Ever since that September day in 1926 when a small group of greenkeepers gathered in Sylvania, Ohio, to form the GCSAA, we have been a profession driven by the spirit of volunteerism.

Other than a few, well-funded exceptions, most chapters and turf associations are run primarily by superintendents who freely give their time and talents for the benefit of the larger profession. Our own Monroe Miller is a great example: he’s probably put in 5,000 hours into writing, editing and managing the Wisconsin GCSAs “Grass Roots” magazine over his career and never received a dime. He did it because he was passionate about his profession and his association.

But, times are changing in the industry and the non-profits that serve it. Nearly every association has seen revenues fall as trade shows have declined, advertising has contracted and memberships have shrunk. They’re being forced to operate in a leaner, meaner fashion. They’re also being asked to deliver proof of value more than ever before. Companies are demanding a return on investment instead of just blindly writing checks.

The other casualty is the volunteer ethos that made us great to begin with. Fewer superintendents can devote time to their local chapters – even though they would love to – because of pressures to be focused on their real jobs or because they simply don’t have their facilities’ financial support anymore. I worry that younger folks aren’t getting involved. Where will the next generation of leaders come from?

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