DIFFERENT, YET THE SAME

I'm currently recuperating from five days at the GIE + Expo in Louisville. As you may or may not know, GIE is the national show for the lawn care, grounds and landscape contracting industry. For those of you who've never attended—which includes, I suspect, almost every superintendent reading this—the show is similar to the Golf Industry Show in some ways, but different in others. The events, which includes, I suspect, almost every those of you who've never attended—otherwise, it's Louisville for you. And that points out another difference between the shows—the GIE takes place in Louisville.

So, if you're interested in turf cut at an inch or less, you go to the GIS (or STMA if you're one of those athletic field dudes). Otherwise, it's Louisville for you. And that's the GIE for you. And that points out another difference between the shows—the GIE takes place in Louisville.

The “other half” of the green industry may be different, but unless we work as a whole, none of us will survive.

Whereas the GIS moves from Orlando to New Orleans. I love GIE, but being rooted in Louisville is equivalent to locating the Super Bowl in Toledo until the sun goes dark. Variety is the spice of life, and you pretty much only get salt or pepper in Louisville. (One aside: the location in Louisville essentially makes that show a “superregional” event.)

Another difference: GIE is, first and foremost, an iron show. The golf business is dominated by red, green and orange, but you get the entire rainbow in Louisville. There are a dozen other manufacturers selling to the residential and commercial cutting market. You think golf’s big three are competitive? The pro mowing market might be somewhat bigger than golf’s, but there are five more companies vying for your business.

Even though the GIE part of the show—historically the chemical and fertilizer segment—merged with the Expo part (the equipment side) a few years ago, the big soft goods manufacturers don’t have nearly the presence in Louisville as they do at GIS. Why? Lawn care is basically a herbicide and insecticide market. Fungicides, growth regulators and other specialty products, such as wetting agents and foliars, play a minor role in the segment.

The educational component of GIE + Expo is good but nothing like GIS. There might be 3,000 attendees signed up for seminars versus the 7,000 who attend the conference part of the golf show. Some of the education is agronomic, but the majority is business driven. How do I get more customers? How do I manage my lines of credit in a tough economy? What about H-2B and other labor issues?

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.