



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](mailto:psjhawk@cox.net) or 440-478-4763.

# The way we were

I absolutely despise Barbara Streisand, but her stupid song “The Way We Were” is stuck in my head right now. (“Memories. Like the corners of my mind.”) If you also suffer from “crappy-tune-repeating-endlessly-in-your-brain” syndrome, you probably can feel my pain right now. I guess my options are to shoot myself or to exorcise this demon by writing about it. I seem to be out of bullets at the moment, so let’s try the latter.

I guess the whole “The Way We Were” thing started because I was talking with another former GCSAA staff member about the good old days of the conference and show. During our chat, it occurred to me this is my 20th national conference. Yikes! The “misty watercolor” memories came flooding back. Here are a few of my favorite unofficial memories of the big shows of yesteryear.

## Working hard

GCSAA staff members generally are hard-working and focused at the show and always are trying to represent the association as professionally as possible. There were occasional exceptions. One such faux pas occurred at the 1994 show in San Francisco when we were preparing to make a big hoo-haw over the launch of “Par for the Course” on ESPN. We’d invited a couple of ESPN executives to the show and, at the last minute, decided to arrange an early morning golf outing for them at the famed Olympic Club. Transportation (a ridiculously large limousine) was set up and off we went for a fabulous round.

During our return from the course, the ESPN guys decided to break into the limo’s ample supply of booze to celebrate a memorable golf outing. Being a good host, I accepted a tumbler as well. Soon, our journey was over, and the megavehicle pulled up in front of the headquarters hotel. Without thinking, I blithely hopped out of the pimped-out, white stretch limo holding my golf clubs and a large glass of scotch ... only to find out that 30-some seminars had just ended and maybe a thousand association members were standing at the curb outside the hotel. With 2,000 eyeballs firmly planted on yours truly, I froze like a deer in the headlights. There was a brief, stunned silence before a loud voice from the crowd shouted, “Keep up the hard work, Jonesey!”

## Autograph hound

Before the era of relative association austerity and various rescheduling attempts, the pinnacle of show week was the Gala. The seemingly endless dinner featured a gaggle of awards, bad speeches, a rubber chicken dinner, ill-fitting tuxedos and, of course, semibig-name entertainment like Neil Sedaka, Bobby Vinton, Tony Orlando, Kenny Rogers and even the Beach Boys.

One of my quasi-official duties was to serve as a liaison between board members – who wanted autographs – and whichever has-been (I mean “star”) was providing the entertainment. This was a source of much aggravation ... and humor.

One year, I literally broke into the room secured by the Beach Boys roadies to get the surf geezers to sign some albums for board members. Several band members gruffly complied. My last target was the legendary Mike Love (whose name is apparently a shortened version of, “Mike Loves to Be Hammered Out His Freakin’ Gourd”). I found him slumped in a chair and politely tapped him on his shoulder. He jumped about three feet in the air, screamed some gibberish at me and collapsed completely at my feet. My heart stopped, thinking that I had managed to kill a thoroughly pickled music legend. A roadie came over and nonchalantly said, “Don’t worry ... he does that every night.”

## Near-death experience

In 1988, I wanted to get a good picture of the legendary Sam Snead, who was holding court in some exhibitor’s booth, so I decided to climb up to the catwalk above the trade show floor and take a shot looking straight down. This was in the day before staff members kept in touch with fancy cell phones and PDAs, so I was dutifully lugging around a huge walkie-talkie clipped to my belt. I took my picture and was climbing back down from 30 feet up when the walkie-talkie caught on a ladder rung and started falling ... directly at Sam Snead’s head. My heart stopped – again. Fortunately, it missed his noggin by inches but crashed and busted into a million pieces right next to him. I scrambled

down and started stuttering apologies. He stopped me and said calmly (in his thick Southern drawl), “Son, I’ve lived a long time and done a lot of things, but dying like that would have made for one hell of an obituary.”

## Other memories

- Two decades ago, making the rookie mistake of being directly between the Jacobsen booth and the ribbon-cutting at the open of the show. Lesson learned: Never get between 4,000 superintendents and a \$6 hat.

- Making GCSAA scholarship winners go through fraternity-type hazing rituals (sending them on “snipe” hunts, having them lug boxes around and try to get autographs from pro golfers, etc.). Many of these “kids” are now industry-leading superintendents and turf researchers. Some even still talk to me.

- The Cushman girl. Enough said.
- Joshing with the late, great Robert Trent Jones Sr. about being his long-lost third son.

- Watching in horror as football coach Lou Holtz was enthusiastically introduced by the president as the keynote speaker to

a huge ovation from thousands of attendees at the opening session ... but knowing that Holtz was running late and wasn’t in the convention center yet.

- Stumbling down Bourbon Street with my old pal Mike and a few thousand of our closest friends. (Note to President Bush: Please, please fix New Orleans so we can go back.)

Okay, I’ve shared a few memories of “the way we were”, and the stupid song is out of my head now. But, I still have many, many other show stories – some perhaps even a little embarrassing to readers right now. So, unless you’d like to see those memories (some possibly too painful to remember) revealed in this column next year, make sure to track me down at the *Golf Course News* booth (#5315) at the big show in Atlanta. And maybe, if you offer me the right incentive (wink, wink), I’ll simply choose to forget.

See you at the show. We’ll make some new memories together. GCN

MY HEART STOPPED, THINKING I HAD MANAGED TO KILL A THOROUGHLY PICKLED MUSIC LEGEND.

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at [www.golfcoursenews.com/messageboard](http://www.golfcoursenews.com/messageboard).

