

The Verdict— Atlanta Was Pretty Cool

The Golf Industry Show, after several attempts to find a home this February, made its way to Atlanta, thankful to be anywhere that could handle it. Although conspired against by hurricanes, funerals, and countless other obstacles, the show did go on, and it turned out better than most people had expected. Sure, attendance was down a bit, but not as far down as was estimated. And sure, it wasn't New Orleans and Bourbon Street and Paul Prudhomme, but Peachtree Drive and Hooter's weren't a bad fallback position. And though the weather could definitely have been warmer, it could have been a lot colder, too. So the basic question one must ask when harkening back to memories of the show in Atlanta is, "Was my glass half empty, or was it half full?"

The beginning of the festivities took place in Houston, where a slimmed-down version of the MAGCS golf contingency went into battle for bragging rights in the National Championship and Golf Classic. In the Championship Flight, Al Pondel, CGCS of Rockford Country Club was our top dog, winding up in fifth place, four strokes behind the winner. In the Chapter competition, the MAGCS #1 team of Dave Kohley, Al Pondel, Tommy Robinson, and Tim Scott placed sixth with a 175. Team #2 with Dave Arden, Tim Davis, Brad Legnaioli, and Dave Radaj finished ninth with 171. With a glass half full, that's pretty darn good, huh?

Next stop was Atlanta and the show—another impressive trade show with something for everybody: a vast array of educational seminars, classes, and presentations, and, of course, all those fun evening events. Once again, the Midwest put its best foot forward in hosting the epitome of hospitality suites. The venue in the Hyatt Regency, the volunteers who gave of their time to greet our members and guests, and the sponsors whose contributions were so generous, all came together to make it one of the finest in recent memory. There are simply too many people to thank for their part in the success of the two-night event, but we have to mention Commercial Advisor Sharon Riesenbeck and her team of dedicated and selfless volunteers. Outstanding job, everyone!

Easy as it is to get all caught up in the evening entertainment activities, some pretty important business gets done at these shows, too. For one, GCSAA's officers for 2006 were elected, including President Sean Hoolehan, who I'm sure several of you remember from his days working here in our midst at Butler National in the early '80s. Another event with a Midwest flavor to it was Golfweek's SuperNEWS Superintendent of the Year Award, which included in its list of nine finalists Erwin

McKone of Briar Ridge Country Club. The award went to Mark Burchfield of the Victoria Club in Riverside, Calif., but a toast with a half-full glass to Erwin for being a finalist and getting his mug on the cover of the magazine. Last, but certainly not least, the very magazine you are reading made some noise by winning the GCSAA Chapter Publications contest for the second consecutive year in Category 4. So now the glass is looking about two-thirds full, right?

There is a decided advantage to having the big show in a city like Atlanta—once it's over, you just go home. There's no real reason to stay around and extend the trip (unless you've been waiting your whole life to take that tour of CNN). And that's where my story ends—at the airport in Atlanta, sitting in a lounge with a sizable portion of the MAGCS membership, reliving the events of the previous days while sipping at our three-quarters-full glasses. Pretty cool, not bad, better than expected, were the words bandied about. Then, here's this group of soldiers who, it turns out through eavesdropping on their conversations, are just back from Iraq. They're sitting in our lounge, waiting for their flights that will take them home to their families who are waiting to hear all of their stories. And a guy—I wish it had been me—walks up to the bar, whispers something to the barkeep, and the next thing you know, each of those soldiers has a big ol' cold beer placed in front of him, compliments of that guy, that complete stranger. I watch him walk out of the bar, I watch the soldiers tip their glasses to him in thanks, I watch him thank them for all they've done and shake each of their hands, and I go get on my plane with that picture in my mind—and like those soldiers, my glass is now full. Atlanta was pretty cool. 