

# The Shape of Things to Come

*The final version of the MAGCS strategic plan will carry a new mission and vision forward into this 21st century. Right now, though, the plan is but a draft. So read all about it and tell your Board of Directors what **you** think.*

*Imagine the MAGCS strategic plan is the subject of debate by the 2004 presidential candidates. Better yet, imagine "Saturday Night Live" is lampooning the 2004 presidential contenders as they debate the MAGCS strategic plan. Dubya would extol the virtues of sound "strategy" and reiterate a dozen times that creating and implementing such strategy is "hard, hard, hard work." Kerry, meanwhile, would counter that before going forward with any strategic plan, we should take it to the United Nations for its input and approval.*

*In carefully examining the strategic plan, and bringing our feedback to the Board, we—the members of MAGCS—have a voice in further refining and shaping the plan.*

Political humor aside, the development of a strategic plan for the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents is, indeed, a challenging endeavor. Enacting the strategic plan **will** be hard, hard work. And before proceeding, gaining the input and approval of the membership is more than commendable, it is crucial to the plan's success.

Our elected representatives on the current Board of Directors have willingly assumed the challenges outlined above. They firmly believe that having a solid strategic plan—one that includes a more succinct and user-friendly mission statement, a clearly articulated vision for the future and realistic goals towards realizing the vision—is critical to the future well-being and strength of this organization.

The Board took the first steps in early December, convening with facilitator Hannes Combest from GCSAA for a daylong session dedicated to examining the purpose of and plans for our Association. Hannes asked the Board probing questions that required them to think long and hard about where MAGCS has been, where it is today and where it is going. The product of all this soul-searching is a draft strategic plan, compiled by Hannes and her GCSAA team, that incorporates the Board's extensive feedback.

The Board took a first look at this document just prior to its March meeting. Now, it is the Midwest membership's turn to review the draft strategic plan and share our thoughts. As executive director Luke Cella points out, each Board member—by going through the brainstorming session—felt a reinvigorated and authentic sense of ownership in our Association. "When you go through this exercise, everybody in the room takes a personal responsibility," Luke explains. "When people feel a sense of ownership, the follow-through and thought process is much deeper."

In carefully examining the strategic plan, and bringing our feedback to the Board, we—the members of MAGCS—have a voice in further refining and shaping the plan. We, too, gain ownership of the mission, vision and goals for our Association.

The following is a section-by-section discussion of some of the key components of the draft strategic plan. The full text of the draft plan, as well as a message thread for discussion of the plan, is available on our Web site, [www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org). Whenever feasible, the Board plans to encourage an open discussion of the strategic plan at upcoming monthly golf meetings.

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### The Mission

The mission statement is arguably the cornerstone of the draft strategic plan. The vision, and goals, for the Association originate there.

The current MAGCS mission statement is the original, dating back to our founding in 1926. Its formal, elaborate language reflects the founders' noble objective of banding together to elevate individuals and the profession as a whole.

"To advance the rights and sciences attendant upon, pertinent or related to the occupation of green-keeping, to unite the greenkeepers and golf course superintendents of the Chicago metropolitan area into a cooperative group for the collection, preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge and information, thus effecting more efficient and economical maintenance for golf courses and thereby improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige and efficiency of the members; the creation of an instrumentality of entity of record capable and susceptible of procuring all bene-

fits to the members both individually and collectively."

The Board felt that the content of the existing mission, while meaningful and relevant, was getting lost amidst its length and complexity. They looked not to reinvent the mission, but streamline it in keeping with the changing times. Luke notes, "There's a lot going on there. In this day and age, people look for simplicity, and want to easily get a handle on what we're about. We wanted to come up with a mission that is simple to say and understand, not only for us, but for people outside the Association."

The proposed mission statement in the draft strategic plan reads as follows:

*The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS) exists to provide networking, education and career advancement opportunities to those who facilitate the growth and enjoyment of golf.*

Networking, education, career advancement—the goal of MAGCS to provide opportunities in these areas is common to both the 1926 and 2005

missions. However, Luke is quick to point out that the very nature of some of these activities has changed enormously. Take networking, for instance. In the past, says Luke, networking meant members exchanging information and ideas in person or more formally, with a letter (sent "snail mail," of course) or a phone call. The phone call was placed to a desk line and no answering machine or voicemail greeted the caller if the intended target was unavailable. Now, with the prevalence of e-mail, instant messaging, digital images and cell phones, sharing insights and trading thoughts is much more instantaneous, informal and constant.

Education, too, means something different now than it did 79 years ago. Luke comments that the changes in MAGCS education offerings in recent years underscore change in the industry, and further changes on the horizon. "The focus is shifting from heavy agronomy and scientific-based education to more of a business and professional orientation," notes Luke. "The primary age

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group in our Association may not have had formal education in business or technology management, and they are in the whole process of adapting right now. For the generation coming out of college, this is not something we have to teach them, but they need other issues addressed—career-building, and of course, real-turf experience, for instance. For all groups, MAGCS needs to give them the tools to advance their careers. We must make sure the education we provide matches specific needs.”

Finally, the definition of career advancement has expanded. No longer is it confined to moving from one superintendent position to another, or ascending into a superintendent job from the assistant ranks. Today, it could mean gaining skill sets and experience to transition into an entirely different role within the golf industry. It might involve supporting the roles of the assistant superintendent and technician—spray, irrigation, equipment, etc.—so they are truly career positions. It could translate to exposure to new ideas and techniques that make an existing job more fulfilling.

As much as the draft mission reiterates, much more succinctly, concepts integral to the original mission, it also clearly extends the reach and benefits of MAGCS beyond the superintendent ranks. The 1926 mission speaks directly to greenkeepers and golf course superintendents. The refocused mission clearly pertains to superintendents, in that it cites the Association’s name right up front, yet it speaks to “those who facilitate the growth and enjoyment of golf.” Why the change?

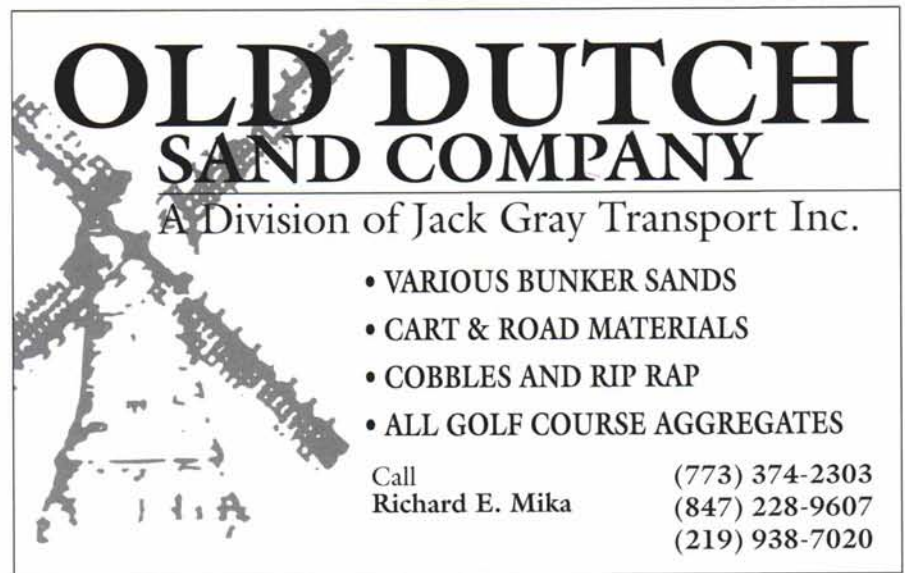
“As our profession evolves and our knowledge base grows, we increasingly rely on other qualified professional individuals,” Luke explains. “We need to look to foster their growth as well as our own.

“The key person at any golf course property, whether a private club or public facility, is the superintendent. The physical grounds of the golf course outweigh any other asset an owner or club possesses,” continues Luke. “With this notion that the golf course superintendent is a leader at his or her property, it follows that our Association would encompass, promote and provide professional resources to everyone involved with the golf course operation.”

In short, says Luke, “This mission sets up the MAGCS as the leading local organization for the golf course management profession.”

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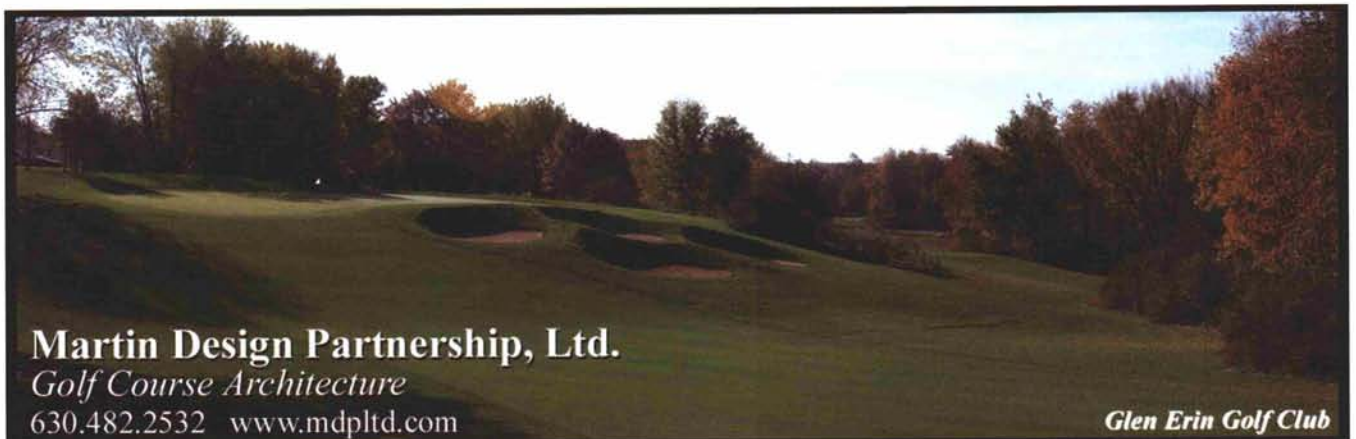
*As much as the draft mission reiterates, much more succinctly, concepts integral to the original mission, it also clearly extends the reach and benefits of MAGCS beyond the superintendent ranks.*



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## The Vision

Demographic analysis suggests that by the year 2020, MAGCS membership will be younger and quite diverse. By that time, Luke feels some of our current members will have become general managers or assumed roles similar to directors of whole golf course operations. The ever-changing and complex role of the golf course superintendent is a natural stepping stone to a facility manager, and the best experience any manager of a golf course operation could have. Furthermore, as the profession evolves, the supporting roles of the assistant golf course superintendent, equipment technician, irrigation technician and spray technician will take on more importance and responsibility. It is up to the MAGCS to make sure the individuals that will hold these positions are educated and prepared for the tasks at hand.

The draft vision is holistic and inclusionary, presenting the MAGCS of 15 years hence as encompassing the entire golf course management profession. It does not speak to superintendents alone; although superintendents remain the priority constituency, the vision speaks to the aforementioned managers, assistants, technicians and beyond. It foresees an organization that has a greater impact on legislation that affects our industry, successfully promotes a higher positive profile for the profession and generates significant funds for turf research.

The proposed vision in the draft strategic plan reads as follows:

*By 2020, the MAGCS will:*

- Broadly represent the golf course management profession.
- Be viewed as a professional resource for golf course management professionals.
- Be viewed as a resource for surrounding GCSAA chapters.

*This will result in:*

- Increased recognition for legislative issues relating to environmental issues.
- Increased public exposures for golf course management professionals in the area.
- Increased funding for research.

The Board, Luke says, intends through this vision that the MAGCS should remain and solidify its position as a leading GCSAA chapter and

an example and/or benchmark to other chapters.

## Goals to Meet the Vision

Of course, formulating a vision is not enough. Realizing the vision means crafting attainable, measurable goals, the steps that take us from point A to point B. The draft strategic plan concludes by outlining five such goals that read as follows.

### 1. Increase membership.

According to Luke, MAGCS membership currently stands at 640. Of that total, 270, or 40%, are golf course superintendents. The next largest membership class is E, or commercial, with 177 members. What does that tell us? Analysis by Board member Tim Anderson suggests that some 80 facilities within our geography have no representation in the MAGCS. We could expand our penetration to those facilities. More paramount, of course, is growing our ranks in other membership classes, especially C (assistant) and D (student and employee of golf course superintendent). This, says Luke, is absolutely consistent with the mission and vision for MAGCS.

Important, too, is an assessment of what MAGCS offers these constituencies. "Reviewing membership benefits occurs on an ongoing basis," says Luke. "We need to define why people become members and always make sure we're meeting their needs."

### 2. Enhance communication with members and the public.

"Public and media relations . . . this is where we lack the most experience and where we can grow our efforts the quickest," comments Luke, adding that the Board was generally pleased with print and online communications. Gary Hearn is the current chair of our Media and Public Relations Committee and plans to develop a short- and long-term strategic plan at present.

### 3. Continue to offer a high-quality professional development program.

Relating directly to the draft mission statement, this goal comprises scholarship offerings, career assistance and continuing education. The MAGCS scholarship program continues to flourish, with fundraising generating enough proceeds to

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increase the number and amount of scholarships. Under investigation is setting up an endowment for the disbursement of scholarship funds. With respect to continuing education, the Board feels strongly that MAGCS excels in this area, and will continue to pursue the finest speakers, seminars and workshops.

Career assistance is an area where opportunities abound. Under discussion is establishing a mentor program for first-year superintendents. As the MAGCS works toward elevating the superintendent profession, so too its efforts should elevate the other roles within the industry. Says Luke, "Today's superintendents wear so many hats, and they can't possibly be an expert in every facet of this profession as it has evolved over the years. They need highly qualified people working for them. We now have long-term assistants, irrigation technicians, equipment technicians and so on. With so many good people working in the industry, we're going to see career positions created out of jobs once viewed as transitory, and it's up to the leadership within the Associa-

tion to advocate for these positions entailing the salaries and benefits that will make them true career positions."

**4. Develop a leadership and volunteer management plan.**

Essentially, this goal encourages MAGCS to bring more resources to bear by getting more people involved. "The more people you reach, the more people you are able to help and meet their needs," notes Luke.

**5. Continue to develop a more strategic Board.**

Turnover is a fact of life on the MAGCS Board. Yet one of the best techniques to ensure continuity from Board to Board is to refine our focus, which the present Board has done in shaping a mission, vision and goals for the future. Luke feels that the Board actually having the time to reflect on the big picture is an advantage of the creation of the executive director job. Says Luke, "Instead of having to focus all their time and energies on committee, task-oriented work, the Board can take a more global stance, refocusing every year and taking a fresh look at the mission and vision . . . making sure they still work for us and what we are doing to

fulfill them. We need to make sure that long term, we are ahead of the game. Of course, the leadership of our committees must continue to meet the high standards set by previous leaders of this organization to ensure future success."

**What's Next**

As mentioned previously, the Board is actively encouraging us, the members of the MAGCS, to get involved in this process by asking questions, providing feedback, lending insights and generating ideas. The Past Presidents Council reviewed and discussed the document at their March 11th meeting. Further opportunities for discussion include upcoming monthly golf meetings, the message board at [www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org) and this very publication, in our "Midwest Voices" column.

As our executive director states: "This should be the mission and vision of the entire membership. The people you elected, who represent you on the Board, came up with this—now what are **your** thoughts?"



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