GCSAA Orlando exceeds expectations

With the golf economy in the doldrums, many in the golf course industry had low expectations for this year’s GCSAA Conference and Show in Orlando. And for good reason. Many clubs and national management companies simply couldn’t afford to foot the bill this year for their superintendents. And despite the fact that Orlando is usually a top draw, travel concerns from Sept. 11 kept some from bringing the wife and kids along.

In the months before the show, the GCSAA reported that preregistration numbers were off and started offering payment plans for exhibition booths. But as it turned out, attendees like a discount furniture warehouse trying to unload hide-a-beds during a President’s Day blowout sale. It didn’t inspire confidence.

Readings from my own pre-show barometer suggested that this one might be a dud. As with past shows, my daytime dance card was packed, but my evenings were less so because fewer companies were throwing parties and hosting events.

So when I stepped off the plane in the Sunshine State, I, too, didn’t know what to expect. Would the show floor be a ghost town? Would exhibitors start packing up at 11 a.m. on Saturday in frustration and go play golf? Quite the opposite. On Thursday, perhaps due to some well-timed thunderstorms, the show floor was packed. Registration lines stretched out the door. While attendance numbers were down from Dallas, they still topped 20,000 according to the association, and exhibitors reported that booth traffic and business were exceeding their expectations.

As one exhibitor confided: “The numbers may not be as strong, but the customers are better.”

And not to worry, families. The show floor, the Golf Course News booth was hopping. Perhaps it had something to do with the comfortable couches, but whenever I returned to our home base to rest my tired feet, I wound up having five conversations at once. It was great to hear from all of our friends in the industry. Other highlights from Orlando 2002 included:

- The Golf Course News Golf Course Builder of the Year Awards were a blast. In years past, everyone who showed up at the Golf Course Builders Association of America’s annual awards dinner already knew who the winners were. This year a veil of secrecy shrouded the winners. The vibe prior to the awards ceremony was electric as I heard numerous speculative bets spreading across the ballroom. It made for a fun night, and I would have given out 20 awards if I could have. See page 20 for full stories on the winners.
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- The Golf

EXPERIMENTING WITH DIVERSITY

Experimenting and diversifying within different parts of the workforce and finding the right combinations – retirees, students, interns, housewives, etc. – may prove beneficial.

Blackberry Patch Golf Club in Coldwater, Mich., runs a high maintenance operation with minimal financial resources, according to superintendent Pamela Smith. Smith has successfully put together a team that combines seniors and students.

“The senior staff is critical to our department,” she said. “They are quick to learn the operation of the equipment, are always dependable, and bring a wealth of knowledge and life experience to our operation. In addition, they are able to take the layoffs and return each year.”

The combination of seniors and students creates a unique synergy, said Smith. “Young people who have never held a...