

50 YEARS OF GCSAA CONFERENCES

What progress have we seen?

Two years ago, this magazine and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America each marked 50 years of service to the golf courses of the nation. Now we have another golden anniversary to celebrate: that of the national turfgrass conference and show sponsored by the GCSAA.

When superintendents attending the First National Greenkeepers Golf Show walked into the Spanish Room at Detroit's Hotel Fort Shelby in 1928, the first booth on their right was occupied by GOLFDOM, the fore-runner of GOLF BUSINESS magazine. The magazine staff has been at the show virtually every year since, but because the history of the GCSAA conference and show has been chronicled elsewhere, we won't repeat it here. Instead, we have asked some long-time members of the golf course maintenance business to talk about significant developments they have witnessed by attending GCSAA annual meetings through the years.

William E. Lyons was greenkeeper at Firestone County Club in Akron when he attended his first association conference and show, in Cleveland in 1946. Now 73 years old and affectionately known as "Old Bill" around



Lyons:
tractor
driver to
businessman

his Lyons Den Golf Course in Canal Fulton, Ohio, Lyons told us, "The superintendent has come from the job of tractor driver to being a businessman. That's the biggest innovation that the superintendents' association has brought forward."

He added, "We seemingly have come as far as we can on mechanical maintenance to reduce man-hours. I don't see much in equipment impro-

vement that will cut many more man-hours. Actually, we've over-groomed golf courses in America, and this is expensive."

About the future, Lyons said, "I think there are going to be fewer golf courses, the way the tax structure is going. Inflation may eat us up to a point where we are going to overprice golf for the public player."

"The GCSAA is going to have to deal with this in the future. The golf course superintendent is going to have to be on his toes to run a budget that will be equitable to the member or the public course player. In some areas, water is becoming an ever more costly item. In California, courses are paying more for water than they are for taxes."

The 1946 turfgrass conference and show was also the first for Tom Mascaro, who then had his own company, West Point Products, in Pennsylvania. Long an innovator in turf maintenance products — he was one of the inventors of the aerifier and the verticutter — Mascaro is now president of Turfgrass Products Corp. in North Miami, Fla. He says he has been to all 32 shows since World War II — "never missed a one."

"I think the two most significant developments in the golf business have been the mechanization of golf course maintenance and the development of the superintendent into a real professional," he said.

Mascaro added that in the future he expects an increase in the application of hydraulics to golf course equipment. "It's an efficient way of doing things and it's playing a big part in taking the load off people's backs."

Like Mascaro, Dr. Fred Grau, director of the Musser International Turfgrass Foundation in College Park, Md., is also an innovator in turf maintenance — he helped Mascaro develop the aerifier and verticutter, in addition to his breeding work. However, Grau, 76, goes back a little further in the golf business than Mascaro. He attended his first annual conference in about 1935 as an extension agronomist for Penn State University, and since then he has only missed two GCSAA conferences.

Grau agreed that the development of efficient golf course equipment has been important to the industry, but



Mascaro:
mechanized
maintenance

"the whole thing couldn't have exploded like it has unless the state experiment stations were involved in it. In the mid 40's . . . they helped get turf recognized as a legitimate part of agriculture."

Future research will probably focus on the development of grasses which can tolerate drought and resist disease, according to Grau. "We must breed disease out of these grasses."

Grau, like many of those we interviewed, said the superintendent has



Grau:
superinten-
dents have
become pros

developed, along with the golf industry as a whole, into a respected profession. "The superintendents have really pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and done a tremendous job in becoming professionals," he said.

If anyone is qualified to objectively evaluate the development of the golf course superintendent it is probably Charles Wilson, who just retired from the Milwaukee Sewerage Commission in Oak Creek, Wis. He has attended all but one of the GCSAA conferences since 1948 when he was an agronomist with the United States Golf Association. "Probably the single most significant change has been the increasing professionalism of the golf course superintendent," he said. "He has become more educated and much more competent to serve the game of golf since the early days."

And Wilson doesn't see the con-

tinued development of the superintendent slowing down one bit. "In the future, the superintendent will play a more important role in the handling of the labor force and he will pay more attention to the accounting end of the business. I also believe there will be an enlargement of the superintendent's support of turfgrass research," he said.

Although he is not going to the Atlanta conference, Wilson said all golf course superintendents should attend. "The conference is something golf should support. And when I say support I mean both municipal and public courses should pay the superintendent's way to attend, as do many of the private clubs."

George M. Kozelnicky, a professor in the Department of Plant Pathology and Plant Genetics at the University of Georgia in Athens, views the future development of the golf course superintendent, in large part, as the responsibility of the association. "I think the association's efforts to better train and educate the superintendent in the newer phases of turf management is necessary."

Kozelnicky, 60, who is also executive secretary of the Georgia GCSA, added that the association must also begin to prepare the superintendent for his increased involvement as "overall director of operations" of the golf course.

About the future, Kozelnicky said, "On a local level we're currently paying some attention to the development of alternative means of energy and what new sources may soon become available. Water conservation is also a concern of the future," he said.

Kozelnicky is not the only one concerned about future supplies of water for recreational use. Alexander Radko, national director of the USGA



Radko:
efficient
use of
water and
chemicals

Green Section, said a major concern of the GCSAA will be "ecological matters and ways to find more efficient use of materials."

"Water is going to be more and more critical as time goes on and I

think we're going to have to take a look at using more effluent water in the future," Radko, 62, said. "We're also going to have to look towards methods of applying chemicals more efficiently."

Regarding equipment, he looks for manufacturers to continue to develop equipment which will cut maintenance costs. However, Radko, who attended his first GCSAA conference in about 1951 as a research assistant for the USGA, warns, "The manpower requirement is never going to be totally reduced because man is such an important factor in the personal touches to the golf course maintenance program."

Radko also expects a "decentralization" of turf conferences in the future. "One of the problems that comes up with a conference this size is finding a place big enough to accommodate it. I think some day they might have one show in every state," he said.

Ed Worthington, 69, a golf course maintenance supply dealer from Saranac Lake, N.Y., attended his initial national show in the early 1940's. When he first attended the annual conference, Worthington said, most superintendents went there to "get drunk and have a good time, but that has changed now. More emphasis is now being spent on the educational aspects of training golf superintendents."

Although the educational segments of the conference have improved, Worthington said he would like to see more emphasis on "practical demonstrations" by manufacturers exhibiting equipment at the show. "I'd like to see the big manufacturers pay more attention to training golf course personnel in practical matters like how to take apart and put back together a mower for normal maintenance," he said. "In the old days . . . all equipment was made rather simple, but today, with all the new, sophisticated equipment, the mechanic has become very important."

Dr. Euel Coats, a professor at Mississippi State University in State College, Miss., is particularly interested in the educational aspects of the conference. "I guess because of the profession I'm in I have noticed an improvement in the educational aspects of the conference," he said. "We're also beginning to see some breaking up of the program into things specifically for us Rebs with concurrent sessions for the Yanks."

Coats, who is also executive secretary of the Southern Turfgrass Associ-

ation, added that at future conferences he expects more involvement in the actual program by superintendents.

Dr. Ralph E. Engel, research professor of Turfgrass Management at Cook College, Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, N.J., attended his first national conference in 1948. He sees the two biggest developments since the early days of the show as being the increased professionalism of the superintendent and the increased use of "native pesticides" on turf. What does he look for in the future? "I think the industry will probably go for more precise turf maintenance and the development of new grasses," he said.

Dr. James Beard, professor of Turfgrass Physiology at Texas A&M Uni-



Beard:
maximizing
cost/benefit
relationships

versity in College Station, Tex., has attended about 15 national conferences. Beard, 43, was working as a research assistant at Purdue University when he attended his initial conference in 1958.

"I think that turfgrass professionals in the field need to be more actively involved in educating the general public on the contributions turf makes in the day-to-day activities of the people in the United States," he said.

Beard added that the primary future concerns of the golf industry will probably be "the continued increase in emphasis on maximizing cost/benefit relationships in golf course maintenance and increased efficiency in the use of water, energy, and plant nutrients."

One would expect university professors to evaluate the educational sessions at the annual conferences, but Angelo Cammarota, superintendent of Hobbit's Glen Club in Columbia, Md., was also eager to express his opinions on the subject.

"I think in the past three or four

years the educational aspects of the conferences have gotten better and better, but I think we should get away from turf more and focus on personnel management," Cammarota, 63, said. "We've got to get more versatile to include more people other than those in the turf business. We have to attract everyone in the green industry. I think



Cammarota: include more people in turf business

we've been emphasizing golf courses too much."

Cammarota has been involved in the turf business since he was 16, and he has attended 19 consecutive conferences since 1959. Cammarota said he has seen the industry "come a long way," but he would like to see it "move along a little faster. We've made some progress, but I think if we don't double our pace, we will be dragging our feet."

Dr. James Watson, vice president of The Toro Co. in Minneapolis, has attended 25 conferences consecutively. Watson, 58, attended his first GCSAA conference in 1953 at Atlantic City as an agronomist with Toro.

He cited the "continuous improvement" of maintenance equipment



Watson: superintendent has become an astute buyer

and the expansion of educational programs available to superintendents as the two primary developments in the golf business. "The superintendent has also become a very astute buyer," he said. "They are more aware of the need for equipment to minimize operating costs and they have an in-

creasing amount of knowledge about the equipment and materials they need to operate a golf course."

In the future, Watson looks for a "broadening of the conference into the allied turf groups. They are currently trying to bring in people from other areas of the turf industry and I think that is where the growth has to come," he said. "The golf industry is fairly static, so the growth has to come from the allied areas."

Randolph Mulkey, superintendent at Silverado Country Club in Napa, Calif., said the GCSAA and superintendents throughout the country will have to pay close attention to economics in the future. "The price of golf has gotten so high that it's hard for the golfer to pay the bill. So we've got to develop more labor-saving equipment



Mulkey: need for labor-saving equipment

and find other ways to fight high maintenance and labor costs," he said.

Mulkey, 65, attended his first national conference in Chicago in about 1959. At the time he was in charge of grounds maintenance at Ferris State College in Big Rapids, Mich. He said the most significant change in the industry during his 40 years of involvement has been the development of labor-saving equipment, including the mechanical trap rake, triplex greens mower, and automatic irrigation systems.

Stanley Fredriksen, who retired from Mallinckrodt Inc. in St. Louis several years ago, has attended 24 consecutive national conferences. He said the annual show has changed a great deal since he attended his first GCSAA conference in 1954 at the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis.

"The banning of open hospitality rooms about 10 or 15 years ago was a big change in the conference. Many thought that open hospitality rooms were an open invitation for every-

body to get drunk and a few of the conferences got out of hand," he said. "It's a more sedate, well-mannered group than it used to be."

He added that the "almost continual growth of the conference, to the point where only eight to ten places on the North American continent can accommodate the group" has been another significant change in the annual show. "In 1954, the entire conference was held in the Jefferson Hotel," he added.

A third development has been the "vast proliferation" of golf course superintendent turf conferences across the United States. "When I first got involved there were only about 12 regional and state conferences. Now there is something like 100," he said.

Regarding the most important developments in machinery, Fredriksen, 67, said the riding greens mower "revolutionized" the industry by drastically cutting maintenance costs. Other important equipment developments include aerating machinery, motorized sand trap rakes, and the turf truckster. "The most dramatic chemical change to come about has been the development of pre-emergence weed-grass control chemicals," he said.

If there was a single theme which weaved its way throughout the 14 interviews conducted by GOLF BUSINESS, it was undoubtedly the development of the golf course superintendent from a manual laborer into a professional businessman.

Stan Fredriksen said it best. "When I started going to conferences the guy that took care of the golf course was called a greenskeeper. He then graduated to golf course superintendent and more recently he has been called the turf manager. He has certainly grown in quality, education, and stature." □

For a special commentary by Herb Graffis, GOLFDOM/GOLF BUSINESS editor and consultant since the first GCSAA conference, see the Viewpoint column on pages 41-42.