

Spreading the Good Word

By Darren J. Davis

If you have read previous "Super Tips" in *The Florida Green*, you know that I generally highlight unique tools or innovative solutions that my peers have developed. However, in this installment I am going to take a different course and speak on a topic that is near and dear to me — communication. This Super Tip will focus on communicating our value to others, or "spreading the good word" about the golf course management profession.

It is rare to come across a report that highlights the challenges, issues, and hard work of a golf course superintendent. However, it is all too common to stumble upon negative reports or viewpoints of the golf course industry and those connected with the vocation. For this reason, it is my belief that each of us needs to step out of our comfort zone and become diligent promoters of the trade that provides immense satisfaction and gainful employment.

When most people think about the duties of a golf course superintendent, they think about our agronomic responsibilities. If they have been educated about the profession, they might also understand the business aspect or people-management side of our vocation. However, those not directly connected to our line of work often are unaware of the countless auxiliary duties that we perform on behalf of our employers, those things that don't fall under the typical golf course superintendent job description. One example is the massive fund-raising efforts we undertake to subsidize turf-grass research that directly benefits our employers. A second example, and the topic of this article, is about promoting our profession to portray our occupation in a positive manner.

Many things I do relating to the golf course management profession come from suggestions or ideas that I have gained from my peers. The idea that I am writing about in this "Super Tip" came primarily from Joel Jackson, the commander and chief of our terrific magazine,

The Florida Green. Shortly after my fellow FGCSA board members and I were fortunate enough to entice him into early retirement and come aboard as director of communications for our association, Jackson began submitting short educational articles to golfer-oriented magazines and newsletters in the Central Florida area.

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These publications are distributed to golf course pro shops and retail outlets and are read by golfers, the people whom we superintendents are trying to influence and educate about the profession.

The idea stuck with me, and it resurfaced one afternoon last year when I was grabbing lunch at a nearby sandwich shop. While I waited for my hot Italian sub to be prepared, I began thumbing through a local ball and stick publication that was on the rack next to the *Homes and Land* magazine. In browsing through the magazine, I recalled the numerous articles that Jackson wrote and subsequently shared with the FGCSA board. After I finished my lunch I returned to the office with a copy of the publication.

So I wouldn't forget, I immediately e-mailed the publisher with the question, would he like me to supply him some editorial at no charge? Like many regional publications of this type, it provided its readers with scores, names of golfers who had holes in one, an instructional golf tip, and sometimes a few photos of area golf events. The editor responded to my e-mail with, "No promises but go ahead and send me something."

This email began a long-term relationship which has provided me an outlet to spread the good word on the positives of the profession and the hard work of my peers.

Just as Jackson was not looking for praise for his efforts, I am not seeking recognition for mine. I can honestly say that the most rewarding outcome of me

writing for the local golf magazine is when one of our peers reaps the benefits of having a golfer recognize what it is that their golf course superintendent does for them. The intended outcome of this editorial (Super Tip) is not to draw attention to Jackson's or my efforts, but rather entice others to follow suit.

So if you are asking where do I start? After getting the green light from a local publication, I suggest you look at your previous submissions in your club newsletter. More than likely with just slight modifications those articles will work well in this format.

My first few submissions came from stock articles that Jackson provided me and I modified to fit with my region of the state. Since then, I have submitted my own work monthly, 800 – 1200 words on topics including "Off the Beaten Path," an article on golf-car traffic and its devastating effects on turf; "Green Speed"; "Golf and the Environment," an editorial that highlighted the numerous positive impacts a golf course has on the environment and the community; "Water - A Precious and Expensive Resource," a discussion on the efforts made by golf course superintendents on water reduction; "The Augusta Syndrome – TV Golf is not a Reality Show;" "Jack of all Trades – A Look at Today's Golf Course Superintendent;" "The Language of a Golf Course Superintendent - A Primer of Terms"; "Grain or Grade," a discussion on the realities of grain on putting surfaces; "The Summer Culture – Cultural Practices Require Golfer Patience," and "Bunkers – A Hazard of the Game," an article that depicted the time and money that is poured into an area of the course that was once truly considered a hazard.

A few suggestions: remember your audience and speak on their level, prepare several editorials at once so that you can always meet your deadline, and finally submit your own photography so you can further highlight the issue you are addressing.

So what are you waiting for?
Spread the good word!