

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

9/11 Reminds Me We Need to Stay Strong



*By Ralph K. Dain Jr.,
GCSAA Regional Representative Florida*

As I am writing this piece, I remember what I was doing at this time exactly 10 years ago. I was the superintendent at Sailfish Point in Stuart. I had just returned to my office from checking the golf course. My mechanic told me a plane had hit the World Trade Center so we popped into the break room and watched what unfolded in horror and silence. I prayed for those impacted by this then and I continue to pray for those who are still impacted by this event today.

As days and weeks passed after Sept. 11, 2001, I remember thinking how important it is not to let opportunities pass you by and take advantage when you have the chance to do something meaningful. By

no means am I trying to equate speaking out on topics that impact our industry with the sacrifices of those who serve in our military, or police and fire departments. But we have made the decision to work in the golf industry, and there are opportunities to lead our profession when we have struggles or need individuals to speak up.

In my travels and interactions with the various chapters around the state, my focus has been the three GCSAA Action Alert Messages. We have been prompting our members to speak out on the issues regarding the NPDES Legislative Fix, Protection of the H2B Visa Program, and the inclusion of golf facilities in Natural Disaster Relief Funding. Your willingness to fill out the Action Alert Comments online has been well documented and has made an impact at all levels.

Recently we sent out a call to action with the idea of meeting with Senator Bill Nelson's staff at his eight district offices around the state. The request for volunteers was met by numerous individuals willing to participate. Chava McKeel, GCSAA Advocacy Department, prepared three great, one-page speaking-point documents to be used in these sessions.

This outreach effort received a great boost when Erin Boyd Wilder, FTGA Board member and representative for Sod Solutions, was able to organize a meeting with Senator Nelson's chief of staff, Pete Mitchell, in Tallahassee. Mark

Kann, FGCSA president, Joel Jackson, FGCSA executive director, Erin, and I met with Mr. Mitchell and were allowed a solid hour of interaction to express our thoughts on all three issues. We left after a very positive session with Mr. Mitchell with the belief that our messages will get in front of Senator Nelson.

Again, I realize these are not earth-shattering events, but within the industry where we all make a living, it is important to take the time to have our voices heard. It is often easy to get into a bunker mentality and just focus on the 18-36 holes for which we are responsible. If we remain silent and let others dictate policy with misinformation, there is a very real threat that you will wake up one morning, head to work, and have none of the tools currently at your disposal. After reading this, look around your facility and think about the number of items in your arsenal that could come under attack. There are many. Then boot up your computer and look to see if GCSAA has any new Action Alerts running and take a few minutes to help protect the way you do your job.

Silence is not always golden.

Until next time, I remain,

Ralph K. Dain Jr.
GCSAA Field Staff, Regional
Representative Florida Region
Phone 785-424-4306
Email rdain@gcsaa.org

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END OF AN ERA



**GREEN SIDE UP
BY JOEL JACKSON**

On Friday, July 8, 2011, the space shuttle Endeavor blasted off on the final mission for any current American space vehicle.

Many of us have witnessed 50 years of space exploration and technological advances spearheaded by the United States.

On the one hand it is an end of an era, on the other it begins a new era of perhaps even more far-reaching unmanned

exploration thanks to advances in remote guidance technology. And there likely will be a more cooperative atmosphere of joint multi-national manned trips to the space station.

The economic crash of 2008 saw the end of a decades-old golf-course-building boom, due to the failure of the associated real estate markets and bank closings. But just as the space industry is morphing into a new configuration, so will the golf industry.

We have seen the multi-association cooperative known as “We Are Golf” emerge as a group that speaks of the benefits and contributions of golf to the nation’s economy and social and recreational benefits to people seeking ways to enjoy the outdoors and a little friendly competition. Next February we will join our allied Florida Golf Associations in a Florida Golf Day in Tallahassee to promote our industry and educate people about the issues.

Golf courses across the country are shedding their stuffy, rigid rules of golf’s

approach to the game and introducing multiple forward tee options so people can actually score and enjoy the game. Programs like “Get Golf Ready” and “Play Golf America” are gaining traction and courses are allocating times for beginners, juniors and seniors to enjoy the club’s course and amenities without feeling like a burden or hindrance to the more skilled players.

Isn’t it in the best interest of a club and the industry to foster these changes and accommodations to grow the game? Like the space industry, we cannot afford to keep flying the old business models. We need to come up with some new ideas and programs to make golf viable and desirable.

Most golfers want a nice-looking golf course, but they must also change their perceptions about having it “perfect all the time.” Turf perfection is not a requirement to play golf. Reasonably smooth and consistent is a fair compromise for 95 percent of the play. Professional tournament venues and ultra-

high-end clubs that can afford it are welcome to raise their grooming levels for special events.

However, the reality for all of golf — including the PGA Tour and the exclusive clubs — is that the growing pressure on our natural resources politically and agronomically will mandate conservation of these resources and will require some concessions on turf color and sometimes density in the roughs on a course.

We are talking mainly about water availability and quality. More and more moisture-sensing devices and methods to manage our water use on golf courses are emerging, along with ways to calculate and plot distressed areas that can be spot-watered just like we learned to spot-treat with pesticides.

Yes, we are the end of an era in which many of us grew up, but we are also at the beginning of a new one which might be different, but I think will be no less exciting. It will be another new frontier to travel.



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