

Programs with an Eye Toward the Future

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PICTURE GOLF COURSE superintendents without an association. We would work within a vacuum — we would have few with whom to commiserate, no experiences to share and learn from, and our profession would lack plans and goals. There would probably be little consistency from golf course to golf course. Golfing conditions would surely suffer.

As outrageous as it may seem to have a golf course without a superintendent, it is equally outrageous to imagine superintendents without an association. As opposed to some who work in the same building, or even in the same office, superintendents have to make an effort to come together. An association, be it local or national, provides a means for superintendents to share experiences with those who work in the same occupation.

Professional associations consist of members who join forces for the advancement of their profession. Associations address issues of common concern, sometimes to provide money for research, sometimes to learn new techniques, sometimes for camaraderie, and in some cases, just for the sake of belonging to one's professional association.

Our association — the GCSAA — will influence our profession during the coming years.

In looking toward our future, we have to consider what lies ahead of us. I see future challenges falling into two distinct areas — skills and image. We need to think about our future, and of the skills we will need as golf course superintendents to continue to maintain excellent golfing conditions, and to further ourselves professionally.

For example, where will pesticides be 10 to 20 years from now? What will we be required in terms of our pesticide applications? What pesticides will be available to us? How will we have to change our management practices to take the best advantage of the chemicals



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we are allowed to use? What will the water situation be? We've seen water shortages in the Northeast, Florida, and in Arizona growing worse. We have seen examples where golf courses are considered non-essential users of water, and are prohibited from irrigating in times of drought. If this trend continues, with the projections for dwindling water supplies, golf courses are going to have a very difficult time maintaining conditions with existing strains of grass.

What about skills needed to master new technologies in equipment, irrigation systems, personnel management, and turfgrass varieties?

These are all needs that will present themselves in our future, and as an association we must consider today.

WE ALSO FACE a challenge to our professionalism. In another decade, what management skills will be required of us? What kind of image do we want to project for ourselves? How do we want to be viewed by our colleagues and by our golfers? What kind

of income do we want to earn? If we intend to be in a good position a decade or two from now, we must determine what we want, and work toward those goals.

To meet these challenges, we will be aggressively enhancing our GCSAA programs in at least three key respects. Quality education certainly must be responsive to the challenges, and most certainly will enhance our professional image in the future.

We have a very strong education program at GCSAA, and a clearly defined long-range plan has been developed that sets forth over the coming years the framework for our continuing education.

We have in place a curriculum that is gaining wide acceptance among superintendents. We offer courses in botany and physiology, computers, golf course design, golf course construction, the Rules of Golf, worker productivity, stress management, legal liability, and much more. Last year more than 2,500 members participated in GCSAA seminars. We expect that figure to increase by nearly 20 percent this year. Compare those 2,500 participants with fewer than 300 in 1982, just six years ago.

And GCSAA's seminars have earned an excellent reputation among other professionals in golf. Our records indicate that GCSAA seminars are attended by golf course architects, college instructors, builders, green committee chairmen, club managers, golf professionals, and even by members of the PGA Tour. GCSAA's education program is designed to be flexible, to allow for the changes in technology in our future and to assure that we will be well trained and can find the specific training we need to excel.

As we all know, a person who is well read and well trained will project a strengthened professional image, and will be personally rewarded.



When we look at education in the future, we're speaking not only of continuing education for today's superintendent, but also of higher standards for young people entering the field. By the year 2000, we will probably see a predominance of golf course superintendents with four-year college degrees.

Superintendents in the last few years have demonstrated a desire to continue their education; 92 percent of super-

intendents who attended last year's conference in Phoenix had completed some college, and 42 percent had a bachelor's degree or better.

As superintendents, we see the value of education in our future far more than we did 10 or 20 years ago. We can only look for this trend to increase.

This desire for more and more education is also reflected in our certification program; 77 percent of GCSAA's superintendent members are either

certified or plan to become certified when they become eligible to enter the program. We are seeing increasing value in certification — employers are anxious to hire Certified Golf Course Superintendents. That's because certified superintendents are educated persons endorsed by their peers, and capable of top performance. As we move toward 2000, more and more requirements will be demanded of people seeking to become certified.

IN THE AREA of government relations, GCSAA has launched a new and important program with the employment of a government relations manager and an active government relations committee. Future superintendents will have increased awareness of the range and complexity of their statutory and regulatory obligations. For example, you will be more aware of restrictions on the use of water, restrictions on the use of pesticides, and regulations on underground storage tanks, and you will become increasingly involved in providing input into the regulatory process, not only on a national level, but also on state and local levels.

We will help ensure that those regulations will fit our circumstances, and, in following the example of some GCSAA members, superintendents will become participants in the boards and commissions that regulate the profession. We will not do well if we sit back and let others determine our future on regulatory issues.

Already we have seen substantial results from our government relations efforts. For example, the recent decision to cancel cadmium fungicides contained an allowance for using them on golf course greens, tees, and aprons.

Our ability to report on issues and trends in regulation has greatly improved. In fact, officials from the EPA and Congress are participating in this effort. Several of these government representatives attended our conference, in Houston.

As you've already heard, GCSAA is working with the USGA and with others on future research goals. For example, we're working to develop low-maintenance, less-water-consuming turfgrass varieties. These varieties, when they are available and planted on golf courses, are going to make a tremendous difference in our ability to use less water — perhaps to use more effluent water — and will allow us to continue to provide the conditions golfers expect.

Future superintendents will become more familiar with Integrated Pest Management. Everything that is done to the golf course will fit together in a cohesive plan. Physical tactics will be

used to control pests on the course. More trapping to detect actual levels of pests will be used, along with chemical means, such as pheromones, repellents, sterilants, growth inhibitors, insecticidal soaps, and synthetic pesticides.

Biological controls, such as resistant varieties, natural enemies, propagation of diseases and parasites of pests, and release of sterile pests into the environment will be common.

Genetics will play a large role in the integrated pest management mode of control. We're seeing the potential for this now in California, where strawberries are treated with bacteria for frost control, and in Michigan, where work is being done with a bacterium that attacks annual bluegrass.

Cultural practices will be emphasized. The management of water, sanitation, the use of aerification and thatch control, the judicious use of fertilizer, and perhaps a reconsideration of mowing heights will all be important factors. And of course we will be functioning under regulatory restrictions as well — those imposed on us and those we impose upon ourselves, such as quarantines and seed certification.

Worker safety is a great issue in our future. In our litigious society, we are becoming more responsible for the well-being of our employees. There is more use of safety equipment and an increased emphasis on training of golf course employees. We have a responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy work environment.

GCSAA's government relations program will keep golf course superintendents aware of these issues and make sure we have significant input in shaping the decisions that may affect us.

Also this past year, GCSAA has renewed its commitment to a strong public relations program. We have made efforts to increase the awareness of the role of the superintendent as a professional in the business and the person responsible for the management and playability of the golf course.

The GCSAA also conducted focus group research in which we brought together golfers from public and private

courses to discuss their impressions of the superintendent and his association. I think all of you would be pleased and somewhat surprised with the recognition these groups gave to superintendents.

Without exception, these groups credited the conditions of the course to the superintendent, and had a very strong, positive impression of him as a professional. I have to add, with some immodesty, the consensus was that the superintendent is the most valuable employee at a golf course — and that the superintendent is the most difficult employee to replace.

We need to continue to make golfers aware of the impact of the superintendent on the golf course and aware of the professionalism superintendents bring to their jobs. This awareness will bring us added stature, but it will also bring more pressure and responsibility. The expectations of golfers will increase, but so will the rewards.

DESPITE the progress of the past year, we must realize that elevating awareness of facts regarding our profession among golfers is a long-term goal — one that we should realistically expect to take many years to achieve. We must work with the media to further its understanding of our profession, we must learn to accept the criticism we receive, and we must realize that it's sometimes justified.

In the area of public relations, more than any other, we must do for ourselves. In order to make our future better, we must each work to develop our individual professional image.

Sixty years ago, a group of men banded together to form our association, and by working together toward common objectives as a unified group, we have achieved many goals. But now we face new challenges we must work together to meet. Every superintendent must work to further our common goals. We cannot return home to our jobs and allow our future to develop as it may. We must strive towards our future goals with the determination to direct our own fate, to control the path of our chosen career.