Most of the golf industry is STILL environmentally ignorant and insensitive

Upon his return from the GCSAA convention in Las Vegas in February, Golfweek Business Editor Steve Pike criticized the golf industry for expending too much time and energy telling each other about golf’s positive environmental impact rather than focusing its efforts on educating the public. Steve’s column struck a nerve with me because it reflects the same frustration I have felt for years. His perspective on the golf industry’s environmental IQ overall — and the concern of its members — differs from mine, however.

While attending the GCSAA convention, it would be easy to conclude that the industry overall is highly motivated and tuned into research and the environmental issues.

This is misleading.

While the majority of those attending the convention might fit that profile, they represent only a small percentage of those in the business. Those who need education the most cannot (or will not) attend the GCSAA convention or others that offer similar learning opportunities.

As Saddam Hussein recently learned, you cannot win a war unless you have the hearts and minds of your own troops. Unfortunately for the golf industry, too many people in the business ignore golf’s problems and hope they will just go away. As long as they continue to make a good living, they are unconcerned about restrictive regulations and upward spiraling costs.

I believe the environmentally ignorant or insensitive still make up the majority of those in the golf business. If my analysis is correct, how can we possibly convince the general public that we are environmental “good guys?”

For many years, superintendents comprised the majority of those desirous to learn to help change golf’s poor environmental image. The last few years have seen architects and builders getting more involved.

Recently, the formation of organizations such as the Arizona and Florida Golf Councils indicate interest and commitment from a broader cross section of the industry than ever seen before. Perhaps our sleeping giant has awakened, but he has yet to stand up on his own two feet.

Some in the business are not only indifferent to educating themselves and giving something back to the business that sustains them, they also deny others under their authority the opportunity to do so. Many superintendents who don’t attend conventions and other educational meetings say their general managers or greens chairmen won’t let them. Other superintendents interviewing for new jobs have reported that their interviewer asked questions about their involvement in superintendent associations, bluntly stating they were “not interested in someone who wastes time at those things”.

Though other reasons were given for the actions, it is odd that the last three immediate past presidents of the Florida GCSA have all lost their jobs in the past 15 months.

All are highly qualified superintendents. The same thing happened several years ago to the only GCSAA director ever to serve from the state of Florida, which is one reason Florida has no representation on the national level, and probably never will.

The only conclusion I can draw is that many decision-makers in the golf business see each golf course as an island and don’t recognize the existence of golf as an industry. They can’t seem to grasp the connection between their bottom line and the bottom line of the club down the street.

Surmounting this industry failure is a prerequisite to winning over the public. I guess it is easier to keep putting the squeeze on the pro, the
It is odd that the last three immediate past presidents of the Florida GCSA have all lost their jobs in the past 15 months.

superintendent, and club manager, and the chef to tighten their budgets than it is to try to get to the root of the problem.

Merely telling the public that golf is an environmental "good guy" isn't going to cut it. Validated research is needed to refute the claims that we are harming the environment.

In the environmental arena, the American system of justice is put aside — the accused are judged guilty until they prove their innocence. Very little evidence (validated research) exists upon which to substantiate our innocence or our guilt.

What little research is available is extremely encouraging and supports our "good guy" position, such as the Cape Cod study about pesticides and groundwater contamination. Many such studies are needed, and needed soon. This research isn't going to get done unless we — as an industry — support it both politically and financially.

To give an example of the political ramifications of research, just last week I was told that the chances of the DER completing the groundwater contamination studies at my course and at Boca Lago, as scheduled, are slim. Since the first rounds of tests indicated no

problems, the DER isn't motivated to finish the project - they would rather pursue testing where negative results are indicated.

The golf industry, meanwhile, is losing an excellent chance to gain one more piece of validated research proving that properly applied chemicals used on golf courses don't contaminate groundwater. If the DER doesn't complete the study and publish its findings, we have nothing to prove this contention.

If Mark Jarrell, superintendent, calls the DER at (904) 488-3601 and asks Bruce Moore or someone else at the agency to finish the study, the response is "we'll get back to you;" if a representative of a $5.5 billion, politically-active golf industry calls, the answer may be a bit different.

As for the financial support of research, it is very simple: golfers are a minority in this country and tax dollars aren't going to pay for research aimed at helping golf courses.

Most research today is a cooperative effort between industry and the university system. If you are wondering why there is such a lack of pertinent research, look no further than your mirror.

How much have you contributed to turf research over the past few years? If every golfer had been contributing an amount equal to the value a sleeve of golf balls every year for the past several years, we might have had the necessary research in hand to keep greens fees from going up an amount equal to the cost of a new golf bag each year.

Nobody ever said you had to do it all yourself.

Turf specialists today face greater responsibilities than ever before. That's why the technical and managerial assistance offered by Total Turf Services, Inc. is so valuable.

An unbiased consultant experienced in renovation, new construction, budgeting, grow-in, soil testing, fertility programming and more. Working within your guidelines to see a project through to completion. On time and on budget.

Don't do it all yourself. Call Bud White at Total Turf Services today.

Total Turf Services, Inc.
3 N. Main Street, P.O. Box 935, Watkinsville, GA 30677
Phone: (404) 769-4570 • FAX: (404) 769-8538
H
aving spent the past two
and one half years
managing bentgrass greens at the Isleworth
Golf and Country Club, I have a different
perspective of bentgrass from most of my
Florida peers. There is only a handful of
courses in the state that have pure stands of
bentgrass maintained year round.
While I came to respect the fine playing
qualities of bentgrass, I also gained an
appreciation for
the difficulties of
managing a cool
season grass year
round through
three different
Florida
summers. Now
that I have left
Isleworth, I am
often asked if
I’m glad to be
away from the
pressure of maintaining the bentgrass.
The easy answer is yes.
The reflective answer is that it was a
unique experience fraught with frustrating
turf losses countered by remarkable
successes.
It is not reasonable for 99.9 percent of the
golf courses in Florida even to consider
using bentgrass except for winter
overseeding. However, if a club or two out
there is contemplating pure bentgrass
greens as its year-round turf, then please
read the following list of requirements that I
feel are necessary based on my two and one
half years (and three summers!) worth of
bentgrass trial and tribulation.
Following this list is no guarantee for
success. Remember! Growing bentgrass in
Florida is somewhat akin to growing
oranges in Pennsylvania. It is out of its
“natural range”.
But these basics are necessary to assure a
reasonable chance for success:
SITE
The greens should be located in areas
with excellent air circulation and sunlight.
Greens surrounded by trees, mounds, and
houses will suffer on hot, humid days. Some
courses have installed fans to try to
counteract this “stagnant pocket” effect. At
Isleworth the highly elevated, exposed
greens always did better in times of stress
than those down low by the water and
shielded by homes or trees.
CONSTRUCTION
I highly recommend USGA Specification
Greens.
Bentgrass does not tolerate excessive
moisture so the consistency and drainage of
the greens must be exact. Shortcuts and
sloppiness in the construction of the greens
will result in definite problems in the
summer.
Improperly sized drain gravel,
inconsistent thickness of the soil mix,
incorrect sub-grade contouring, and on-site
mixing of the soil were some of the
construction problems that came back to
haunt us during times of stress on the
Isleworth greens.
IRRIGATION
A modern control system is mandatory.
The old electro-mechanical controllers can
be made to work, but they become labor
intensive when you must constantly adjust
for moisture requirements. The new
computerized controls will make
infinitesimal adjustments to allow for local
environmental changes.
Each green should have at least two
manual hose connectors for hand-watering
isolated dry spots, and a separate mist
system of small heads for quick cool-down
syringing in addition to the heads necessary
to water the putting surface and the slopes.
STAFFING
A qualified, professional, assistant
superintendent is essential to manage
bentgrass. The care and attention that it
requires will burn out one manager. The
staff should be able to lead a “normal” life
to produce a quality product. I was at the
golf course 358 days my first year until I
hired a good assistant. Managing bentgrass
became tolerable after that.
Control boxes for turf irrigation systems

Plymouth irrigation boxes are made of a strong, tough thermoplastic material especially suitable for underground use. They're lighter in weight, easier to handle and less brittle than cast iron or concrete boxes. And, the covers feature molded-in green color to blend-in-with rather than stick-out-of your turf. Rectangular boxes have snap locking covers; 10" round boxes have twist lock covers; and 6" round boxes have snap fitting covers. All boxes nest for simplified storage. AMETEK, Plymouth Products Division, 502 Indiana Avenue, Sheboygan, WI 53081, Phone: 414-457-9435, FAX: 414-457-6652.

CLUB COMMITMENT

Even with the first four items in place there will be hard times and disappointments.

Bentgrass is a cool season grass.

Hot, humid days up North tend to get balanced by cool nights. Hot humid days in Florida are followed by warm, muggy nights. Therefore, the time zone for problems with bentgrass is expanded by warm springs and falls. The club must understand that and be flexible in its demands for grooming during stressful periods. Also, the club that plans to use bentgrass should be one that has light play or no play in the summer (Augusta National, for example), and no more than 20,000 rounds per year — 15,000 is better.

The title of this piece is "A Requiem for Bentgrass." A requiem is a song, or dirge, or mass for the dead. Bentgrass has departed my life, but is still alive for others. Dan Jones, CGCS, recently tested 24 bentgrass cultivars for Dr. Milton Engleke of Texas A&M. Dan was to treat the bentgrass no differently from bermudagrass and take no unusual actions to preserve it. Dan returned eight cultivars which survived the native conditions and neglect. Dr. Engleke will continue to test and select the hardiest cultivars for possible development.

So there you have my professional opinion about bentgrass in Florida! I spoke at the 1990 Wisconsin Turfgrass Symposium about growing bentgrass in Florida, and they gave me "The Living on the Edge" award!

It is a very special grass that requires some very special conditions to be successful. If all the conditions controllable by man are not met, I will guarantee problems. If those conditions are met, I will still promise you some tough days and turf loss while trying to grow a grass variety out of its natural range.