

**B**oth of our state industry associations, the FTGA and the FGCSA, have reached crossroads. Recent meetings and conversations confirm that major changes are in the wind for both groups. More meetings are being scheduled, including at least one between

members of both the FGCSA and FTGA boards, to determine which course to chart for the future.

Starting first on a positive note: Based on the results of the recent FGCSA day-long planning session held in November, the board is actively pursuing the hiring a full-time staff person to serve as an

executive director. I think it is an excellent idea whose time has come.

An executive director could give us professional representation at regulatory, legislative, and allied industry gatherings that we currently are conspicuously absent from, helping to build the necessary bonds and steer a course for the betterment of our industry. Expanded coverage of statewide events for publication in the Florida Green and closer coordination with FTGA would be other benefits of having in this position. Making this move will help elevate our association to the next level.

Moving to the less pleasant developments: Attendance at nearly all industry-related events throughout the state, reportedly, is down. This includes the FTGA Conference and Show, the Poa Annuia, the Crowfoot, the South Florida Expo, and some of the other chapter events. The suppliers and manufacturers who sponsor these events are disgruntled, and rightfully so. We can't continue to ask the same companies to support activities that we ourselves do not attend.

In my opinion, the primary problem is not apathy on the part of the superintendent — though it is applicable to a certain degree — but lies with the sheer number of events available to

superintendents to attend on a regular basis. No matter how much you'd like to participate in everything offered, the reality is that you wouldn't hold your job very long if you did. Few employers would accept a superintendent being away from the job 30 or more days a year in addition to family vacation time. Hard decisions must be made determining which events are most beneficial to you and your club.

So what can we do to improve attendance and ensure success of worthwhile and traditional events that, for the most part, raise funds necessary for the turfgrass research we all want and need?

First and foremost is to have each organization review its mission statement, if they have one, or otherwise determine just what their function is and who is their target audience. It is painfully obvious to me that superintendents are the primary target for a majority of these events, and since we can't attend them all, one of two things must happen: Either the number of events must be reduced, or the target audience must be expanded.

I don't think that simply changing the content, schedule, or venue, whether in a major or minor way, will improve attendance at many of these events. No matter how good a program, superintendents can't go to them all, so whatever Herculean efforts are put into making one event successful will probably come at the expense of reducing attendance at another industry event. People working within the same basic industry shouldn't be in competition with themselves and fighting over the same limited sources of support.

This doesn't mean that efforts shouldn't be made to make an event a "can't miss" affair, it just means that hard decisions must be made using common sense and logic rather than emotion, ego, and/or competition to reduce the number of offerings. Communication and coordination between the various organizations becomes essential for any hope of cooperative resolution of this serious problem.

Trying to put a positive spin on matters, what is wrong with expanding our target, where applicable, to club managers, golf pros, members, and anyone else with an interest in our business? There may be certain events where the golf course

*Where do we want to go and how do we get there?*

**Mark My Words**



Mark Jarrell, CGCS Assistant Editor



superintendent or his suppliers are the only desirable participants, but I can think of very few. We've complained for years about the golfer's indifference to our problems, but how many events do we attempt to reach out to include these people so that they have an opportunity to interact with us and learn about our needs and concerns? Why don't we use this problem of poor attendance to our advantage by including those who might be able to help us if they had any idea what we needed?

Putting on my FTGA hat for a moment, I can tell you that the FTGA will be considering co-sponsorship of the annual Conference and Show with other organizations to increase attendance and reduce the burden on the vendors who go to great expense "showing" for various organizations. Many other ideas

will be considered, all aimed at increasing attendance, excitement, and value to both attendees and exhibitors. Our task is made more difficult given the GCSAA's decision to hold its annual Conference and Show in Orlando every three years, but many talented and dedicated minds will be working on solutions.

For those of you serving on various association boards, I hope my words have struck a chord and you will consider taking appropriate actions. I also hope you will reach out to the younger superintendents in your area to encourage their participation - Sherry Krasula of the Howard Fertilizer Company pointed out to me that many of the younger guys are intimidated by those of us who have been involved for so long, and though I can't imagine

another superintendent feeling "intimidated" by me or any other association volunteer, she's probably right. If I've ever made anyone feel that way, I apologize, and hope that you realize your ideas and insights are just as important as mine or anyone else's, so speak right up and get involved!

In closing, I'd like to (once again) emphasize the importance of supporting those suppliers who fund our various activities and functions. I've heard enough recent rumblings to consider it fair warning that many of our long-time supporters aren't going to continue financial support of our industry's events if they continue losing business to competitors who make no such contribution, usually over insignificant differences in price.

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