you will be hooked. It's truly a win-win for all involved.

Editor's note: For more information on First Green, visit www.thefirstgreen.org or contact Leann Cooper, GCSAA's senior manager, chapter services, at 800-472-7878. You can follow First Green on social media: @TheFirstGreen on Facebook and Twitter, and @Link-sasLabs on Instagram.

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