



Pat Jones is president of Flagstick LLC, a consulting firm that provides sales and marketing intelligence to green-industry businesses. He can be reached at psjhawk@cox.net or 440-478-4763.

Beer and scribbles

I've sort of lost count, but I think this was my 18th Golf Course Superintendents Association of America show ... er, I mean, Golf Industry Show ... and once again, I returned from the big hoo-haw in Orlando with a pocket full of completely unreadable notes scribbled on cocktail napkins, matchbooks, my left forearm, the hood of my rental car, etc.

Upon further review, many of these jottings are harder to figure out than the Da Vinci Code. I'm looking at my notes right now, and I'm sure it was critically important when I wrote, "Bllagh! Don't forget that Bllagh is planning to acquire Gsichop! Big news!" This almost certainly made a lot of sense at 3 a.m. when the bartender at the Peabody Hotel was threatening to call the cops unless we stopped messing with the ducks.

So, once again, I'd just like to state for the record that (say it with me) beer and journalism just don't mix.

However, after many years of frustration caused by attempting to balance the intake of cereal malt beverages with different note-taking technologies (mini-tape recorder, PDA, etc.), this time I got smart and took a *Golf Course News* intern along. Her job was to shadow me every step of the way and assist me in my heroic news-gathering efforts by capturing every conversation, detailing every meeting and making sure we had the best possible coverage of the event. So, I can simply ask her to hand over all of her terrific, carefully recorded notes and crank out this GIS follow-up column, right?

Wrong. She ran screaming from the show after about three hours. You guys really are animals!

But, thanks to my connections with the CIA, I was able to "borrow" one of their supercomputers to decipher my beer-impaired notes from Orlando. Thus, once again, I'm proud to present my cogent (not) and insightful (hah!) observations from the big, big show.

The combination platter

The "surf and turf" concept of combining the GCSAA and National Golf Course Owners Association shows seemed to be pretty well received and caused few problems. Most attendees and exhibitors said the

show was basically the same as it always had been. Oil and water mixed nicely, and the lion and lamb laid down together in peace.

Perhaps this was because the owners largely bagged the show in favor of golf, poolside lounging or other fun activities. My impression is that they simply didn't appear for the show. I love the NGCOA guys, but I searched long and hard for owners to interview on the trade show floor, and it was like looking for a badly sliced ball in the deep woods.

Say what you will about the "team-decision-making" concept being floated by the various associations, but the team has to show up. For the many exhibitors who spent a lot of time and money trying to figure out how to handle the "new" show, this was a big disappointment.

Assistants stay home

I've been on record warning that some primary decision-makers (superintendents, owners, general managers) will get left out of the big mixing bowl that is the new GIS. In short, some courses will not send all three key personnel to the same show. That apparently didn't happen this year, but the complete impact won't be seen until the Club Managers Association of America joins the show in 2007.

But, what I heard from several superintendents was that they were forced to make an unexpected sacrifice: Their assistants weren't able to come to the show this year. In the new world of economic pressure and a combined show, something had to give. And, what gave was the chance for assistant superintendents to attend an educational event that's probably more important to them than it is for their bosses.

These days, assistant superintendents handle more responsibility and more management duties than ever before. GIS management needs to think carefully about how they can create opportunities and incentives to keep our next generation of superintendents coming to the big show.

Temporary insanity

Few attendees may realize it, but the vast

majority of people working the show wearing those "GIS Staff" badges are temporaries hired from around the Orlando area. That explains why the woman in charge of the largest booth at the show (think orange) was firmly told by people working at the registration area she'd have to pay for a new badge after she'd forgotten hers one day. Oops. Through gritted teeth, she politely asked them to check with GCSAA show staff, and she was eventually cleared to get a new badge.

World's biggest centerpiece

OK, the "Building of the Green" smack in the middle of the show floor was really cool, but most attendees missed the actual construction, which was the neatest part. The time-lapse video shown around the site was slick, but watching the dump trucks bring in soil, sand, etc., was even slicker. It literally created a centerpiece for the whole show. I'll never forget all the "workers" – most of whom were presidents or honchos for the Golf Course Builders Association of America member companies who did the majority of the work – carefully creating the green complex. And, I certainly won't forget Tom Marzolf, one of Tom Fazio's

main guys and the incoming president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, out there hand-shaping the site with a shovel. Did

I mention he was wearing dress clothes and a necktie at the time? It was fantastic to see all the chiefs of some of our industry's most notable companies out there getting dirty.

Can you top this?

The bottom line was that the first of the new "alphabet soup" GIS shows went off without a hitch. Orlando is a tremendous site, the GCSAA staff did its usual fabulous job, and the combined show was a hit. The only downside is that the New Orleans venue probably doesn't allow for some of the same cool things (building the green, solution centers, etc.) that Orlando offered. That's the bad news. The good news is: Bourbon Street beckons. See you there. GCN

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