



# TURFGRASS MATTERS

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## Covering Up Blue Jeans

by Ken Ingram, CGCS

Never before has the "image" of the Golf Course Superintendent been more topical and "in the news" than the past few months. For those of you confused by this headline, you may recall a familiar *Tee-2-Green* advertisement this summer featuring Mark Wilson, CGCS, Superintendent at Valhalla the site of the 2000 PGA Championship. In its original form published in several national magazines, Wilson was wearing blue jeans. When the advertisement ran in the August issue of *Golf Course Management* the photo had been amended changing the color of the pants. As you might imagine this decision has been widely discussed among superintendents and in GCSAA's online forum "Talking it Over." For critics of GCSAA policy, after months of debating PDI, the amended photo was like pouring gasoline on a fire.

There is no denying the importance of "image." Public perception is influenced by outward appearances. Those of you that attended our April meeting will certainly agree. Our speaker was an image consultant, Geoff Lewis. He gave an excellent presentation showing slides of men and women with various hairstyles, clothes, etc. and asked the audience to guess their profession, incomes, etc. As you might expect, we labeled the well dressed and groomed individuals as successful people. At the end of the presentation, Mr. Lewis went back through the slides slowly and to our surprise it was the same two individuals simply dressed and groomed differently. Working as long as we do on the golf course, we all know the way someone looks on the course and the way they play the game reveals an awful lot about a person's character.

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*When dealing with the image and public perception of our business, you won't be successful working alone. Support GCSAA and MAAGCS.*

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So is image more important than substance? Certainly not, There are always exceptions to the rule and I think our society appreciates true professionals that have the humility to disregard image. Craig Stadler among PGA Tour players or Pete Dye among the architects are examples. In the Valhalla case, Mark Wilson managed an excellent golf course and my members could care less what clothes I wore if I provided those playing conditions at my course. Even if we are successful, we will still be judged and compared to others in our profession. If the profession in general lacks education and experience it will detract from the image, income potential, and respect of even the most established individuals. No matter how many hours you work or how good the condition of your course, when budgets and salaries are discussed you will always be compared to the others in your profession.

Is the PDI a vehicle to improve GCSAA's image? Indirectly I believe it is. It makes a major assumption however, that with education and experience, superintendents will seem more professional. Is the day coming when your national trade association dictates your attire? I doubt it, but employers do. I know of one management company that tells the superintendent to wear "golf attire" while at work. My facility had a management ar-

range for two years with a major hospitality and hotel chain. They are very image conscious for "front of the house" positions and not so image conscious for the "back of the house" personnel. My staff and I were never affected and we joked that we must have be considered "back of the house."

We should all work on image individually by educating golfers, protecting the environment, and using good ethics in business. But you owe a portion of your efforts to groups working on your behalf. Even if you don't agree with everything on an association's agenda or individuals elected, your involvement makes a difference. These are interesting times for GCSAA. PDI is probably just the tip of the iceberg. This question of image is incredibly dynamic. These programs will influence your career, especially for younger superintendents. GCSAA and the chapters need your help right now. You need to attend meetings and get involved with these decisions.

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