MOORE COUNTY, N.C. (Nov. 29, 2022) – Building on the recent announcement of Golf House Pinehurst and its commitment to foster a stronger golf community in North Carolina, the USGA has partnered with Sandhills Community College to create the USGA Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program (GAP).

> *"This pilot program is an opportunity to do our part to strengthen the golf workforce in our new home community, and to foster an even stronger golf economy in North Carolina."*

The 12-month registered program through ApprenticeshipNC is designed for anyone with an interest in pursuing a career in golf course maintenance or those working on a course and wishing to advance their skills.

A collaborative effort with area golf course superintendents, GAP aims to recruit, educate, and train the next generation of golf course maintenance professionals while removing barriers to entering the profession and providing participants with a living wage.

In-person college classes start in January and will be combined with on-the-job training at Pinehurst-area golf courses including Pinehurst Resort & Country Club, Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club, Forest Creek Golf Club and The Country Club of North Carolina.

"The USGA has long enjoyed a strong working relationship with our friends in the industry who own, run and maintain the green spaces on which every golfer plays," said Matt Pringle, Ph.D., managing director of the USGA Green Section. "This pilot program is an opportunity to do our part to strengthen the golf workforce in our new home community, and to foster an even stronger golf economy in North Carolina."

Qualified applicants will attend classes free of charge through a regional partnership with the USGA, ApprenticeshipNC, and area golf facilities. Participating Pinehurst-area golf courses will employ all students at the start of the program at a minimum $15 per hour pay scale, with a commitment to increase their hourly pay to at least $17 per hour at the completion of the program.

"The recruitment and retention of skilled labor has been an ongoing challenge for the golf course industry," said Bob Farren, CGCS, director of golf course maintenance at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club. "This apprenticeship program is positioned to address that challenge by creating career paths for its graduates, who will be trained on the latest in golf course maintenance technology and best practices."

USGA educators who will teach the inaugural classes include Jordan Booth, USGA agronomist, who received his B.S. in turfgrass management at Clemson University and both his M.S. and Ph.D. at Virginia Tech. A certified golf course superintendent through the GCSAA, Dr. Booth joined the USGA in 2021 and moved to Pinehurst, where he currently serves as its lead Southeast agronomist.

He will be joined by Chris Hartwiger, director of the USGA's golf course consulting service. Hartwiger received his B.S. at the College of William and Mary and his M.S. at North Carolina State University. He joined the USGA in 1995.

Cole Thompson is the third USGA expert to round out the organization's educators. Dr. Thompson is the USGA's director of turfgrass and environmental research and oversees the Mike Davis Program for Advancing Golf Course Management – a competitive grant program that provides leading turfgrass researchers with significant grant funding to advance sustainable golf course management. Thompson received his B.S. in agriculture and both his M.S. and Ph.D. in horticulture, all at Kansas State University. Prior to joining the USGA in 2018, Dr. Thompson conducted turfgrass research, extension, and education as an assistant professor at The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo.

Students will expand their knowledge through college courses built around their work schedules. Courses will include soil science, water management, turfgrass science and pest management. GAP participants will gain expertise in managing the ever-advancing tools of their trade, from maintaining automated irrigation systems and autonomous mowers, to GPS-guided robotics that more efficiently manage energy, water, labor and nutrients – the four biggest maintenance costs for

most courses.

“Sandhills Community College is committed to meeting the workforce needs in our community. The golfing industry is a vital component,” said Dr. John Dempsey, president of Sandhills Community College. “This unique partnership with SCC, USGA and local golf courses shows how partnerships are able to address the challenges our local employers face and provide a pipeline of skilled workers who then have increased earning potential.”

The North Carolina Community College System currently offers more than 1,400 registered apprenticeship occupations, a “tried-and-true approach” for preparing workers for jobs while meeting the business needs for a highly skilled workforce that innovates and adapts to future needs. The programs are employer-driven and offer flexible training strategy for workers who earn a living wage.

In addition to the credentials earned through Sandhills Community College, apprentices will receive a Journey Worker Card through the North Carolina and United States Department of Labor, providing each with the essential tools for a successful career in golf course maintenance.

Registration is now open at sandhills.edu. The second cohort of GAP students will begin in June of 2023.

GAP, a pilot program with curriculum developed by the USGA, is the latest endeavor by the USGA to help golf courses provide the best playing conditions for golfers while more efficiently managing resources, advancing science and skills in agronomy, and providing practical consulting services to manage costs. Those efforts are led by the USGA Green Section, a division of the organization solely dedicated to golf course sustainability.

Many of the USGA Green Section experts will be based at Golf House Pinehurst when the six-acre campus opens in December 2023.

“There’s no better place to initiate this apprenticeship program than Pinehurst, N.C.,” said Natalie Hawkins, executive director of Moore County Partners in Progress. “With our abundance of world-class golf courses and excellent community college system, we are pleased to help the USGA make their vision become a reality.”

Please click here for GAP-related editorial images to use.

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https://mediacenter.usga.org/Greenkeeper-Apprenticeship-Program