

By Dale Ivan

In Moses Lake, Washington, a prime challenge is finding and keeping skilled, productive staff for a seasonal labor market that results in high annual turnover.

We tap all the traditional sources for finding employees: pitching the program through the youth employment service, using the city's employ-

sonnel, it is a recognized and appreciated benefit to full-time staff members.

More Effective Management

The second major challenge is having the resources, money and staff needed to keep facilities in top quality condition as required by administration, facility users, and our own demanding standards.

There's no one correct answer to more effective crew management. Much depends on your management style and commitment to your job. Maintenance standards, computer inventories, check lists, all take time to effect. I have seen crews lose produc-

same environment each day and help develop procedures to make tasks easier.

6. Whatever procedures you establish, explain why they are important. Then follow up to ensure they are being followed. For example, develop a checklist of materials the parks' clean-up crews need on their truck. Then do a spot check to make sure they have them and reward the crews that comply.

7. Identify the "sensitive" positions. Youth supervisors at the aquatic center must be skilled in dealing with both the public and a teenage staff, while managing multiple tasks. Attitude, personality and commitment are as

Managing Crews — Techniques That Work

ment development department, placing ads in the state newsletter.

Our most productive recruiting comes through the referrals of relatives and friends by current and past employees.

The signs of good employees, often noted during the interview process (attitude, interest and commitment in other areas), generally will be evident in the job they do as well. The students with good grades and involvement in several activities become the college students who commute on weekends to work those early- and late-season spots so hard to fill. It's easier to train people in specific job-related skills than it is to teach the work ethic.

Moses Lake doesn't face the high tech or high service job-market competition of larger metropolitan areas. But with pay rates average for the region and the physically demanding work, keeping employees can be as challenging as finding them. Though our turnover is in the average range for similar parks and recreation departments, we're always trying to do better.

The city does offer a full benefits package to all full-time employees and those seasonal employees working six months or more per year. It adds nearly \$3 per hour per participating employee to operational costs. While it hasn't been a very effective tool in recruiting and keeping part-time per-

sonnel because the paperwork system requirements allow them less time to do the hands-on work. Typically, the administration or agency sets the requirements in this area.

Here are some personnel tips that work:

1. Provide input, backed up with documented details, to help develop and implement the most effective procedures.

2. Seek personnel trained and proficient in office and computer skills. We have an excellent office manager who is able to take charge of much of our record keeping and paperwork flow.

3. Experiment to find the systems best suited to your crews. Compare the information you gather from a fill-in-the-blanks job work order to that of a prepared check-off format. Track the time difference between those crews gathering materials for a day's tasks that morning or the previous evening. Compare results when written work assignments are — and are not — reinforced with verbal explanations.

4. Refine your own communication skills. People process information differently, so don't get trapped in a single method. You may find it most effective to provide written notes to some personnel and communicate verbally with others.

5. Understand that moving from site to site is more demanding on your employees than working within the

important as competence in the technical components of the job. Working independently requires a different set of skills, so does tackling the less challenging, highly repetitive tasks.

8. When possible, match people to the tasks they perform best. But also make sure all do their share of the "must-do, but don't-like" tasks.

9. Rotate weekend or other non-conventional work schedules so no one is consistently exploited. Include staff in the process when possible to develop the work schedules. We will work hours from 5 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. apart from holidays, weekends or call backs, so staff input is very important.

My management style is very direct and involved. We need to be quality consistent with quantity results. This takes a lot of hours to check on tasks and projects. Tasks have a tendency to be done differently from what was directed the further removed the manager is from their staff.

We use full-time staff to help supervise individual projects or assignments. We spell out details. When crews know where to go, what to do, what order to do it in and what results are expected, it reduces indecision and mistakes.

Cross-training works. The majority of our staff can move into several job slots and perform effectively. Rather than classify crew by career-ladder designations of 1 to 4, we use a desig-

nation of 2 for most personnel. (Our groundskeeper position is an exception.) This gives us more flexibility to switch crew members between tasks and eliminates any hidden resentment when a "3" is asked to do a "2" job.

Morale

Be proactive in your approach to problems. Look for what works and what doesn't rather than just waiting for complaints to be registered. Meetings and policy discussion sessions may merely be smoke screens clouding the real issues.

Crew morale can be a major problem in carrying out goals and objectives. I've found that people feel ownership in their tasks if they receive compliments and not just complaints. Take the time to say, "You did a great job out there. Thanks." And back it up with a letter of appreciation in the personnel file.

Also, a sense of humor exercised during hectic times will produce results.

The single most important factor contributing to productivity, reduced workers' compensation claims and a work force that demonstrates pride in its work is having the top person in that organization demonstrating that he or she cares. That top person (the owner, superintendent, director, city manager or mayor) sets the tone for the efficient and effective work force.

Tale of the Tape

Moses Lake, centered in semi-arid Washington State between Spokane and Seattle, has a population of approximately 12,000 with another 12,000 or so in its immediate service area. Though the city is relatively small, our services are equal to or exceed those of agencies three to four times our population. We are a full-service park and recreation department with numerous and diverse facilities.

Like other park supervisors, I have multiple areas of responsibility in the management of maintenance, budgeting and allocating of budgeted funds, and planning improvements and development of the facilities. I'm responsible for a trained staff that works seven days a week every day of the year. I directly supervise all maintenance-related staff

and hire, evaluate and set the wage for all non-union staff members.

In addition, I interact with the public, service groups, the Park Commission, various city council members, other city and state departments, and more.

Seasonal Demands

Our geographic location gives us an

ever-changing climate. The broad temperature range is from minus 20 degrees to an excess of 105 degrees. There are many days when heating kicks on in the morning and air conditioning in the afternoon. Seasons overlap. We may be trying to sweep leaves as the snow falls and freezes them in place. Irrigation systems are switched between winterization to in-use status

Q: What do all of these teams have in common?

Oakland A's
 Phoenix Cardinals
 San Diego Chargers
 Los Angeles Dodgers
 University of Texas Longhorns
 California Angels
 San Francisco 49'ers
 San Diego State University Aztecs
 Arizona State University Sun Devils
 San Francisco Giants
 San Diego Padres
 University of Southern California Trojans
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Simple But Effective Tools

- Provide an interesting shirt if a uniform look is needed, but don't require a complete uniform.
- Provide out-of-town training and skills enhancement to full-time and part-time staff.
- Grant personal leave requests when submitted (even during busy times) to staff who have been consistent performers.
- Buy lunch for the crew 3 to 4 times a year as an informal meeting.
- Whenever possible, get crew members public recognition, such as photos or articles to the paper showing individuals at work.
- Use overtime or comp time as extra incentives for those individuals who respond to the extra time and money.

to keep turf going during the drastic temperature swings.

This poses numerous challenges such as trying to prepare frozen ballfields for use at the end of February; installing boat docks at four boating areas while disassembling our outdoor family ice skating rink; or trying to deal with special events, construction

projects and preparing our Family Aquatic Center, while at the same time trying to do regular maintenance and facing such issues as equipment breakdowns.

We currently are understaffed. Our dedicated crew consists of a full-time park foreman, five maintenance workers and one groundskeeper. Seasonal

temporary help averages about 15, including ballfield maintenance personnel, campground caretakers, equipment operators and more. Most of these positions last from 5 to 10 months. Our Family Aquatic Center has up to 26 grounds and facility workers, many of whom are between the ages of 14 and 18. □

Dale Ivan has broad experience in managing crews, having moved from the position of county park supervisor, development specialist for the County of Santa Cruz, California, to his current post as park supervisor of Moses Lake. In his seven years of involvement, the Parks Department has built an award-winning aquatic center, a skateboard park, completed a park amphitheater, and installed ADA-compliant playground equipment in all the parks. A five-field softball/baseball complex is in stage two of development. The city is negotiating with Little League Baseball Inc. to serve as a site for finals competition in 1999 or 2000. Ivan is a long-time member of the STMA.



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