

GCSAA head looks forward

By STEVE MONA

When Hal Phillips asked me to write about my first year as GCSAA's chief executive officer, my first thought was that it would be a great opportunity to look back and cite the association's accomplishments—our renewed commitment to member service, the creation of the career development, information, services and chapter relations departments, the debut of "Par for the Course" on ESPN, and so on. But my next thought was, "Why look back?" The past is merely a prologue. (Or, as the great Satchel Paige said, "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you.")

So, instead of reviewing the past, let's focus on the future. This column should be of particular interest to non-GCSAA members who frequently ask themselves, "What's in it for me?"

Stephen F. Mona is executive director and chief executive officer of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.



Steve Mona

First, we hope to make 1995 a year of tremendous progress for the image of our profession. "Par for the Course" and the feature segments we are producing for ESPN are, of course, the anchor of this effort. We also plan to initiate the largest public relations campaign in the association's history. Our goal will be to provide superintendents with easy-to-use tools (such as posters, brochures, videos and fact sheets) to promote themselves and the profession at the same time. What "Par" accomplishes in the mass media, these new tools will accomplish at the grassroots level.

What's in it for you? Better communication with the employers, golfers, government and media who shape your daily jobs.

Second, 1995 will be a year when GCSAA continues to build stronger ties with our chapters. Virtually every program the association has can be more successful with the awareness and participation of the chapters. At the same time, the "national"

must be a more effective support system for our affiliates. Look for us to emphasize the importance of strong chapter relations at every possible turn this year. What's in it for you? Stronger, more effective local associations that help you meet the daily, often, local, challenges of your profession.

Finally, we plan to make 1995 a year in which GCSAA will emphasize the positive impact of golf on the environment. We plan to underscore golf's contributions to communities and to acknowledge superintendents as true environmental stewards. Look for GCSAA to communicate this message nationally, primarily through "Par for the Course" and to carry our environmental message to your local communities. What's in it for you? High-profile support of your environmental efforts and a commitment to telling the true story about golf and the environment.

This past year was remarkable — but the best is yet to come. This truly is the time to become part of an organization that is reaching new heights of service and success. What's in it for you? Professional development, opportunities, and, most of all, a national organization working every day in your best interests.

Leslie comment

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courses] green graveyards because apart from the grass, these golf courses support no other form of life. No trees, no birds, no insects, no nothing."

Excuse me! "No trees, no birds, no insects, no nothing"? The reporter didn't even question this statement. A person would have to have absolutely none of their senses — including common sense — to believe this line.

Well, in this game called life — where golf course superintendents, managers and developers continually face environmental activists — we may see some light ahead. There are reports of more sensible people on the Far Side — what has been an abnormal group too closely resembling the violent *Earth First!* members.

Williamsburg (Va.) Environmental Group President Ron Boyd reports: "Four years ago we were taking golf course projects to the localities or federal government for permitting, and it was more of a fear of the unknown on their part. They [Corps of Engineers, EPA, state departments of natural resources, etc.] didn't know what was going to happen. They thought 'You're going to clear

off 125 acres? Oh my God, what about all this poison runoff? And, oh my God, oh my God...'

"But as they slowly have gotten educated and seen these projects in place, it's not as hard to get them [projects] through the process any more."

Regarding environmental organizations, Boyd said: "I see less of them being vehemently outspoken against projects. There is always concern, but not like there used to be. There used to be almost a blind rage against projects. You don't see that much any more."

"I think the information illustrating golf courses' positive effects on the environment is being disseminated better. Once people start looking into it, there's not much negative they can draw off of. Sometimes they dredge up events that happened eight or 10 years ago. But, that might as well be light-years ago."

This all looks good. We can only pray that right minds remain in control. There is no law that members of environmental groups will follow the leaders. The fact that the National Wildlife Federation was co-sponsoring a positive meeting with golf industry folks while at the same time feeding foolish drivel to the poor little *Ranger Rick* readers illustrates the point.

Letters

NGF MISREADING PERCEPTIONS

To the editor:

I noticed with interest a cover story in your January 1995 issue dealing with the recent NGF Golf Summit, making the lead statement that "Poor public image is the single largest hindrance to golf industry growth."

While there is some lingering perception that golf is the pastime of "rich, white males" (really only applicable within the private club sector today), this is far from the primary reason why golf as a whole might not be growing at a faster pace.

With two-thirds of the existing golf courses across the country open to the public; with most daily-fee schedules falling within the \$14 to \$20 range (before resident/senior-type discounts), anyone wishing to "get at" the game of golf can play regularly for a few hundred dollars a year in fees. A set of used starter's clubs can generally be found at nominal cost, or bought new at one-time expense of about \$150.

Furthermore, an examination of the approximately 9,000 public golf courses across the country (as compared to 4,500 private club courses) will clearly indicate a true "melting pot" of player types who are in the vast majority within the game — all races, ages, sizes, abilities, backgrounds, wealth, etc. It has been a long time since golf could be accurately defined as a game primarily for wealthy whites.

Concerning environmental issues, guidelines are well defined today. Generally, once a project elects to comply, the environment is no longer an issue and the project will move on — provided there is sufficient net usable land remaining. Environmental issues basically do not stop golf course development projects today.

Surprisingly, the Summit identified "player development" as one of three "overarching problems" in golf. Why? What is wrong with settling for some natural player volume across the country (like ev-

ery other participant sport) — be this 15 million or 30 million players? Why does there have to be a constant heavy "push" to develop more golfers? The only answer is to satisfy the self-serving purposes of those who grow financially when the game grows; i.e. manufacturers, developers, operators, golf organizations and the media.

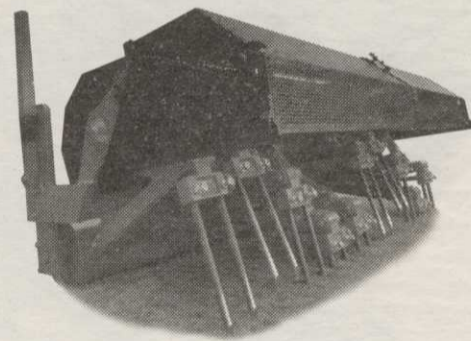
Natural marketing to bring more players to the game, instruction programs for beginners — fine. But to label player development as one of the three "overarching problems" in golf is a mischaracterization.

Because of the inherent value of the game of golf, I personally feel half America would play golf, given legitimate opportunity. What prevents this? I suggest: 1) the lack of fundamental instruction throughout the game, especially within the predominant public sector; 2) the lack of effective practice facilities; and 3) the lack of a sufficient number of golf courses.

The NGF is looking to exacerbate the problem now as it seeks to raise \$2 million (first year only, with more to come) to fund a public-relations campaign intended to correct golf's poor (elitist) image — an issue that is really a "red herring." Of course, any public-relations firm will gladly accept the assignment and off everyone will go. When they are finished spending all this money, the same basic problems facing golf today will still be there.

The reality is that golf presently lacks informed national leadership and, therefore, appropriate vision. National golf organizations (NGF, PGA, USGA, the three Tours), while well intended, are so occupied with addressing their own agendas they see only the "trees" and not the shape of the "forest." Golf's merit will ultimately prevail, with the game growing to approach its natural level via what is now an inefficient process that, I expect, will gradually be refined.

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