



# And the Survey Says . . .

*As 2003 wanes, the thought occurs: What a year! Not only did my husband and I enjoy the blessing of a third child, but also—for the first time in my professional life—I am quoting Richard Dawson (remember “The Family Feud?”) in print.*

2003 marked the first-ever *On Course* readership survey. Sure, questions concerning the magazine have appeared on past Midwest membership surveys. But until this year, the *On Course* staff and Editorial Committee had never solicited such specific feedback from our audience.

A little history . . . for many years, MAGCS leadership has sensed a high level of membership satisfaction with *On Course*. The general questions posed on past Midwest member surveys confirmed this. In 2003, however, the time seemed ripe to subject *On Course* to greater scrutiny, with a goal of gaining insights that would allow further enhancements to the magazine. In June, Midwest members received a survey that asked them to comment on many diverse aspects of their magazine.

Happily, the participation rate was satisfactory (greater than 10%) and analysis of the results suggested membership's endorsement of the magazine's content, appearance and format. Complete survey results are now available on the MAGCS Web site ([www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org)). Some highlights of the results include the following:

- Some 71 MAGCS members responded, a statistically valid response rate.
- Forty-eight (48) noncommercial members responded (mostly Class A/B members) and twenty-three (23) commercial members weighed in.
- The vast majority of our members (82% and 87%, respectively) rated the editorial content and aesthetics of the magazine as excellent/outstanding or very good.
- While “the Bull Sheet” remains the most widely read recurring editorial content in *On Course*, all of our regular columns (“On Course with the President,” “Director’s Column,” “Super -N- Site,” etc.) received readership scores between “sometimes read” and “always read.”
- In terms of topics for feature articles, “Ask the ‘Expert,’” etc., respondents were positive about most subject matter but especially enthusiastic about coverage pertaining to major golf course projects, innovations in turf/facility maintenance, turfgrass science and first-person accounts/experiences.
- More than three-quarters of noncommercial members said that the advertising in *On Course* does or could impact purchasing decisions; more than three-quarters of commercial members said they viewed advertising in *On Course* as an invaluable way of reaching their target market and/or supporting the MAGCS.

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, encouraging the Editorial Committee and *On Course* staff that we are meeting or exceeding most members' expectations of the magazine, survey respondents also provided us with a number of comments and suggestions that we plan to use to further improve the magazine. Among changes planned for 2004 are the following:

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- Renew our commitment to regular columns that received high ratings from readership but appeared infrequently in 2003, including “Midwest Personalities” and “The Way We Were/Are.” (Note that only greater membership participation will allow us to realize this goal. Please visit the Web site and fill out a “Midwest Personalities” questionnaire. Don’t hesitate to call or e-mail your editor or Editorial Committee chair with topics for “The Way We Were”—if you have an old photograph, advertisement, memo or article, you have an idea!)
- Introduce new content, such as the occasional guest essay and a quarterly news round-up from other GCSAA chapters.
- Maintain an advertising-to-editorial ratio of 50/50 in order to improve magazine aesthetics while affording greater exposure to all ads.

In addition to completing the survey, some members took a moment to express concerns or share suggestions. Here are excerpts from this feedback . . . the good, the bad and the ugly! Where appropriate, I’ve added a further comment of my own.

- I like a variety of topics in each issue.
- Personal issues always interest me. We all work hard at our facilities and allow our golfers to enjoy the greatest courses in the country. Personal struggles, relationships with others, and how we handle these stresses—that interests me.
- The balance of *On Course* is superb. It is difficult to gauge and quantify just what works best. The mix of serious/lighthearted content works VERY well and is a delight to open each month. There is much to cover in the reach of the MAGCS and I, for one, believe that *On Course* does a wonderful job. Keep up the fine work.
- I enjoy some of the articles that have been selected and reprinted from other local chapter newsletters. Maybe a place for one of these in each issue would be nice. *Editor’s note: Because we usually enjoy an abundance of original submissions from MAGCS members, we don’t often look to reprints to fill our pages. But knowing that articles gleaned*

*from other chapter publications are appealing to our readers, we will make it a priority to include good “previously published” material on a more regular basis.*

- [Would like to see] more history of clubs and people from the past that have been involved in the Association. Maybe a “where are they now” article. *Editor’s note: If you have ideas for topics or personalities to cover, let us know!*
- The current format is very good. A nice mix of articles (golf-related) from personal stories to time-sensitive research.
- The Wisconsin association has a couple of superintendents who are regular contributors to their magazine and LOVE to write. Unfortunately I don’t think the MAGCS has anyone that would volunteer for something like that . . . Maybe if we went bimonthly (like Wisconsin) the content would be better. The *On Course* magazine is difficult to read because of all the ads breaking up the flow. *Editor’s note: The Midwest has plenty of outstanding writers, and it would be nice to see these individuals contribute more often. On Course is committed to publishing primarily original material submitted by our members . . . and the higher the participation, the better our magazine will be.*
- Keep article pages together—not on page 3 then to page 26, continue the flow from page to next page. Use the same format as the *Wisconsin Grass Roots* publication . . . *Editor’s note: We have made an effort to reduce the incidence of page-jumping, but sometimes that’s the most viable alternative. Putting together On Course every month is like assembling a giant jigsaw puzzle. The puzzle pieces are text, graphics and advertisements. While we try to “package” each article, keeping each item self-contained, it is not always possible.*
- With the large number of members in MAGCS, I would like to see the “Midwest Personalities” feature in every issue. It’s a great way to learn about our fellow members.
- Introduce a new category of articles: “Get to Know Your Vendors.” We learn a lot about our customers in “Super –N– Site” and there

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*So share your ideas, write an article, send us feedback.*

should be that same insight conveyed about the vendors.

For me, the most encouraging aspect of the readership survey was NOT the membership’s overwhelmingly enthusiastic feelings about the magazine. It was the passion for having a good magazine reflected in all the responses, favorable and less-than-glowing. You care about your magazine, and the Editorial Committee and the *On Course* staff work diligently every month so as not to disappoint membership’s expectations. Will we use this survey’s results as an excuse to rest on our laurels and forego further improvements? Absolutely NOT! We have many ideas for enhancing *On Course*, and we are taking the necessary steps to implement those ideas. Just remember—achieving our goals for the magazine depends in part on your involvement. So share your ideas, write an article, send us feedback. Don’t wait for the next readership survey to express your pleasure or displeasure with some aspect of the magazine.

Finally, a hearty thanks to everyone who participated in the readership survey. We promised choice Midwest merchandise to three randomly selected respondents, and our winners are Rod Betterly, Bob Breen, Jr. and Sean Creed. Enjoy!

Happy holidays to all and warmest wishes for 2004. 