Golf superintendents keeping ‘Eden’ green

BY MARK LESLIE

To John Ebel and a host of other golf course superintendents, they are in the world’s oldest occupation. “Adam was the first greenkeeper, if you read the scripture (Gen. 2:15); God put Adam in the garden to work it and take care of it,” said Ebel, the superintendent at Barrington Hills (Ill.) Country Club who with several colleagues has organized annual Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Prayer Breakfasts since 1980. “We hope that as we all meet in fellowship that the prayer breakfast will grow and increase fellowship among our members and that we may share God’s love and support each other through the promises of God, and that His Kingdom may be increased,” Ebel said.

Indeed, the breakfast has grown tremendously in just 10 years. Rosey Grier gave a stirring talk before a full house of 400 people at February’s GCSAA International Golf Conference and Show in Anaheim, Calif. NFL chaplain Doc Eshleman, air-crash survivor Norman Williams, and Mike Atkins are among the other past speakers at the breakfasts. “Our purpose is to glorify God in our lives,” Ebel said, “and I think golf course superintendents have a unique position in recognizing God’s handwork and His omnipotence in what we do because we are at the mercy of conditions beyond our control.” “His glory is all around us. We see it every day and we just tend it.”

The seed for the breakfast was planted in 1975 when “several people in our organization sensed the need and saw that the spiritual aspect of our profession was really missing,” Ebel said. “We have much professional, educational and other things like that to offer but we didn’t offer anything spiritually.”

In 1980 the seed germinated when Ebel and his wife, Juanita, “stepped out in faith” to bring the first Prayer Breakfast to the St. Louis conference. John had secured a speaker he felt would communicate well with golf course people. The GCSAA assigned them a room at the conference hotel and scheduled the meeting as the first on the agenda. The Ebels drove around in a taxi the night before, looking for a Dunkin’ Donuts, and brought back 12 dozen doughnuts to serve with coffee.

One hundred and twelve people showed up. “That was very encouraging,” Ebel says. The encouragement has continued. A core group of GCSAA members from the Chicago area meets every month or two. Other people are getting involved. Ebel said, “and we feel there will be others coming along to keep it going.”

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The Professional Golfers’ Association of America has promoted two executives to the newly-created level of senior director.

Joe O’Brien, a member of the headquarters management staff for 16 years, has been named senior director of strategic planning.

Joe Steranka, director of communications and public relations the past year, will be senior director of marketing and promotion.

O’Brien will work directly with the international management and consulting firm of Booz, Allen and Hamilton, retained to assist the PGA in development of a five-year strategic plan.

The comprehensive study will provide input in several key areas.

Steranka brings ten years of sports marketing experience to his new position. He will be responsible for all PGA marketing programs, including sales and licensing, and a new golf promotions department which will manage programs such as the Oldsmobile Scramble and National Golf Day.

Steranka also will oversee the PGA Merchandise Show and the PGA Junior golf program.

John Ebel

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