



Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*

## Pat Jones Revisited

The MAGCS January Meeting/Wee One Fundraiser was held at Seven Bridges Golf Club, Don Ferreri and Dave Gelino hosted.

John Miller, CGCS Field Staff Representative of the GCSAA for the Great Lakes Region, started the day out with a presentation on "What is Happening Now."

John started out stating that the GCSAA is "mission focused, we are dedicated to serving our members, advancing the profession and promoting the growth of the game." This will be accomplished in several ways as John continued to explain.

### Field Staff

At the request of the membership, the GCSAA began to implement a Regional Field Staff program. The purpose of the GCSAA Regional Field Staff is to assist affiliated GCSAA chapters helping them become more effective and to help them fully comprehend services provided by the GCSAA. It was designed to create a direct voice for the chapters and to relay needs back to GCSAA. Ultimately it would like to develop new programs for the GCSAA and chapters. One major focus is to expand the superintendents' role in the golf community. All field staff is supposed to visit member and non-member facilities alike.



*John Miller, CGCS Field Staff, offered help to all our members for any GCSAA related issues.*



*Pat Jones' business is keeping close tabs on the golf industry. Not everyone may agree with his viewpoints, but we can all agree it is nice to have him in town to support the Midwest and Wee One.*

### Programs

John then listed and explained some of the programs that GCSAA offers:

1. Research, not conducted in house.
2. Leadership Academy
3. Education
4. BMP's: Best Management Practices
5. Access to Michigan State University's Turfgrass Information File (All MAGCS members have, not just Class A and SM members as with GCSAA)
6. Nutrient Management Template
7. Salary Surveys
8. Environmental Institute of Golf

### Advocacy

The GCSAA has reached out to create electronic bulletins. Last year the main topic was how the extreme heat and drought was affecting turf. They have been active in Government relations and public policy. Some actions they have been involved with include: chemical products and use, nationwide permit regulations, American Disability Act and how it will affect golf course use and operations, Chesapeake Bay Clean up Program and involvement with Health care reform. Recently they led a trip to Washington D.C. on which some of our MAGCS Members attended to promote the environmental benefits of the game.

### EIFG: Environmental Institute of Golf

This program has been promoting the sustainability of the game through research, awareness, education, programs and scholarships for the benefit of golf course management professionals, golf facilities and the game. This includes the Rounds for Research program where local Chapters are encouraged to solicit rounds to forward to the GCSAA or local chapter to contribute to the program.

John concluded with an update on the 2013 GCSAA Conference in San Diego.

Pat Jones, Publisher/Editorial Director of the magazine "Golf Course Industry" took the podium to present on "What Would Wayne Think?" This is in reference to Wayne Otto, CGCS of whom the Wee One Foundation is named for. "I think Wayne would be delighted in the Wee One cause," Pat began.

Pat launched into his interpretation of the State of the Industry. It was not a pretty picture. He explained: "I think this recession is the lynch pin. Today's golf market has 15,850 total facilities. 4,200 of those are private, 1,800 are run by management companies. Revenues are up 10% in 2012. This is closely tied to the favorable weather most of the country was having. Our industry has a \$76 billion impact on the economy. Golf Maintenance spends about \$9 billion. There was a net loss of 450 courses from 2006-2012. This is a players market. People have the ability to negotiate a green fee."

### How did we get here?

"We are paying for a 20-year boom which started in 1987 and went through 2007," he stated. "5200 golf courses (+42%) were built during this era." Pat referred to some of the architecture of the designs as "ego courses or design delirium." Some of these new courses were "maintenance madness" requiring extensive hand labor to maintain design features that required unlimited inputs with bloated budgets for the sake of a course design. During this time there was also growth in professionalism, a boom in construction, technological changes and TV driven higher expectations. "Was it overkill?" he asked.

### What's changed recently?

"The fake bubble has burst that was built on false assumptions. 1/3 of facilities lose money, 1/3 break even and 1/3 make money. The supply has exceeded the demand in every way. There are too many facilities, too many suppliers and too many distributors."

"Professional values are evolving. There is a change in the traditional path to a Superintendent Job. These are desperate times and this trumps ethics when it comes to finding a job. New social /business networks have changed the dynamics of communication and professional development. There is a bigger separation between the haves and the have-not. Economics are starting to drive new views about playing conditions and maintenance priorities."

"GCSAA is at a cross roads. Right now, the Annual Conference is the major revenue producer for the Association. Trade shows have changed. Is there going to be a new business model? "

"The game is also under scrutiny by regulators about environmental concerns. Water use and discharge is clearly the biggest issue. The game is played on grass, no water = no grass. Water is going to become much more expensive in the future."

### So what does the future hold?

"There will be a gradual supply/demand resolution. Operations will become smarter and leaner. I believe there will be a cleaner segmentation between facilities. A successful facility will define and fulfill a market niche. There will be more emphasis on fun, family, fitness and friends."

Pat broke down the new specialization/segmentation of the

Superintendent role.

1. **Top Gun** These are the "gurus" working at the high end private clubs. They have the resources to attempt to provide "perfect playing conditions." There are not a lot of these.
2. **Traditional Mid-Scale Private Club Superintendent** This group is becoming fewer and fewer as Clubs struggle to fill Membership spots.
3. **Department Head/Manager** This group includes the up-scale daily fee courses.
4. **Business Leader** These are the Superintendents that have become the de-facto General Managers.
5. **Link in Corporate Golf Chain** These are the Management Company Superintendents. They may oversee more than one course. This will become a growing segment.
6. **Blue Collar Superintendents** This group works at a traditional "mom and pop" course that will be supported by consultants and suppliers for resources, supplies and services.

Pat concluded with a few closing comments that were not very optimistic. "I think the golf market is never coming back. We are just stealing customers from each other."

So we got that going for us. Which is not so nice. @

**Ed Note:** I just watched the video of Pat and it helps when editing the write up. I didn't think he ended on such a somber tone, for as Pat says – "the fact that you are all here, learning and you are taking this stuff seriously, means you're more likely to survive. If you just hunker down and pretend that nothing is going on, that you don't need to change, and you're going to resist every iota of change that is coming your way, you're going to lose. You have to get out, you have to educate yourself, you have to be a better businessperson, and if you do, you are going to win. It is very likely that you will come out of this thing better off, you're going to move up the chain in the new paradigm of golf, because you'll understand how the business of golf works, no longer will you just be spending money, you will be driving revenue – keep coming to events, keep educating yourself, that is the way."



If you'd like a copy of the talk, either PowerPoint or video – shoot me an email and I'll get it to you: [luke@magcs.org](mailto:luke@magcs.org)