

**W**here were you? Where are you? Appropriate questions to ask, having just returned from another lightly attended FTGA Conference and Show. We had a great event in Gainesville, with the only negatives being the poor attendance and the hot weather.

The first question is for every superintendent and turfgrass professional in the state. You should have been there, but I recognize that there are legitimate reasons for non-attendance. First and foremost, I think there are too many opportunities available in this state for

continuing your professional education and sharing fellowship with your peers, and you must make hard choices regarding the numbers and types of events you attend. I refuse to believe that apathy is a serious factor among the dedicated professionals I've come to know in the golf industry, but

I do believe that job, family, and societal stress combine to create a reaction that is often interpreted as apathy.

The second question is for those who never seem to find time to attend anything. Some join the various associations (we call them checkbook members) and are rarely seen at meetings, while others have never joined anything. Only about half the superintendents in the state belong to one of the Florida GCSA's chapters. Apathy may be a factor among this group, but I truly believe other financial and psychological factors play a bigger role. Clearly, I am not qualified to comment or analyze further, but somehow we've got to reach out to this large group and gain their participation, as they are the ones needing education the most and most likely to cause regulatory problems for our industry.

Though much deep thinking and gnashing of teeth has gone into the problem of what seems to be endemic poor attendance at local, regional, state, and national meetings and events, those of us in leadership roles cannot draw definitive conclusions. We do our best to

create a schedule and venue that appeals to us as professionals, and assume that it will also appeal to other golf and turf professionals. We try to meet the needs of our exhibitors — those who are actually financing the association's activities — though their number-one priority has always been seeing potential customers. We listen to suggestions and criticisms, making appropriate adjustments that make sense.

As the president of the Florida Turfgrass Association, and a past president of the Florida GCSA, I'd like to give you the main reasons why I think the FTGA's annual conference and show is the one event you shouldn't miss.

**1) The solvency of the FTGA depends upon the success of the annual Conference and Show.** As a superintendent, you might not really care, as we have a strong state association and solid local chapters. This is misguided thinking. One of the most important functions of the FTGA is to unite the various turfgrass industries to have greater influence on our Legislature and regulatory matters. Simply put, our strength is in numbers, and though we have not yet gotten large numbers of members from the other turf-related fields, we are working hard to increase their participation. Superintendents "going it alone" may sound appealing, but it is ultimately counterproductive.

**2) Florida has a unique environment, and most research needs to be done within the state to have relevance to our situation.** Florida's turfgrass problems will be solved by Floridians. Past problems with the University of Florida are just that — past! Much progress has been made in the last few years and UF is poised to become the strongest turfgrass program in the country. Led by new IFAS VP Mike Martin, the UF administration now clearly understands the importance of golf and turfgrass to the people of this state, and is dedicated to supporting our efforts. There are highly qualified UF researchers ready, willing, and able to tackle our problems. The ball is now in our court! Over a half million dollars worth of projects were submitted for our consideration this year, and we were able to fund only a quarter of them. Research will not

## Where WERE You?

### Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS  
President, FTGA

get done — not here or in any state — unless we pay for it.

3) Every strong university turfgrass program in the country is closely aligned with its state's turfgrass association. We are working to build such bonds. We have a definite disadvantage in Florida within our own ranks due to the small number of UF grads in the turfgrass business, eliminating automatic support and loyalty to the university. Many of Florida's wealthiest golfing businessmen, on the other hand, are UF grads, and aligning ourselves with the University of Florida, and working hand-in-hand with UF officials in our new fund-raising campaign spearheaded by Don Benham, has great potential in finally raising the big dollars we've always dreamed of.

4) Growing grass is at the core of our complicated and complex business. Superintendents have more in common with sod producers, sports field managers, parks and recreation people, and landscape maintenance people than we do with our golfing members. We have many common interests and goals, and need to work together through an "umbrella" organization like the FTGA.

Please think about these points when next year's conference and show rolls around.

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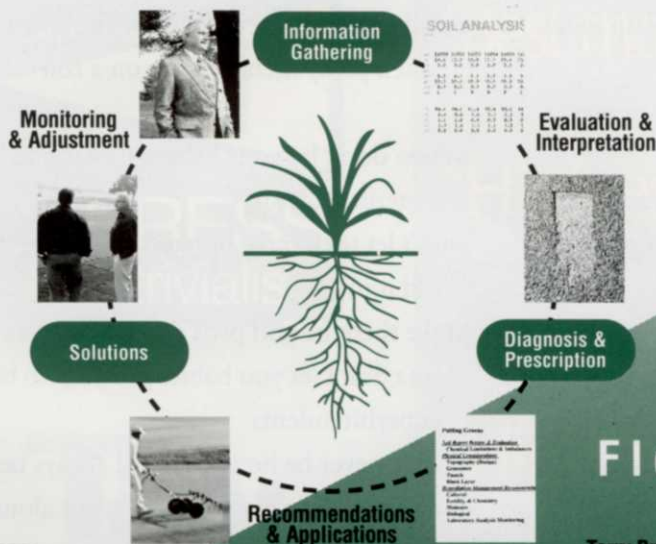
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