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Las Vegas

Glitz, Glamour and Golf

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas, the city that never sleeps!

During GCSAA's 68th International Conference and Show I stayed at the MGM Grand mega-resort that covered over one square block with all its parking lot, arena and amusement park appendages.

The hotel glowed emerald-city green in the night in tribute to the MGM movie classic, "The Wizard of Oz". One thing was for sure, Toto, we weren't in Kansas any more!

I'll admit the flashing neon lights and larger-than-life resorts along Las Vegas Boulevard were very exciting, but a three or four-day trip would be more palatable as the hustling bustling throngs of people and the "bong-bong-bong" of the slot machines got a little wearing after a while.

The pace along the main strip is pretty frenetic. If you sit still too long you feel like you're missing something somewhere. From the newest show and hotel sidewalk extravaganza, like the battling ships at Treasure Island, to the still-spectacular volcano eruption at the Mirage to the best and cheapest buffet dinners, there was always something to see and do.

By all accounts GCSAA's 68th International Conference and Show in Las Vegas was a smashing success.

The seminars early in the week were filled to capacity, setting all sorts of attendance records. I ought to know. I had to pick my fourth and fifth choices since I hesitated a little too long in getting registered.

Even then, I had two of the most interesting seminars I had ever taken.

"The Challenge of Owning Your Own Course" and "Maximizing Job Satisfaction" gave me a fresh perspective on the challenges and possibilities available to superintendents everywhere. I recom-



FGCSA Association Manager Marie Roberts let this Elvis impersonator have his picture taken with her after she hit a jackpot early in the convention.



Vegas Revenue Review

*Spinning shiny steel cylinders rolled,
within the glittering Vegas web of gold.
Blinking, flashing, clinking, taking toll.*

*Conservative FGCSA members
tried their luck at the slots.
Most casting and losing,
their hard earned lots.*

*Until one met Lady Luck
and didn't get burned!
Marie Roberts received a
\$1,000.00 return!*

- IRENE JONES

mend both of them if you need a change from bugs and weeds.

As always the peer networking was evident as seminar classmates compared notes and swapped business cards during breaks and at lunch. There is a nice thread of continuity when you run into people from across the country you met at previous conferences and you catch up on each others' lives. It's called personal growth and it shapes the kind of manager and person you become just as surely as the classroom material.

Nicklaus admitted that those "chocolate drop" mounds at Loxahatchee and Grand Cypress didn't really work.

It was fun talking to fellow Florida superintendent Joe Dougherty. He was attending his first GCSAA Conference and he was really getting pumped up and enthused by mingling with all the golf talent and absorbing information.

On the flip side, I talked to a dejected superintendent in Orlando after the conference whose club manager doesn't see any value in paying for him to attend seminars. What a shame!

While I enjoyed trying my hand at hitting a slot machine jackpot and learning to play blackjack, the bulk of my time

— and that of other superintendents — was spent on business. I know there are a lot of clubs out there that still don't support paying their superintendents' travel expenses to meetings and seminars just like my friend in Orlando.

A venue like Las Vegas is even a harder sell!

But my schedule managed to cut through the glitz and glamour and focus on golf. My schedule was probably typical of thousands of other superintendents. Only the names of the seminars and concurrent sessions were different.

I attended three full-day seminars and one half-day seminar for tested CEU credits toward my recertification on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

On Monday, I went to the early-morning "Innovative Superintendents Session" and then I attended a Golf Course Architects Forum with Rees Jones, Arthur Hills and Jack Nicklaus. Nicklaus admitted, to his credit, that those "chocolate drop" mounds at Loxahatchee and Grand Cypress didn't really work from a maintenance standpoint.

A little later I went to the Ben Crenshaw press conference where he talked about winning the Old Tom Morris Award. Since Crenshaw is such a golf history buff, he seemed truly overwhelmed by the significance of the award. On Tuesday, I went to the Chapter Newsletter Editors Forum in the morning and spent the afternoon at the trade show. Wednes-

day was devoted entirely to the trade show.

The show was filled as usual with the tools of our trade with every technological advancement prominently displayed. I walked through miles of aisles of equipment, accessories, amendments, biological controls, fertilizers, chemicals, and services.

In contrast to all the modern equipment present and of nostalgic interest was the display of mowers and equipment from the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland. These items have been donated to the Heritage Preservation Committee of the GCSAA, which is collecting tools and memorabilia that represent the history of our profession.

Evenings were filled with traditional functions and receptions.

There was the Opening Session on Saturday night with Capt. James Lovell, commander of the Apollo 13 mission. While generally praising the accuracy of the hit movie's account to the mission, Lovell gave a personal account of the real trials and tribulations of that event. His message: The successful solution and conclusion to that potential disaster was the best example of teamwork he could think of.

The much-ballyhooed Government Relations Session with Eleanor Clift and Fred Barnes of PBS's McLaughlin Group was interesting but a little underwhelming compared to some speakers in the past.

The unflappable (shuttle bus) driver proceeded to take us all the way back to the hotel in reverse against traffic in time for us to catch the next bus

Clift and Barnes played their left and right positions true to type. Almost like caricatures!

The voice of common sense in the person of developer Kim Richards was the voice of mainstream working Americans asking for sensible laws and regulations, accountable legislators — not bureaucrats — making the regulations, and clear compliance rules and requirements before passage of the laws.

The event was a little too theatrical to be stimulating. Most of these political pundits are celebrities and not true sounding boards of the real world.

On Sunday night, the FGCSA hosted another great reception and about 450 Florida superintendents, spouses and

suppliers got together to compare the week's progress and gambling losses. Many thanks to the sponsors for helping to make the reception a success.

Then there are always those special incidents and adventures that add a little color and excitement to each conference.

One morning as we were enjoying some clever repartee with our jovial shuttle bus driver, the forward gears of the transmission failed about three blocks from our hotel. The unflappable driver proceeded to take us all the way back to the hotel in reverse against traffic in time for us to catch the next bus. He gave a running commentary of the non-existent oncoming traffic and gave us all a start when we bounced over a speed bump

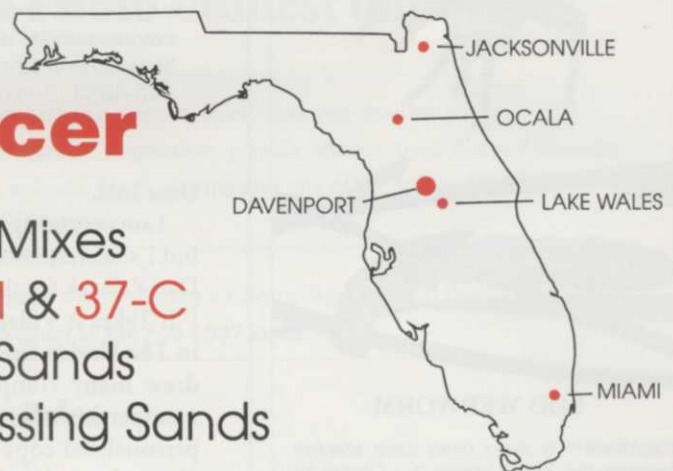
as he claimed a collision was imminent.

Two days late and several dollars short, our own Marie Roberts gave me a little casino insider tip: Find the change makers in the slot machine areas and ask them where the loosest slot machines are located in the casino. You should reciprocate with a tip if you hit. Marie did! In fact her good fortune inspired a verse from Irene Jones (See "Vegas Revenue Revue," page 90).

In terms of the cash that I brought to gamble with, I guess some might say I left Las Vegas a loser. In terms of what I saw and heard about our profession and our association, thousands of winners left Las Vegas, excited about carrying on the traditions of the game of golf.

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