A tale of two golf worlds

After 30-plus years in the golf industry, I have a mix of chlorophyll and ink in my blood. The chlorophyll is from my years as a superintendent, and the ink from my years as a journalist covering this great industry.

I used that blend of elements to my advantage when I attended the annual Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) and International Network of Golf (ING) annual spring conferences. They are my journalists’ education equivalent of the Golf Industry Show and Florida Turfgrass Association turf conference.

At the TOCA conference we talk turf, landscape and pest control, and I’m rubbing elbows and talking shop with folks from all the industry publications. Our educational sessions are focused on using the latest technologies in order to keep you informed.

We also have sessions on refreshing our creative juices. We want to get and keep your attention so we can educate you in the latest products and innovations. We are also in the business of helping to grow the game so we can all stay employed.

A couple of examples from this year’s TOCA out in Portland, Ore., were the presentations by Dr. Milt Engleke on the latest turfgrass breeding research, which leads to grasses better suited to a variety of ecosystems around the country, rather than one turf fits all. That was followed by two writing workshops by renowned writing instructor Ann Wylie, who challenged us to “write like a roller coaster” to jump-start our creativity.

A couple of weeks later I attended the International Network of Golf Conference at the Reunion Resort, just 20 miles from my house in Orlando, and also the same facility that soon will have hosted its second Golfdom Summit. At the ING, I venture into the golf lifestyle side of the industry. Attendees are from golfing publications, which primarily talk about, travel, resorts, golf equipment (balls and sticks), training aids and apparel. It’s the front-of-the-house part of the business. I enjoy attending these sessions so I might help in some small way to provide a connection between the clubhouse and golf maintenance.

I see more people are becoming aware of the environmental issues facing golf, especially in the area of water availability. Getting the “playing the game” folks and golf maintenance folks on the same page is critical for addressing regulatory and growing the game issues. They go hand in hand.

This year ING had a “Best Practices” session, which covered topics like marketing the facility, effectively using online media, charitable fundraising and a host of growing the game topics.

All these topics depend on a well-maintained golf course to attract and retain golfers.

Joel Jackson, CGCS-Ret., is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.