Flood devastates Texas courses

By Peter Blais

Jack and Melissa Fletcher stood along the banks of the Brazos River Christmas Eve watching the rain-swollen waters rise at the rate of an inch per hour and drown their nine-hole course.

"It died a slow death," recalled Jack, who helps daughter Melissa manage Valley Lodge Golf Club in Simonton, Texas, 30 miles west of Houston. "It was a very helpless feeling."

Valley Lodge was one of many courses suffering major damage from the heavy rains that deluged eastern Texas in late December and January. (Continued on page 26)

Strategic plan critical challenge to club managers' association

By Peter Blais

Jack Sullivan found his bride and a career on the golf course.

The New Club Managers Association of America president was a high school English teacher in Fairfield, Iowa, when he met his bride, Darcy. There's story behind the story.

Sullivan and his former employer, Grosse Pointe Yacht Club in Grosse Pointe Shores, Mich., have many courses suffering major damage from the heavy rains that deluged eastern Texas in late December and January. (Continued on page 68)

Stricter pesticide laws in the making

By Peter Blais

A growing number of communities are proposing laws restricting pesticides since last summer's U.S. Supreme Court ruling that federal law cannot stop local governments from regulating their use.

The result could be thousands of unsold, contradictory regulations making it harder for golf course superintendents and others in the turf industry to do their job, according to those supporting recently proposed legislation allowing federal law to preempt local ordinances.

"We are pushing for uniform pesticide laws imposed by federal and state governments based on good science," Williamsburg, Va., said a revised manual probably will not be completed for another six to 12 months.

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Photo courtesy of Mandel Brockinton
Sullivan sets sights on future as new CMAA head

Continued from page 1

tenure, which began when he re-
placed James Pearce as the
association's head during January's
annual CMAA conference in San
Diego.

"The strategic plan will detail how
our association will function and
how it can best serve the industry in
the coming years," Sullivan said.

"Once the plan is developed it won't
be etched in stone. It's a living docu-
ment that will require changes as we
move along."

Managing change has been a
constant in Sullivan's professional
life and is the biggest challenge
facing club managers today, the new
CMAA chief said.

Sullivan had a crash course in
change when he was recruited for
the club manager post at Nakoma
back in 1975. Nakoma was tradi-
tionally a small men's club. The few
women members weren't allowed
to use the facilities at certain times.

But Madison's demographics
were changing. Dual-income fami-
lies became the norm. Women and
children also needed a place to
recreate, socialize and call a second
home.

Sullivan helped guide the mem-
bership through the changeover to
a family club. The sometimes rocky
transformation included the combi-
ing of separate men's and
women's facilities into a single eatery
just three weeks after the board of
directors voted to separate them.

But despite such early mistakes,
Nakoma had a strong board,
Sullivan said. Along with the efforts
of the other two key players on the
staff, the superintendent and golf
pro, the club settled comfortably
into its new identity and has be-
come one of the most successful
family clubs in the state, he added.

Members Andy North and Sherri
Stainhauer have gone on to suc-
cessful professional playing ca-
reers.

She characteristics a manager
needs to successfully institute and
adapt to change, Sullivan said, are
good listening skills, the ability to
bring different groups together and
an aptitude for helping members
make the changes themselves.

"Everyone in the club has to buy
into the changes or they simply
won't work," Sullivan said.

"The odds of two national asso-
ciations facing the club industry, Sullivan said, involve
membership practices, government
intervention, maintaining service
levels in a depressed economy, and
a mobile workforce that can will
leave the club industry without
higher wages band proper training.

Membership practices that are
sometimes seen as discriminatory
to women and minorities have come
under increased scrutiny in recent
years.

"Most clubs realize this is a fact
of life. It's 1992 and clubs must do
business in an open manner. There
will be clubs that determine to
remain exclusively private and retain
selective membership practices.

But whether they can continue to
survive without change remains to
be seen. We're going to see more
clubs with open membership poli-
cies," Sullivan said.

The recession has deeply affected
the club business, the newpresident
said.

"It's caused everyone to look
at their operations," he explained.

"Past recessions have often been
good for clubs. People would stay
closer to home and spend more
money at the club rather than take
that trip.

"But because of the protracted
nature of this recession, the effects
are trickling down farther. Mem-
bership waiting lists are dwindling.
Clubs that depend on business
spending for much of their income
are hurting. Clubs need to be more
competitive and market to their
members to survive. That's the key.

"Managers need to listen to what
their members want and address
those needs."

Coming off a record attendance
at this year's conference, Sullivan is
presiding over a strong association
that just accepted its 5,000th mem-
ber and certified its 900th. He need
look no farther than a mile down
the road to see an equally success-
ful association president, Bill Rob-
erts of Lochmoor Club, who will
assume the presidency of the Golf
Course Superintendents Associa-
tion of America at that group's an-
nual conference and show this
month in New Orleans.

The odds of two national associ-
ciation presidents working within
the same small Michigan commu-
nity at the same time are pretty
astronomical, Sullivan agreed.

"Bill and I talk together on a
regular basis. Before I go to a board
meeting, I call him and ask what
happened at his last board meeting.
He does the same with me.

"I lost the first time I ran for
the CMAA board and won the second
time. Bill lost the first time with theGCSAA board. We moved on from our former clubs at similar times and came
together here I admired his work at
Sentryworld (Stevens Point, Wis.) and
recommended him for the job here
(Lochmoor). We'll probably continue
to speak on a weekly basis."

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