

Chapters can do more



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Where does the greatest opportunity lie to advance the professionalism of golf course superintendents further? The question conjures up a wide variety of possible answers.

Is it via the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America with its ever-expanding programming? Not necessarily, even though the GCSAA should be recognized for its continued efforts to better serve its members and the golf industry. I'm only saying this isn't the best means available because so few in golf have consistent contact with the GCSAA.

Is it via the continued inspired work of individual superintendents? Not necessarily, because the indispensable work of each superintendent collectively throughout the country already has had its meaningful impact on the industry and doesn't promise the opportunity for unbridled future professional advancement.

Then where will this opportunity be found? It's through the enhanced operational performance of the 104 GCSA regional chapters, which represent the front-line interface between the world of the golf course superintendent and the tens of thousands of golf club/course officials and millions of golfers throughout the country.

The basic issue that needs to be addressed within chapter programming to advance the profession is the far too persistent practice of focusing the chapters' primary communications vehicles (i.e. — newsletter, educational and guest speaker programming) on close to 100 percent of agronomic/turf management subject matters. This doesn't serve the chapter members well because they're consistently being overloaded with technical education via a wide variety of sources, or the nation's local golf communities whose officials don't have the patience or interest to digest this same steady flow of technical information.

The result of this short-sighted chapter programming is the equivalent of putting the world of the golf course superintendent in a closet, region by region, and closing the door. Recommended corrective measures include:

- Reorganize chapter newsletter content along the following approximate lines: 35 percent technical writing, 35 percent national and regional industry news, and 30 percent chapter activities and member-welfare issues, most of which can be sourced by subscribing to

national information services.

- Restructure chapter **educational programming** to continue to include precedent-setting technical subjects, which would then be complemented with basic 101-level programming intended to educate club/course officials to better understand the working world of the golf course superintendent.

- Restructure **guest-speaker presentations** by inviting speakers to present topics that parallel the subject matters suggested above for newsletter and educational programming.

This implies that club/course officials would be invited to attend many chapter seminars and monthly meetings. To ensure more effective and affordable educational programming and meeting speakers, four to eight chapters might form regional circuits that would schedule four to eight varying educational topics and speakers for a season. Then rotate these seminar subjects and speakers through each participating chapter's events/meetings.

Because it's recommended that local course officials be invited to attend monthly meetings, it's further suggested the monthly tournament format be adjusted to allow each chapter member to invite a guest official from his course to play in the day's golf tournament on a two-man-team basis and then stay on to listen to the guest speaker of the day — a win-win situation for all parties.

Finally, in the quickly advancing communications world, is there a good reason why every chapter doesn't develop its own Web site to promote activities and to permanently catalogue its education and speaker programs? Currently available information indicates about 60 percent of the 104 GCSA chapters have, or are planning, their own Web sites. For any serious business or association not to have its own Web site is tantamount to inviting eventual organizational suicide. The 25 or so chapter Web sites currently in play throughout the country provide an excellent collective model for the remaining chapters to emulate.

Suggesting the above is clearly "easy talk" but obviously not an "easy walk." Little of permanent importance will happen until chapters can engage qualified people to manage their varied membership, newsletter, educational, tournament, speaker and Web-site programming professionally. Statistics show that only about 10 percent of the 104 GCSA chapters currently engage

an association manager or executive director. The rest of the chapters essentially rely on executive secretaries to administer membership and direct-mail programming.

In contrast, the 41 PGA sections throughout the country each has an executive director and its own Web site — affordable necessities because the national PGA underwrites section operations. The GCSAA is not yet there, maybe some day? But chapters shouldn't wait for this eventful day because these challenges can be addressed now.

The easier part of this challenge would be finding qualified executive director candidates from the retired corporate and military communities; by soliciting from the empty-nest parent community; and by advancing qualified executive secretaries that are presently engaged.

Before looking at the more challenging aspect of funding executive director types, it's important to ask why the PGA has only 41 sections and the superintendents have 104 chapters. The answer is that it's far easier to fund operational programs with larger, more consolidated regional membership bases. Many GCSA chapters are too small to self-fund their own operations. As the GCSAA looks to formalize its relationships with the affiliated chapters during the years ahead, chapter consolidation might be an early topic of consideration.

Assuming that chapters will some day be able to maintain a minimum number of members, adequate operational funding would be realized by positioning dues comfortably above present levels (i.e. members pay more for better service provided by professional staff), and by realizing added advertising/sponsorship revenues from the expanded newsletter, education and Web-site programs. The money is there, if mined properly.

All of the above suggests the need for a series of annually repeating workshops to educate chapters how to find, fund and effectively utilize professional staff. No doubt, this resource will develop as need arises. Clearly, the process would be significantly enhanced should one or two chapters volunteer to develop a model management program.

It's time for the world of golf course superintendent to open its doors and let the light shine out through the prism of more effective chapter performance. GCN