

PARK MAINTENANCE MANAGERS GO BACK TO SCHOOL

Like so many others in the field of sports turf and grounds maintenance management, Duane Frederick doesn't have a lot of time to squander. As Park Maintenance Supervisor II for the city of Modesto, CA, he is responsible for 264 acres of developed community parks, 400 acres of regional parks, and other assorted landscaped areas.

He manages 42 full-time employees, ten temporary employees, and an additional 20 or so persons who are hired as needed for special projects. In his "spare time," he is earning his bachelor's degree in business at California State University, Stanislaus.

His dance card, as they say, is full. However, in 1988 and 1989 the 42-year-old supervisor took one week each year to attend the Pacific Southwest Maintenance Management School in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California.

"I wanted to increase my knowledge of park maintenance management," says Frederick. "I also knew it would be a wonderful opportunity to network with people in my profession and share insights."

Sponsored by the California Parks and Recreation Society Park Operations Section and the National Recreation And Parks Association, the school is held at the University of California, Los Angeles Conference Center on the densely wooded shore of Lake Arrowhead. The center is tucked behind a quiet cove, almost hidden from the lake it faces. It is the perfect tranquil environment in which to learn.

The school is open to all green industry professionals, although 90 percent of the students are involved in sports turf or park maintenance management. It is broken into week-long, first- and second-year programs.

Enrollment is limited to 100 students in the first-year program and 50 in the second.

"In the first year, we cover the horticultural end of maintenance management, from irrigation and sports turf management to Xeriscape," explains Bruce Wegner, Manager of Parks and Recreation for the City of San Clemente, who is the immediate past chairman of the school. "We also get into maintenance management systems and communication techniques.

"We try to teach people how to be assertive and articulate," he continues. "That's especially important in the public sector, where you have to justify entire budgets based on your needs. If you can't justify those needs clearly and assertively, you may not get the dollars you require."

The first- and second-year programs are taught to two different sections of students during the same week. Although the actual classes (which run from about 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. each day) and course work last for a combined total of two weeks, the school cannot be finished in less than two years. That provides the students with a year between sections to apply what they have learned.

The students in both sections are required to attend and participate in classes and pass a test at the end of their respective

programs. In addition, first-year students must complete a project that requires each of them to develop a mock management and maintenance program for a hypothetical, five-acre public park. Although some class time is devoted to project work, most of it must be completed on the students' own time after classes.

"It's not a place for someone who isn't serious about learning," Frederick warns. "I think those people who struggled in the school came with the attitude that it was just another conference, and that all they had to do was sit there and listen."

Successful first-year students receive a certificate of completion which allows them to attend the second year. Second-year students receive a certificate of graduation.

"In the second year we build on the basic information provided in the first year's program," Wegner reveals. "We cover maintenance management systems more deeply, including related computer sciences.

"Then we concentrate on personnel and personal management," he continues. "That includes designing and implementing employee training programs, positive discipline skills, employee evaluation and motivation, and written and verbal communication skills. The goal is to enable [graduates] to educate people involved in [their] business, such as workers and customers."

Public perceptions of grounds maintenance and the green industry in general are

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The Class of '88 at the UCLA Conference Center at Lake Arrowhead.

LOFTS OPENS WEST COAST RESEARCH FACILITY

Lofts Seed, Inc., based in Bound Brook, NJ, has established a West Coast research facility on a 50-acre, company-owned farm located near Albany, OR.

The facility is headed by Dr. Virginia Lehman, who recently completed her Ph.D. at Texas A & M University, under the direction of Dr. Milt Engelke. Lehman also holds a master's degree from the University of Idaho, where she specialized in turfgrass breeding and seed production.

"We're delighted that Virginia has joined Lofts, and we have big plans for our turfgrass breeding program in Oregon," said Dr. Richard Hurley, vice president and

director of research for the company. "With research farms on both coasts, we have a unique opportunity to coordinate and expand our research efforts."

CARRAWAY APPOINTED SALES MANAGER

Bill Carraway has been named sales manager for the Florida and Caribbean territories of Southern Turf Nurseries, based in Tifton, GA. He is leaving the Atlanta sales territory, where he has served since 1989.

Carraway has more than 15 years' experience in landscape construction and maintenance, as well as knowledge of golf course construction and irrigation. He com-



pleted special course work in turf and ornamental horticulture and ornamental and turf pest control at the University of Georgia College of Agriculture in Athens, GA.

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also addressed during the second-year program in a course entitled, "Being In The Fishbowl: The Public Perception." According to Wegner, there are any number of common practices in the industry which can lead to misunderstandings between the public and maintenance management and personnel.

"There are plenty of misconceptions out there concerning the green industry, like the one that arises when one guy is digging a hole with a backhoe, and another guy is leaning on a shovel looking into the hole," Wegner explains. "The public sees this and thinks, 'Look at that lazy guy leaning on a shovel watching someone else work!' But what the public doesn't realize is that the guy with the shovel is probably a spotter, and is there to make sure the backhoe doesn't hit a 24-inch gas main or other potential hazard."

"Another example of a public misperception which can be avoided has to do with different work crews, on different schedules, taking their lunch breaks at the same restaurant," he continues. "The public sees the same color trucks parked in front of that restaurant for hours, even though 15 different trucks and crews may have actually been there. But the public perceives it as workers sitting around eating all day and wasting taxpayer dollars."

Wegner adds, "We teach maintenance managers how to deal with those perceptions and how to avoid creating them. We want our students to create a very positive and professional image for the green industry as a whole."

Such lofty yet practical goals are at the heart of the program. According to Wegner, the school was founded in 1984 by several individuals in the field of landscape maintenance management. Recognizing that many people in management who worked their way up from maintenance have little or no formal education in horticulture, the founders wanted to create a way in which these people could expand their knowledge of horticulture and personnel management techniques in a time-efficient manner. They realized from the beginning that few people at the management level have much time to spend going back to school.

"We said, 'Let's put a school together for anyone in the green industry who wants to learn more, not only about horticulture but also about personnel and training, communications, irrigation, and employee and self-management. The problem was how to do it,'" Wegner recalls.

The intensive program, one week per year for two years, provided the answer. While even one week a year is still more than some maintenance managers can spend away from work, it is a manageable amount of time for many people. Other programs of this type existed in Colorado and Washington State, but there were none in the Southwest, where landscape maintenance is a year-round industry.

"We assembled a board of regents from the Pacific Southwest," Wegner recalls. "That includes Hawaii, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and California. All the members were volunteers from the green industry."

The instructors at the school are also green industry professionals. However,

Wegner asserts that the students learn as much from each other as they do from their teachers.

Frederick agrees: "The best thing was being able to talk to people from outside my immediate area. Our problems are fairly common, so our solutions can be applied fairly universally."

"In the Innovative Park Elements session, for example, each student had to make a presentation about something innovative that their agency was doing," he explains. "One person discussed how his agency was using camera surveillance for park security. Now we have actually started videotaping certain park areas, and have filmed people committing acts of vandalism and writing graffiti."

Frederick continues, "During both years of the school there is a session on team management, and I really get into the topic of teamwork and motivation. I've been able to incorporate some of what I learned during these sessions into the personnel training I do in Modesto."

As a recent appointee to the school's board of regents, Frederick will be working with first-year students on their projects. He also plans to attend the school's graduate program, which was started this year.

"The goal of the graduate program is to help supervisors who have completed the school achieve high levels of performance and accountability in the technical, interpersonal, and customer service areas," Wegner enthuses. "With all the environmental issues surrounding us, the green industry is going to become increasingly important in the '90s."