

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-nots. 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





Luke Cella
MAGCS

Golf Industry Show

Each year at the Golf Industry Show I attend the Chapter Executives Session and this year I thought I'd share with the membership the items we discuss and talk about.

GCSAA has made it two years in a row; they finally realized it makes sense to have the CEO and some of the board members present at this meeting of Chapter Leaders and Executives.

In fact, Rhett Evans, GCSAA CEO, led off the session and making a parallel between what Nick Saban has been preaching about his success at Alabama. There "is no continuum for success, the program has to rebuild itself each year," Evans paraphrased and then followed with what the Association has to do the same to keep it a value for its membership. Evans stated it isn't good when members begin to question paying their dues each renewal period.

Evans then went on to give examples of the value of membership within GCSAA:

- A superintendent in Durango, CO was faced with total bans on all pesticides and GCSAA was able to provide him sound, scientific and reviewed data that put golf in a positive light not only economically, and recreationally but environmentally as well and helped to reverse the legislative action.
- The 2013 GCSAA budget has included another full-time equivalent (FTE) for more Government Relations to help with local laws and ordinances.

Evans then asked the group the question "why do we have associations?" There were a myriad of answers and as I listened to the group respond, I thought about how well the Midwest's mission statement covered the question. Evans expounded further by explaining that Associations allow individuals to "ban together" and this is especially important when trying to influence public policy – something the GCSAA is deeply rooted and committed to for the industry. He then used the term "holistic" when describing the approach GCSAA is taking when strategically representing the collective strength of the golf superintendent industry. He challenged us to collaborate with the GCSAA to work together on a national level.

Evans switched gears and touched on the importance of the EIFG and reported that between \$3-4 million was awarded in the past few years to fund over 150 scholarships, research and government relations activities. Through the newly secured Melrose (ex Toro CEO) gift, 17 superintendents were able to attend the GIS Education and Conference in San Diego.

Evans stated it isn't good when members begin to question paying their dues each renewal period.

Evans then went on to explain that hopefully golf's slide (and the rest of our economies) has steadied. Golf has seen a decrease over the past years from \$76 to \$69 billion industry per year, 30 to 25.3 million golfers, and there have been 141 golf course closing in the last year. In closing Rhett asked if there were any questions of the group and the affiliation agreement was brought up. This was something that was extended by GCSAA the last week of December 2013, without much explanation, if any at all. GCSAA is reviewing the document and should have a new draft sometime this summer. I hope we see it before the chapter delegates meeting this fall so members will have time to review and comment.

Mark Woodhead, GCSAA Senior Director of Membership talked a little bit about how the GCSAA and local chapters will be using Google Docs to share databases, or at least for local chapters to upload our membership data. Though the ultimate goal of sharing data, (we send our membership

roster every year as part of the affiliation agreement) has never been made clear, it seems GCSAA will be looking for superintendent members of local chapters that are not members of GCSAA. GCSAA is trying to recapture its membership, which has been on a slide since a high of 22,400 six years ago and a slow decrease to over 17,000 (representing a decline of 4-4.5% each year).

A Rounds for Research update was given, a program the Midwest has signed up to participate in for the next two years. This is a program where golf courses are able to donate rounds to GCSAA and ultimately MAGCS – the rounds are auctioned off and after costs are deducted (20%) the funds are sent to us. MAGCS then is able to use the monies to fund local research.

Chava McKeel and our lobbyist Robert Helland (great name for a lobbyist...Bob give 'em Hell and...) stressed the importance of our lobbyist activities – that is being proactive. The firm he works for, Reed Smith and Associates, keeps a close eye on things that impact our industry. The key is getting and keeping our message in front of those who are proposing legislation. It is amazing what a little education and information can do when applied properly. Bob did give a little insight as to what he think will happen in the coming years of the current administration citing some type of immigration reform will happen, the EPA will continue its review of chemicals used in our industry, and that labor reforms will also occur. Bob feels confident in our strategy of staying involved

by seeing staffers and congress members often throughout the legislative calendar.

These presentations took a little longer than expected and our time for networking with other chapter executives was cut short. Most of us were still able to have a few conversations through lunch and I plan to continue my conversations this month while attending the Chapter Leaders Symposium with Dave Groelle, CGCS at headquarters in Kansas. By the way, the Chapter Leaders Conference is funded by the Williams Leadership Fund (our Williams, Bob and Bruce). Upon our return, Dave and I will have more to report. @



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Joe Meier
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TEACHING AN OLD DOG

Dogs and golf courses go together like greens and cup cutters. When I started to build White Deer Run Golf Course in 1997 I was thinking of purchasing a dog.

As it is my nature to research everything before making the leap, I called around and asked about border collies since they were being used a lot at the time. I have always had big dogs—mostly Labrador retrievers—and did not really like border collies. Knowing that we were going to have problems with geese I said, “Okay, let’s try this border collie thing.” The dog I decided on and trained and worked with passed on about a year ago. Without a doubt it was the best dog I ever had. A great working dog and an even better family dog and companion.

So here I am driving around, seeing superintendents and their dogs on a daily basis while peddling my wares. I missed having a dog, but how would one fit in now? Ah, what the heck, the search was on again. I wanted another border collie, but one with different markings. I found a breeder and found an all-white dog with a black patch over one eye. This one was different alright. I kinda forgot about the training and the “puppy time”. It was a little harder this time without a course to run my new youngster on, but thanks to my many superintendent friends we always have a place to exercise and run anytime we want to. This dog was different. Every dog we see or are around has its job, whether on a course, to hunt, to protect, just to name a few. But what about us? What was Ginger’s job going to be? I started thinking again and researching. I tried agility training with my other dog—HUGE failure—he never liked it. I thought let’s give this a try, I have to have something for this little one to do or it will drive me and my wife crazy. Well after 7 months we just passed our first qualifier for agility.

If you are not familiar with agility, it is where the dog and handler have to move through a number of obstacles, usually around 20 total without penalties. The dog with the fastest time is the winner. Champion dogs will do a course in just over 30 seconds—that’s right, 30 seconds. The obstacles consist of jumps, tunnels, an A frame, a “dog walk” and others. The old dog being taught new tricks here is me. This has been quite an

experience as all my friends will tell you, as they listen to me talk about this ad infinitum. A lot of running and exercise for this old dog (falling down too), the young dog is seen many times ahead of the old one, barking at him and asking, “Where do I go next old man?” This sport is for any dog and its handler no matter what breed or age. Don’t ever think that the agility trials you see on TV are as easy as they look. Again anything that looks easy takes a lot of time and work. The experience has been a total win-win. I get to spend quality time with my dog, she gets the exercise and sense of purpose she needs, and she isn’t bouncing off the walls driving me and my family nuts. If you are willing to work with your dog, the rewards are tenfold. If you are interested just contact me and I will put you in touch with some agility clubs in the area. The one we belong to is www.agilityjunkies.com in the Northwest area. Wish us luck, we will need it. I am sure all my friends can’t wait to hear more about me and my dog, and our current adventures! @

PHOTO CREDIT: JOE MEIER



OFF COURSE gives us a chance to share with our membership the things that are part of our lives and not always work related. Let us know what you do, or what someone else does for fun away from the job. luke@magcs.org

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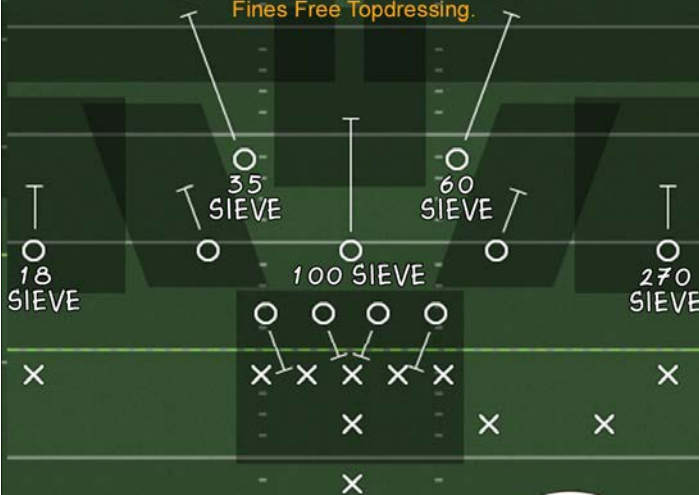
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