



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak CGCS

“Let’s get together and feel alright,” – Bob Marley

That famous chorus from a

popular song scribed by the late reggae icon means a lot of things to a lot of people. I’m sure when Bob wrote it he was not thinking about a particular group, and I am quite sure the “feel alright” portion may have involved a particular controlled substance, but the melody kept coming to me as I reflected upon my week at the GIS show in Las Vegas.

OK- Las Vegas isn’t Jamaica. Golf Course Industry types will never be confused with Rastafarians, who basically take life in stride and possess a “no worries” attitude. Golf Course Industry types- and superintendents specifically - we have worries. So what on earth would make that chorus, and that melody, remind me of an industry convention that is business oriented, structured, and as far from an exotic island as you can get?

Perhaps there is a certain comfort level with being surrounded by a group of people that you know are going through or have gone through the same challenges that you yourself have faced or are facing. Perhaps there is security in knowing that some of the questions in the back of your mind will be answered at this gathering.

Maybe the week long get-together is just plain therapeutic. Whatever the reason, I find these gatherings invaluable to my job and my attitude towards my profession.

There is so much to gain at the GIS. There are the obvious things like half-day or full day seminars devoted to a single topic, the trade show with every vendor known to a superintendent

displaying their goods, or the dynamic speakers at the welcoming reception and general sessions. But what I value the most is the networking. The little conversations I have with either guys I have just met, or guys I have known from my humble beginnings in this business, and anywhere in-between.

Normally the discussion will focus on how their previous year went, how their family is doing, how the weather is either with them or against them presently, or in the past, but sometimes it drifts into something specific. Sometimes it is about trying a different product a new method, or a complete reversal of a given program. Sometimes it is a change in hiring practices or an alternative perspective when dealing with superiors. Sometimes it is successes, and sometimes failures. The best thing about this networking is you are conversing with a real person- not a computer. There is real interaction with real people and the questions and answers and thoughts and theories are genuine. There are very few industries where people who technically are in competition with each other are so supportive of each other and that is to all of our credit.

This trip I had conversations with (and in no particular order):

- A guy from Maryland who is trying a one-shot season-long fertilizer with insecticide and herbicide control. In the transition zone. Results pending.
- A guy from California who is really into 80’s alt-rock, and some great new stuff out of the mainstream. Not agronomic related, but great for my I-Pod.
- A chance lunch with a vendor from Idaho who had an I-Pad and some knock-out pictures from a snow mold trial at a local course. Pictures do not lie.

- A couple guys from a region not to be named that were pretty steamed about their regional USGA agronomist. Very interesting and I'll leave it at that.
- Dinner with two guys from Florida, one from South Carolina and one from the Atlanta area. Now, if you are ever feeling bad about your fungus issues or a few Japanese Beetles, have dinner with these guys. After five minutes I did not have anything more to talk about. All I could do is shut up and listen and be thankful for long cold winters. (Did I really just type that?)
- The Michigan Superintendent Association Director, a former superintendent, on the progression of their electronic publication and association in general. Very progressive and full of ideas to borrow.

That is just off the top of my head. I had many other great conversations on a smaller scale and not just with local guys I already know.

Now, I know I am fortunate to work for a company that will send me to such a great event. I also realize not everybody is that lucky. If you cannot make it to the national convention, there are always your local conventions. They are the same thing only without the national flair. Can't afford the local? Call up five guys you know and meet at a bar once every other month for happy hour. Or go bowling. Or ice fishing. Heck, sit on the end of each others' utility vehicles and paint each others' toenails if that is your thing, but get out there and network. Don't ever be shy about it. Whether you have a one million dollar budget or one hundred thousand dollar budget; superintendents all face similar hardships and experience similar triumphs. Share with each other and it is amazing how it benefits all who hear.

The most beneficial trip I have ever taken was last June to Farmlinks. Farmlinks is an experience I would highly recommend to any industry professional if presented the opportunity. The people in

Sylacauga are tops in hospitality and the education is top-notch, but that is not why that trip was so meaningful to me.

The group that went down there was comprised of superintendents from Minnesota and Western Wisconsin. I am sure I do not have to tell anybody what the main topic of conversation was on the entire trip, but the initials W and K put together figured prominently. My course was blasted worse than it had ever been before, and when I left I had two temporary greens and five more that should have. After two seedings, and the Spring from Hell, I was seriously questioning why I was taking three days to do this but I had committed well before Turf Armageddon and wasn't going to bail on my guy who set it up.

As it turns out, it was exactly what I needed. My psyche needed to hear that almost all the guys on the trip were undergoing the same thing: looking for seedlings that were not there, staring at dead turf every day, trying to figure out if that green is life or just dye from the fungicide, trying to figure out if that look from the member is normal or is that the "better be green next week" look. It got me away from the mess, and together with 15 or so therapists of the turf nature. Thanks to any of you guys that were on that trip. You all really helped me a ton.

By the time we got back the weather finally broke, and grass started growing. I didn't hear Bob Marley then, but can honestly say that we got together, and after that trip I really felt all right. The value of getting together can never be underestimated.