

BCC, Local Industry Facing Challenge In Establishing Proposed Turf Program

BY SUSAN USHER

Establishment of a proposed turf maintenance or groundskeeping program at Brunswick Community College will depend heavily upon a strong partnership with the golf and hospitality industry, a state Department of Community Colleges official advised last week in an exploratory meeting at BCC.

If approved by the state board, BCC would like to have such a program in place and accepting students by the fall of 1991, President Michael Reaves said.

But Sandy Shugart, DCC vice president for program development, was straightforward in assessing the obstacles that must be overcome in order to get the proposed program off the ground and to keep it going.

Officials at several area golf courses were emphatic in expressing a need for the program, which would be the only one of its kind in southeastern North Carolina if approved.

"I've got a lot of hopes for the program," said Ken Reinitz, general superintendent at Sea Trail Plantation. "I think it's something that's needed." As part of Sea Trail Plantation's March 14 grand opening of

its Rees Jones course and Jones-Byrd Clubhouse and Conference Center, Reinitz presented a \$1,000 check to BCC's Reaves to help in establishing the program.

Reinitz said most of the golf course labor in Brunswick County is not trained and with all of the new golf courses being built, the turnover rate is high as new courses offer higher pay rates to attract those with on-the-job training from existing courses.

With a golf course maintenance program, he said golf courses will be able to hire more knowledgeable people who will be able to maintain the areas high-quality courses. At present there are 21 new facilities either under construction or on the drawing board in the Brunswick County service area. Last year alone, more than 600,000 rounds of golf were played on existing Brunswick County courses, generating an estimated \$68 million in revenues, according to the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce.

Shugart agreed with Reinitz and other professionals about the need for trained and knowledgeable employees. "There's no doubt about



KEN REINITZ (left), general superintendent at Sea Trail Plantation, presents a \$1,000 check to Michael Reaves, president of Brunswick Community College, last Wednesday toward start-up of a proposed golf course maintenance program at the school.

it," he told the group of school officials, golf course and landscape professionals that met for breakfast at BCC last Tuesday morning. "But your industry needs to understand the partnership it is getting into. You have to rethink how this workforce is structured, how the people progress through your industry, and to make the college's formal education program part of that progression."

Programs at two other community colleges in the state—Catawba Valley in Hickory and Sandhills

near Pinehurst, both had programs with national reputations that eventually ran into serious trouble because of faculty turnover.

Minimum requirements for DCC to approve establishment of a two-year curriculum program would include two full-time academically qualified faculty members, representing a cost of approximately \$100,000 per year, and evidence that there would be an entering freshman class of approximately 35 students per year—"assuming you don't have a 90 percent attrition

rate." Industry representatives would serve on the program's advisory committee, which Shugart said should begin working immediately on a feasibility study for the program. Also, the industry would not only have to help identify potential students from its existing workforce and work with the college in scheduling classes, it would also have to commit to making completion of the degree program a condition for hiring. Otherwise, said Shugart, the courses would "undermine" the college's program.

"You know what the program is worth. You know what you're paying for that knowledge now," he pointed out, noting the shortage of trained labor, the cost of on-the-job training and continuing turnover due to loss of employees to competing facilities.

In addition, he said the college probably won't be able to keep on hand top-quality turf maintenance equipment without help from the industry.

Even then, the prognosis wasn't especially good. "Regardless of the enrollment and regardless of the industry support, you're going to lose money on the program," Shugart stressed. "It's a loser."

With the minimum enrollment figure bringing in \$70,000 in revenues for the college, the program would still lose a minimum of \$30,000 a year upfront.

Shugart said the goal of each community college campus is to "break even" on its programs, not to make a profit. But that requires having classes that generate profits to offset those that have a higher operating cost and lose money. "That's fine for the big schools," he continued, "but it can kill a small school. Industry will have to help with an

ongoing commitment to support the program."

Representatives of area golf courses attending the meeting said their businesses were willing to provide professionals as classroom volunteers and to provide cooperative employment opportunities and financial support to enable students to enroll. However, speakers from several courses identified differing types of educational needs for their workforce—from several key well-trained supervisory personnel to general training of the entire workforce.

Whatever program is developed, BCC officials stressed that the curriculum will be broad enough to encompass the needs of more local industry than the golf courses alone, such as the anticipated demand for groundskeeping and professional landscaping services associated with the area's expanding tourism and hospitality industry.

Shugart recommended that the BCC advisory committee "work feverishly" between now and June to develop a feasibility study that addresses the need for what would be a regional program, as well as resources and commitment available to support it.

Following initial approval by the state department, he said a one-time grant of \$40,000 to \$50,000 could be available from the state to bring on a faculty member this fall to allow him or her time to develop the curriculum program in time for fall 1991 student admissions.

In the interim Reaves told golf course officials the college could meet the industry's immediate needs by developing a series of continuing education occupational courses or one-day workshops in areas such as equipment maintenance and working with the public.

College May Teach Course Maintenance

Early one morning last week there was what appeared to be an odd assortment of people sharing breakfast at Brunswick Community College.

There were two trustees, the college president, the director of instruction, a vice president of the North Carolina Community College system, golf course owners, golf course managers, golf professionals, golf course superintendents, golf course greenskeepers, and a reporter gathering to discuss an issue of mutual concern.

In order to understand this unusual pairing, you must understand that the community college system is, by charter, an extension of the community. When the college was installed in 1979 it was intended to fill a void in educational needs of Brunswick County, between high school and the four year colleges.

The key element is that our community college has the task to identify specific needs of our county, our citizens, our employees and employers. It is its mission to discover and service those jobs which require training and education beyond those skills provided by the high school curriculum and which fall short of requiring a full college degree.

The Demand Is Here And Now

Understanding that and being aware that three new golf courses have opened for business in the past year with five or six more due to open in the next two years, it becomes a bit more understandable why the college and the golf course representative have something in common. There is an existing and growing need for trained golf course maintenance personnel to work in this growing industry.

If you doubt that this is an industry just look at the new clubhouses and the newly-tailored landscapes that have spread themselves over the scene in Brunswick County. Just call one of the golf course pro shops and try to get a block of tee times from now through Easter. Drive by the parking lots about mid morning some day and count the cars.

The growing demand for recreational golf, company outings, amateur and professional tournaments, fund-raising events, and business golf is on a power curve which shows no sign of leveling off. The demand is beating on our collective doors in Brunswick County. The combination of past success and increasing demand has focused on a need for greater efficiency and effectiveness in golf course maintenance personnel. It is no longer practical to hire someone off the street and give them on-the-job training in course maintenance.

Many New Skills Are Needed

The job skills required are not as simple as they once were. Mowing the fairways and shaving the greens are not like cutting the grass around the house. They require special equipment with its own special needs for maintenance. It is rapidly becoming a high tech endeavor. It has produced some new labels such as turf management to go along with old ones line landscaping and drainage.

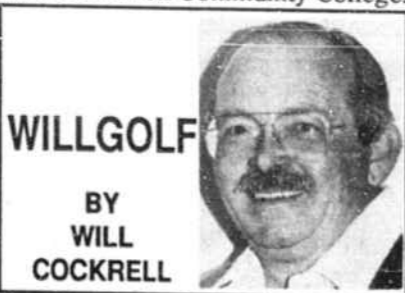
Golf courses require a very special blend of old and new skills to insure that their investment in land, course design, and real estate development is protected. You don't take a Porche or a Mercedes to the corner gas station for a tuncup.

The meeting at the college was conducted to lay the groundwork for designing instruction which will produce both hard skills immediately useful in course maintenance along with knowledge and practical experience in the field which produces interns for greenskeepers and course superintendents. The golf course people must accurately communicate their specific needs with the attendant skills and decision-making ability required on the job. The college must translate those requirements into instructional packages and programs to meet those needs.

Models Are Available

There are several curriculums already in existence in both North and South Carolina which will provide basic data and information from which to proceed. Those will undoubtedly be used to tailor local instruction to meet local needs. It is also interesting to note that the Agriculture Department at West Brunswick High School is preparing instruction for next years students in turf management, landscaping, and maintenance which will provide a nice feeder program for those interested in pursuing a career in golf course maintenance.

It promises to be an interesting and challenging process. And once you think about it, the bedfellows don't seem so odd after all. They need each other and they need results quickly. The demand is there for both parties. An advisory committee is being formed to insure that the lines of communication are both clear and focused.



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