

BY JIM ROCHE

# It's time for the parade



In researching this article, I went to the Bureau of Labor Statistics to find out how many turf technicians are employed in the sports turf industry. Guess what? The Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't even know you exist! There was a category for "golf" but it mainly dealt with architecture and athletes. There was no listing for turf maintenance specialists or anything to do with turf other than the category of "small engine mechanic," which was linked with motorcycles and marine mechanics. Yikes!

If no one is looking at the existence of turf technicians as a profession unto itself, how is any manager going to figure out what his needs are, what he should pay someone to do this job, and what this technician's qualifications should be? Turf equipment uses both gasoline and diesel engines, and the government lists diesel equipment separately with heavy equipment like backhoes, etc. The question is, then, how can we address the turf technician's issues when the United States government doesn't even recognize them as a distinct group?

Let's take golf courses as an example. According to the National Golf Foundation's most recent figures, there are 15,899 golf courses in the United States. On average, each employs 2.5 technicians. This tells us that there are more than 39,000 technicians keeping the turf equipment running properly. Now let's add in college athletic fields, professional sports fields in football, baseball, soccer, polo, and other sports. Let's add in community and park district fields. The number could well surpass 75,000 technicians working in the turf industry. That's not including the technicians that work at dealerships that repair equipment.

Now that we have some idea of the number of technicians, we can look at several areas to get a better understanding of this most elusive worker. Talk to any of the 15,000+ golf course superintendents and ask them if they have a problem finding qualified people. The answer is yes, they do have a problem. There are only a handful of schools that train turf technicians. And those schools are having trouble filling their programs.

Here is a career opportunity for thousands of young people. The training exists, the jobs exist, but the students aren't enrolling. Why? Because they don't even know this profession exists. And neither does Uncle Sam. It's time to step out of the club-

house and into the classroom.

The Equipment & Engine Training Council (EETC) has been aware of this shortage on the dealership level of power equipment repair. The EETC wrote a book to assist dealers find qualified service technicians that the turf industry may want to read because it contains practical solutions to help employers find and keep good employees. Go to [www.eetc.org](http://www.eetc.org) for more information. There is also a list of EETC accredited schools that teach power equipment repair.

For the working technician, training can be next to nothing. All power equipment dealerships are invited to product training and update seminars annually. Because the turf technician is not working at a dealership, he is not invited to these updates. Here is where the turf technician associations come in; there are six of them throughout the US. You can find out more by visiting [www.turftech.com](http://www.turftech.com), but, in essence, most of them offer training classes specifically geared to the turf technician. I recently attended a Turf Equipment Technicians Association meeting that covered reel grinding. Foley United presented the session and it was excellent. If a technician does not belong to a local technician association, he should join one immediately. If there is none in his area, he should start one. Any of the existing associations would be willing to help.

If we are going to overcome the shortage of turf technicians and power equipment technicians, it is time for the parade. We as an industry—technicians, executives, managers—have to get out there and beat the drum and toot our own horn. When the EETC first became organized in 1997, we felt that the major reason young people were not interested in our industry was because of parents steering them in different directions and school counselors steering them toward more "lofty" careers. I now think that it is because young people don't know we even exist. So it's time to get out of the back room, get out of the back shop, and let the world know that we're out here. **ST**

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