

From the Sidelines



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Hiring seasonal employees

THIS MONTH I turn this space over to Ed Hall, the superintendent of parks and grounds for the City of Bowie, MD. At my request Ed addressed the issue of hiring seasonal workers and here's what he had to say:

"The hiring of seasonal or temporary labor can be a tremendous benefit if managed properly. The employment of seasonal labor can save considerable funds while filling many labor shortage problems. It also provides the opportunity for employees to gain experience and be evaluated for future promotion to full time status.

"The City of Bowie Parks Department had hired seasonal labor for many years but has only recently used this important employment tool to maximize its benefits.

"When this program was begun many years ago, it was mainly to provide summer employment for the City's youth. And since it employed unskilled labor the pay scale was minimum wage. This approach was changed about 12 years ago because of a decline in interested applicants and the need to have employees later in the season. We created a two-tiered pay system, one for summer help and one for temporary labor. We currently employ eight to ten seasonal workers.

"The summer help employees work from June through August and are typically high school kids. The best of these are then recruited to return, and many work through college. They get an increase in pay every year they return. The temporary workers start in April and work through mid December and are paid at the same rate as an entry level Parks employee but without benefits. Since we have changed our hiring procedures, we have had many more qualified applicants than positions. The program has worked so well that the current full time staff of 32 has had half of the employees make the transition from seasonal or temporary labor to full time. And when a vacancy does occur, it is almost always filled by a temporary staff member negating the need to go through the outside hiring process.

"The work that is performed by summer help workers consists of working with various crews doing line trimming, refuse pick up, painting, planting flowers, and miscellaneous labor. Most of this work is performed by those that have never worked before and are learning what manual labor is all about. The work performed by temporary laborers would also consist of working with an assigned crew operating mowers, line trimming, working in and around storm water management ponds and channels, ball field maintenance, and the bulk leaf program. These individuals typically are more mature and have worked for our department for more than one season or have an employment history in grounds maintenance.

"We have had excellent success hiring retired individuals who are looking for employment in the milder weather months. They tend to have excellent work habits and can bring a wealth of knowledge and skills from their respective former careers that can have a very positive influence on younger staff members. It has never been more important than the current time to maximize the efficient use of labor of any type and the use of seasonal employee's can give a grounds maintenance operation the required labor force to complete the many numerous and labor intense projects."

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