

FTGA Picks New Executive Director

Experienced Exec Brings Impressive Credentials to Post

The Florida Turfgrass Association has named Casey Wohl Pace as the organization's new executive director. She will manage the 900-member organization's daily operations, develop relationships with allied associations, serve as the industry's spokesperson, and direct the strategic long-term direction of the association.

Wohl Pace previously worked for Florida Citrus Mutual as director of public affairs. In this capacity, she served as chief of staff and assisted the CEO in directing all activities of the statewide association comprising 10,000 citrus-grower members. She focused on issues such as international trade, pest and disease, labor as well as legislative and regulatory affairs. She has extensive experience in association management, industry representation, public affairs advocacy, media relations, crisis communications, reputation management, grassroots communication, issues management, strategic planning, fundraising and special events.

Prior to joining Florida Citrus Mutual, she worked for the Florida Phosphate Council.

"The FTGA is very pleased to announce the hiring of Casey Wohl Pace as our executive director," said FTGA President Matt Taylor, CGCS, "The past few years have seen tremendous growth in the FTGA and our industry, and Casey will be a great addition to our organization as we continue that growth."

Wohl Pace has a master's degree in agricultural communications from the University of Florida and a bachelor's degree in environmental policy from Rollins College. She is a native of Sebring, where her family is in the agriculture and real estate business, and she currently serves as president of the Agriculture Institute of Florida.

Meet Casey Wohl Pace

Editor's Note: Ms. Pace's resume should provide FTGA and FGCSA members with a quick, concise look at the skills and experience she brings to the her new role as executive director of the FTGA.

QUALIFICATIONS SUMMARY

Highly-accomplished executive with an eight-year career in public relations, industry representation, public affairs advocacy and association management. Core areas of expertise include association management, media relations, crisis communications, reputation management, grassroots/legislative communication, issues management, strategic planning, fundraising and special events.

KEY CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Developed and managed all external and internal communication during 2004 Florida hurricane season. Public relations efforts resulted in extensive and prolonged media coverage highlighting citrus damage, federal hurricane disaster assistance for citrus growers of more than \$400 million, and a press conference featuring President George W. Bush in a central Florida citrus grove.
 - Developed and managed public relations and membership communications for two-year, \$7-million Citrus Tariff Preservation Campaign. Executed media and industry communications strategy at international trade negotiation meeting in Miami.
 - Spearheaded communications component for lobbying efforts that secured \$550 million in state and federal funding for a citrus disease eradication and compensation program.
 - Established and managed successful grassroots advocacy campaign to maintain the orange on the Florida automotive license plate despite the Florida Cabinet's effort to replace the graphic.
- Created and oversaw all facets of the industry's first statewide, three-day annual conference, hosting 300 attendees, high-ranking political speakers and raising more than \$130,000.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- **Florida Citrus Mutual, Lakeland** (April 2003-March 2006)

Director of Public Affairs

Served as chief-of-staff and assisted CEO in directing all activities of national/international trade association comprised of 10,000 citrus grower members, an annual budget of \$4.5 million and 16 employees with four direct reports. Appeared on behalf of CEO and managed his communications outreach. Developed and oversaw programs and strategic initiatives that advocated membership's interests on trade, legislative and regulatory matters at all levels of government.

Media Relations – Developed and managed all aspects of the association's media relations efforts including press conferences, media tours, editorial board meetings, opinion editorial placement, letter-to-the-editor campaigns, press releases and white paper development. Media contacts/interviews include CNBC, FOX, ABC, NBC, CBS, USA Today, Associated Press, Reuters, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, as well as local, state and trade media.

Reputation Management - Served as industry spokesperson for Florida's citrus growers on local, state, national and international levels in print, television and

radio mediums. Represented industry during two-year communications outreach campaign with Miami-Dade business community and media.

Strategic Planning - Developed and implemented the association's comprehensive strategic plan to establish goals and provide direction for the board of directors, members and staff.

Fundraising - Reinvigorated the organization's federal political action committee (PAC), raising more than \$50,000 in first year. Coordinated political fundraisers for several members of Congress and state elected officials. Developed and managed Allied Membership, raising more than \$30,000 per year.

Crisis Communications/Issues Management – Oversaw all public and media relations activities relating to many high profile industry issues, including citrus damage during the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, citrus canker controversy, Tropicana patent dispute, federal anti-dumping case and the citrus tariff preservation effort.

• **Florida Citrus Mutual, Lakeland** (*August 2000-March 2003*)

Manager of Public Affairs

Instituted a proactive and aggressive media relations strategy, which positioned association as key media contact for the \$9.1 billion Florida citrus industry. Managed one direct report in the area of governmental relations. Secured more than \$500,000 in state and federal grants to fund public relations outreach activities. Oversaw all membership communications activities including weekly newsletter, website, printed material, Annual Report, membership recruitment materials, etc. Developed and managed the public affairs department budget.

• **Florida Citrus Mutual, Lakeland** (*January 2000-August 2000*)

Public Affairs Specialist

Developed and managed the Florida Citrus Industry Grassroots Network, designed to increase industry political activity and accomplish state and national legislative goals. Recruited more than 600 members and designed network's communications strategy and components.

• **Florida Phosphate Council, Lakeland** (*July 1998-December 1999*)

Communications Coordinator

Served as chief communications liaison for association's external and internal outreach efforts, including media, membership, local and state elected officials, state and federal agencies, and public/private interest groups. Advised the association president and industry officials on sensitive



Casey Wohl Pace

and emerging issues. Developed all communications correspondence, printed material and reports, and oversaw the public relations budget.

AWARDS

- Florida Public Relations Association Community Service Award, 2004
- Florida Public Relations Association Golden Image Award (Public Affairs Campaign), 2002
- Florida Public Relations Association Golden Image Award (Specialty Item), 2004
- The Showalter Group's Political Involvement Innovation Award, (Grassroots Campaign), 2002
- University of Florida Outstanding Agriculture Communications Alumnus, 2005

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Agriculture Institute of Florida, President
- American Society of Association Executives
- Florida Public Relations Association, Past Chapter President
- Florida Society of Association Executives
- Junior League of Greater Lakeland
- University of Florida Agriculture Education & Communications Dept. Advisory Committee
- University of Florida Wedgworth Leadership Institute, Alumni

EDUCATION

- University of Florida, M.A. – Agricultural Communications, 1998
- Rollins College, B.A. – Environmental Policy, 1996

GCSAA Proposes New Dues-Pricing Strategy

After the last dues increase, chapter delegates asked GCSAA to develop an easy-to-understand dues pricing system that would 1) keep pace with increasing costs of providing member programs and services and 2) reduce or eliminate the negative impact that large, infrequent dues hikes have had on membership growth and retention, and facility budgets.

To date, GCSAA's board of directors, several GCSAA committees and participants in the 2005 Chapter Delegates Meeting have been involved in developing and refining the proposed "indexed" dues-pricing strategy. GCSAA member feedback will be discussed at the 2006 meeting to gauge interest in a potential bylaws proposal to adopt such a system.

THE DETAILS

The proposed system is designed to make dues increases (Class A, SM and C) more manageable from a planning and budgeting perspective and more clearly tied to actual inflation factors. If adopted, the proposal would delegate authority to the GCSAA board to consider raising dues every two years according to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Specifically, a maximum potential dues increase would be calculated using the published CPI for 24 months ending on August 31, and then rounded to the nearest \$5. At the GCSAA Plan and Budget meeting in the fall, the board of directors would determine whether to raise GCSAA dues by that amount, a lesser amount or not at all, taking into account other revenue sources, the association's financial position and other general economic and political factors. The board-approved increase, if any, would then be communicated to GCSAA members so that they could adjust their budgets accordingly, and would take effect the following January 1.

If, however, there were a future need for a dues increase exceeding the maxi-

mum tied to the index, it would require a majority vote of the membership at a GCSAA annual or special meeting. The average annual CPI increase over the last ten years has been 2.5 percent.

THE IMPACT

Between 1988 and 2005, GCSAA dues (Class A and SM) rose from \$175 to \$300, with the increases of \$35, \$40 and \$50 – although merited – yielding corresponding drops of 11.3, 6.9 and 6.7 percentage points in the annual membership growth rate.

However, if the proposed strategy had been in effect for that entire time, dues would have increased only \$10 to \$20 every two years to reach only \$285 today – \$15 less than actual current dues. Even with the lower ending dues price and no additional members, the policy of "keeping up" instead of "catching up" would have had no negative impact on revenues over that time. Furthermore, an average annual CPI increase of 2.5% over the next 14 years would yield dues revenue similar to larger increases given every five years, with no potential negative impact upon membership growth and retention.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How would funds from indexed dues increases be used?

Adjusting dues to keep pace with the rising cost of providing member programs and services would allow those services to continue at the current level that members are accustomed to receiving. Membership dues account for only 25 percent of GCSAA's total revenue. Revenue from industry and user fees also increase regularly in order to recover higher costs for delivering services. If dues were the only source of support for the association, professional members would have to pay \$1,200 annually to receive the same benefits.

Why increase dues when total membership has declined the past few years?

The board would only be allowed to increase dues based on the CPI. The key word is "allow." The board would not be required to increase the dues every two years and, as a practical matter, it may

not. Pricing strategy is one of many factors that the board would consider in its review process.

What would happen if the proposed indexed dues strategy were not approved?

If members would prefer not to tie dues to an index to regularly adjust for raising costs, the current process would continue with significant "catch-up" raises, which do not cover higher future costs and tend to negatively impact member retention. Based on the average of the last four dues increases, the next increase would be \$50 in 2008.

On the other hand, a \$15 increase in 2008 would be the likely outcome if a programmed dues increase policy were approved at the 2007 annual meeting in Anaheim.

Why not bring this programmed dues increase to a member vote at the annual meeting on a two-year cycle?

Because the annual meeting occurs in the second month of GCSAA's budget, the association would have to wait 10 months to implement the increase, meaning it would always be playing catch-up with regard to higher costs. It would also eliminate the opportunity for the board to consider GCSAA's current financial condition and other general economic factors that might merit a lower, or no, dues increase.

The board of directors is responsible for making decisions that have major financial impact on the organization, including appropriate increases for user and industry fees, as well as dues for all membership classes except A, SM and C. Delegating the board authority to make timely dues increases not to exceed the CPI would provide for optimal fiscal management of resources.

On the other hand, if a future situation calls for an increase above the allowable CPI rate, then member approval will be required.

If the board wants to increase dues, they should communicate the reasons to members.

True. The board is ultimately accountable to the membership for providing the services, programs and

future direction of the association. The membership has every right to expect the board to keep the impact of inflation in operating costs from creating shortfalls as a normal part of doing business. As part of those efforts, GCSAA will continue to explore and try additional sources of non-dues revenue.

In contrast, failing to prevent future dramatic dues increases would be counterproductive to membership growth and retention strategies.

Why increase dues when the investment reserves are over \$9.5 million?

The investment reserves have two specific purposes: (1) to provide major funding for planned future needs and (2) to prevent significant interruption of member benefits, services or programs caused by a significant unanticipated event. It is both financially prudent and responsible for an organization like GCSAA to have this level of reserves in order to operate successfully and maintain viable options for future planning.

If the proposal were adopted, the board would consider the financial health of the association and other relevant economic indicators when reviewing options to increase dues or not. This review would, of course, include consideration of the investment reserve levels.

Have other associations tried a similar indexed dues pricing strategy?

Yes, there are other associations that have implemented an indexed dues increase process with positive results and few pitfalls. These organizations report that their respective memberships embraced the change after some initial reservations and have experienced almost no negative impact regarding decreases in membership or dissatisfied members. The most numerous comments on developing a successful process include demonstrating that the membership will not lose control (Board of Directors to be held accountable and increase not to exceed a fixed amount) and keeping it simple.

Credit: GCSAA Web site

Plants of the Year

Here is the final Plants of the Year series for 2006. The plants selected for this program have been found to be good performers in the Florida environment and require less maintenance and inputs. Here are two specimens for your consideration. Go to www.fngla.org for more information and suppliers who carry these plants.



Common name: Yellow African Bulbine
Botanical name: *Bulbine frutescens*
Hardiness: Zones 9B -11
Mature height and spread: 14-16 in. tall with 24-30 in. spread
Classification: Flowering Perennial
Landscape use: Massed perennial for color or as an accent
Characteristics: Bulbine prefers full sun, has light green succulent foliage, and produces ever-blooming stems of many star-shaped yellow or orange flowers late spring to early summer. It can withstand a light frost but should be protected. In South Africa, the sap in the leaves is used for healing purposes.



Common name: Amethyst Falls Wisteria
Botanical name: *Wisteria frutescens* 'Amethyst Falls'
Hardiness: Zones 5-9
Mature height and spread: 10 – 15 ft. in height
Classification: Vine, flowering perennial
Landscape use: Beautiful trained over an arbor, or espaliered against a building. Ideal as a containerized specimen.
Characteristics: A woody deciduous vine whose shiny dark green pinnate leaves have about 15 leaflets. The blue-purple flowers appear in young plants, are carried in short clusters, and have a light fragrance. This cultivar is not as aggressive in its growth as the parent species or any other of the wisterias, does not make seeds, and is recommended for the smaller garden.

Photos from Leu Gardens