

We're all in this together —

Don't stand by the tracks and throw rocks at the train as it goes by.

Report to FGCSA Board of Directors from the FTGA Committee

BY MARK JARRELL, CGCS

As a Director of the FTGA for the past 5 years, I have heard many complaints and criticisms from superintendents about what FTGA does or doesn't do. In that period of time the FTGA has taken gigantic strides because of the effort, dedication, vision, and leadership of a number of people who recognized the viability and practicality of this vehicle for advancing the needs of the turf industry.

Many of these people are golf course superintendents or in golf related industries. Curiously, when I came on the board, the perception by many was, and still is, that the FTGA is a golf-dominated association. I recently counted the members of FGCSA who were also members of FTGA and came up with 245 — about a fourth of the total FTGA membership. These numbers, of course, do not reflect commercial members in golf-related industries, but with more than 700 superintendents or assistants in FGCSA, it also means that only about a third of our members feel FTGA significant enough to join.

This is very disturbing. I have always felt that membership in the superintendents' associations and membership in FTGA went hand-in-hand. I can't believe that cost is a factor, even if a superintendent had to pay the dues out of his own pocket, which most don't. The cost to belong to all the superintendents' associations, plus FTGA, is still less than most individual professional organizations. The problem has got to be perception and attitude.

Those of you with a negative attitude about FTGA need to honestly evaluate the source of your feelings. Do you harbor prejudices or animosities toward individuals or particular programs associated with FTGA? Are past problems or

failings getting in your way of objectively evaluating the current programs and goals. Is the aim and direction of FTGA consistent with your vision of the challenges you face now and will face in the future in growing quality turfgrass? There is great danger in reacting to perception, rather than reality, as we know from viewing the circus that has come to be known as the "environmental arena".

Unless they just fell off a turnip truck as it passed by a golf course, no one in the golf industry is ignorant of the public's negative perception of golf's environmental image and the regulatory hoops we've been made to jump through in recent years. This war is just beginning, and the only chance we have is to muster all our resources and fight the misconceptions, ignorance, and prejudice with openness, honesty, and facts. Even then we can only expect a draw, but this is far preferable to the crushing defeat we will assuredly suffer if we stick our heads in the sand and pretend nothing is happening. Read the latest *Green Sheet* if you need reminding of some of the issues we are facing. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

Facts, the only ammunition available to us in this conflict, are in short supply, and the only way to get more is to produce irrefutable, accredited research. This is the sole function and mission of the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation.

Superintendents can take pride in the prominent role we have taken and the leadership shown by many in our ranks in the support of this quest for research, but this is a dubious distinction. The fact is that the participation and support by superintendents and assistants is abysmal — less than half the potential members belong to FGCSA and only one out of eight belong to FTGA. This is much better than the other segments of the golf industry, but nothing to be proud of. The one thing this industry — if it can legitimately be called an industry — isn't short of, is apathy. One out of ten Ameri-

cans play golf, but we have less influence on policies and regulations affecting us than a boatload of Haitian refugees has on immigration policy. A perfect example is the Florida Golf Council, which was founded on the hope of uniting the various factions within the golf industry for lobbying strength. This organization is faltering due to lack of support, despite the fact that Bobby Brantley is the best possible leader we could hope to find.

Apathy will be our downfall. The 90% of the population that does not play golf is not necessarily our enemy and doesn't care about our problems one way or another. But non-golfers will, without a doubt, support environmental issues. Not only do we have to prove that golf courses do not hurt the environment, I think we have to prove to the public that golf courses have environmentally positive benefits for everyone, whether he plays golf or not. I think it fair to say that when the race started, we were left in the starting blocks. To catch up, we need the support of everyone whose livelihood depends on golf.

I also think it fair to say that if you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. Is it fair for others to fight your battles for you? The efforts and resources committed to this endeavor are as much for your benefit as for those who make the sacrifices. If you cannot commit your time and energies to serve on the board or committees of FGCSA or FTGA, the very least you can do is join these organizations and support their efforts with your membership dues, and try your best to commit your club to an annual contribution to the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation.

Don't stand by the tracks and throw rocks at the train as it goes by. If you do not agree with some of the decisions or programs, volunteer to serve on a committee if you have the time, and, if you don't, pick up the phone and offer your ideas and opinions. Do something — anything — other than sit alone on your

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little island of a golf course and complain about the rising tide. A lot of little islands make a formidable continent if they stand united.

For those who still have reservations about the validity of the FTGA, you need to take a closer look at FTGA's performance over the past few years. FTGA has come a long, long way since Ruth Shepherd was its only employee in 1983.

◆ Membership has more than doubled since then and FTGA now has seven full-time staff members.

◆ Since 1987, the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation has collected \$904,153 and dispersed \$709,599 through June 1991. This includes \$350,000 allocated for the Envirotron early in 1991. I don't have figures to make comparisons with various state turfgrass associations, but the number of calls and inquiries to the FTGA office indicates the rest of the country is impressed with what we are doing and interested in our methods and structures. The list of projects funded by FTGA is too extensive to name here, but can be found in an annual IFAS publication available to all members of FTGA.

◆ The quantity and quality of all the FTGA publications has vastly improved. The Member Services Committee has had no less than seven helpful manuals published in the past few years; the *Florida Turf Digest* has become an outstanding newsletter this year under Mike Swanson's direction, as has the FTGA Member Directory; and the proceedings continue to provide complete coverage on the annual conference's educational program.

◆ The Conference and Show is the biggest of its kind in the country. Past complaints about the quality of speakers were admirably addressed this year with the likes of Dr. James Beard and will continue to be a priority for future conferences.

◆ Recent and pending changes in the turf program at the University of Florida, coupled with the establishment of the Dr.

G. C. Horn Endowment and the Envirotron, promise to elevate this program to the highest standard in the country, if not the world. Those who have been disappointed with the performance of the University of Florida's turf program over the years need to realize that this is the dawning of a new day, and that our dollars cannot stretch as far by going to other sources because of the infrastructure already in place with the University. It should be remembered that FTGA has a unique agreement with IFAS which exempts us from the usual overhead expenses — 100% of our money goes to the designated research project.

The Dec. 13 FTGA board meeting in Orlando was extremely productive and shows the continuing progress of the Association:

◆ The Board agreed to fund the cost of collecting groundwater samples from the pesticide monitoring wells at Palm Beach National and Boca Lago. DER had informed us of their willingness to do the analytical work, which is the most costly part of this project, if we would pay for the sampling. Dr. Ed Freeman is securing cost estimates for the sampling. This project is important to help show that golf courses do not pollute groundwater supplies.

◆ The Funding and Endowment Committee is working on a complete MSDS manual to be offered for sale in a three-ring binder for updates.

◆ The architect for the Envirotron was selected in November. Ground-breaking is scheduled for April or May, with the completion expected by early 1993. The site selected behind Fifield Hall was our number one choice, and, unexpectedly, approval was granted for three acres, which gives room for future turf plots on the same site. IFAS has promised a full-time position (engineer) will be appointed to manage the Envirotron, although its formula for that size facility called for only three-fourths of a position. Without yet being built, the Envirotron has

attracted a lot of attention. The PGA Tour has plans to build two "environmentally correct" golf courses in St. John's County and has expressed a desire to build a "satellite" Envirotron on the site.

◆ The Board approved a Pesticide Dislodgeability study by Drs. John Cisar and George Snyder at a cost of \$15,000 over a two-year period. This study will yield information about safe reentry after application of pesticides. A preliminary test on Namacur 10G showed promising results.

◆ The Member Services Committee is working on a safety program and drug-free workplace package, consisting of posters, videos, etc.

◆ This year's First Coast Feast and Golf Tournament raised \$16,000 for research.

◆ And for the big news, FTGA got tired of waiting for the Department of Agriculture to do the right thing and approved funding for the long-awaited turf survey. It will be the most comprehensive turf survey ever done and will cost \$344,830. FTGA is being asked to fund \$139,286 of this total — providing \$70,000 in the first six months and the remainder in quarterly installments for the remaining year of this 18-month project.

FTGA's record of recent years is unsurpassed by any comparable organization. Much has been accomplished by a dedicated minority, but the time has come for all those in the business of growing turfgrass to put away past prejudices and help with the battles affecting us all. The resources available to FTGA are stretched thin and your support is needed to continue the progress. If you are not yet a member of FTGA, join today! If you are a member, but haven't gotten your club to contribute to research, try your best to get one. If your assistant isn't a member, sign him or her up. If you can influence someone new to join, please do so. We're all in this together, and together we can make a difference.