

COMMENTARY

Bringing limited-budget facilities into GCSAA fold is key to growth

By DAVID FEARIS

Most people run for the board with the idea of one day being president. From day one, you are being groomed for the position, so to speak. The president gives you committee responsibilities and you are in the loop on everything right from the start.

The Professional Development Initiative, for instance, began under Paul's [McGinnis] regime. That and other issues have taken up a lot of my time, as they will for [incoming President] Scott Woodhead. It's not like you come on as president and have your own agenda and that's it.

But if I had one thing I really wanted to see make some progress during my presidency, it was what's been called the Limited Budget Facility Program.

Right now 55 percent of superintendents nationwide are members of GCSAA. If you talk to other associations, they say that 55 percent of the market is pretty good.

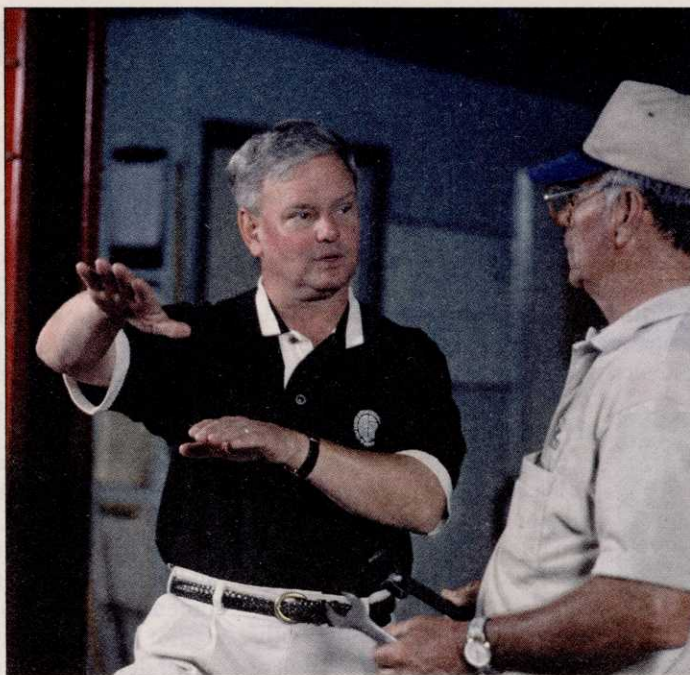
Of the 45 percent of superintendents who aren't members, most work at limited-budget courses. Many are nine holes. Many are municipal.

My interest in those courses goes back to when I was a sales rep with The Scotts Co. Many of my accounts were limited-budget courses. I got to know the people at those facilities and gained a deep appreciation for their ability to do more with less.

Superintendents at limited-budget courses may not have a lot of money for fairways, but their greens are usually unbelievably good. You can put them up against any course. The superintendents are often very innovative and have a lot to offer.

So we formed a resource committee that first met in May 1999 with the idea of finding ways to get the superintendents at these courses more involved with both their local chapters and the national association. There were some non-members on the committee, which was a break with tradition. And there

David Fearis is head superintendent of Blue Hills Country Club in Kansas City, Mo., and outgoing president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. He will continue on the GCSAA board of directors for the next year as immediate past president.



GCSAA outgoing President David Fearis (left).

were owners, some whose superintendents were GCSAA members and some whose superintendents weren't. We brought them together in Lawrence [Kan.] and asked "What can we do to bring these people into the fold?"

There are three things that come up when you ask people why they aren't members of an association: time, money and clique-ness.

Time should never be an excuse. What's the old adage? "If you want something done, ask a busy person." When I was at Scotts I'd get that excuse from limited-budget course superintendents. I couldn't believe they didn't have the time to learn more about the business where they made their living.

As for the money, they'd say something like, "The club won't pay for me to belong."

"Well, did you ask?" I responded.

"They'd just say 'no' if I did," they'd reply.

Well, I'd go to meet with their employer, explain the benefits of belonging to GCSAA or the local chapter, and the owner would usually sign them up. One club even wrote it into the superintendent's contract that he had to go to the local meetings. He loved it once he got there.

But the thing that is the toughest to deal with is the perception, sometimes accurate unfortunately, that there is a clique. "That's for the metropolitan, high-budget country clubs and I just don't

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New president says technology to change GCSAA

By PETER BLAIS

The "techno-president" is how incoming Golf Course Superintendents Association of America President Scott Woodhead believes he'll be remembered. "We'll try to make as much use of technology as we can to better serve our members," promised the 44-year-old head superintendent of Valley View Golf Club in Bozeman, Mont.

"There are some real possibilities with today's technology of doing some alternative distant learning that may allow us to reach the superintendent at the limited-budget course who doesn't have a lot of travel money but may have the time to put a CD-ROM into the computer and do a self-study course or tune into a video conference in the shop. We have an online class now and we'd like to continue to develop those."


Other changes will likely result from GCSAA's Professional Development Initiative (PDI), such as the revamping the association's educational program, Woodhead said.

"Right now our education is based on seminar, person-to-person group instruction," he said. "We're looking at alternatives, whether it be CD-ROM, video-conferencing, Internet, or correspondence courses."

"We're going from having instructors teach what they think students need to know to having the

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New GCSAA president speaks out

Continued from page

students dictate what they want to learn, and then having the instructors teach it that way. We've gone out with focus groups and asked superintendents where they think their strengths and weaknesses are in terms of doing their jobs. We're taking these competencies and comparing them to our existing educational opportunities to see where we need to put more emphasis. Then we'll ask the instructors to develop their curriculum based on what the students say is needed."

The most controversial part of the PDI has involved possible changes in the requirements to be a Class A member. Any change would take a bylaw amendment, which requires a two-thirds vote of the membership. That vote could occur as early as the International Conference and Show in Dallas in 2001.

"It [PDI] really is a work in progress," Woodhead said, "and will continue to be so until at least September, when some sort of recommendation from the Member Standards Resource Group will be presented to the delegates at the annual chapter delegates meeting. If the delegates are comfortable with it, then it will be placed before the board. Until then, it is purely a committee project and the board is doing nothing more than listening and keeping track of the feelings of the membership."

The environment will continue to be a major GCSAA focus, Woodhead predicted. "It's really become a way of life for superintendents," Woodhead said. "It's not such a heated topic among the environmental community these days. But we can't sit back and rest on our laurels. It won't take much to re-ignite a controversy. GCSAA is developing an eco-golf philosophy. You'll see that blossom a little more this year."

Woodhead believes the major strength he brings to the presidency is his seven years experience on the board of directors. "I've had the opportunity to serve on or chair almost every standing committee GCSAA has," he said. "It's given me a very well-rounded background."

Another strength is coming from a limited-budget course himself. "I know what it takes to run a golf course on a shoestring," he said. "I'm aware of the challenges faced by superintendents who have money issues."

Woodhead's employer, Valley View, is a private, equity club located at 4,900 feet in Montana's Rocky Mountain range. The annual operating budget would place it in the lower 25 percent nationally, Woodhead estimated.

"If you look at the new construction, private, equity clubs aren't being established. Most of the lower-end ones are struggling," he said.

Very few GCSAA presidents have come from the Northwest. Dick Malpass (1976) was from Oregon. Woodhead is the first from Montana.

"We're the only two from the Northwest that I know of," he said. "There are obviously a lot more golf courses in other parts of the country. But there are still a lot of courses up here. It's nice that I can carry their voice, as well as that of the rest of the members, when I travel around the country."

Woodhead's assistant is David Evans, who joined Valley View a few months after Woodhead was first appointed to the board in 1993. "David is very competent and makes my ability to travel a lot easier. The members have always been willing to support me in my [GCSAA] duties." ▶

TRADE SHOW OPEN FROM 11 A.M.-6 P.M. FRIDAY,
9 A.M.-5 P.M. SATURDAY, AND 9 A.M.-1 P.M. SUNDAY

FRIDAY, FEB. 18 (CONT.)

8:45-10:30 a.m.

Golf General Session

The Breakthrough Factor: Creating a Life of Value for Superintendents to Achieve Success and Happiness. Presented in partnership with Novartis Turf & Ornamental Products, Pursell Technologies, Inc., Rain Bird and Textron Turf Care And Specialty Products: Cushman, Jacobsen, Ransomes and Ryan brands

11 a.m.-6 p.m.

Trade Show

Noon-12:30 p.m.

Certification Luncheon (by invitation). Presented in partnership with Zeneca Professional Products

12:30-1:30 p.m.

Certification Business Meeting

1-3 p.m.

Super Users Forum

1:30-4 p.m.

Greens & Grassroots Government Relations Program

2-4 p.m.

Selection, Installation and Management of Zoysiagrass. Presented by the American Zoysiagrass Association.

Tools for Tree Management. Presented by the International Society of Arboriculture.

NGCOA-Cutting Edge Programs. Presented by the National Golf Course Owners Association.

Taking Another Look at Strategic Perspective on Golf. Presented by the National Golf Foundation

2-5 p.m.

International Summit

3-5 p.m.

Chapter Media/Public Relations Session

SATURDAY, FEB. 19

6-7 a.m.

Innovative Superintendent Breakfast and Roundtable Discussions. Presented in partnership with American Cyanamid Company and Club Car, Inc.

6:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

Conference Seminar Registration

7-8:30 a.m.

Innovative Superintendent Session II

7:30-10 a.m.

Collegiate Turf Bowl Competition

8-10 a.m.

Golf Course Architecture in the New Millennium. Presented by the American Society of Golf Course Architects

8-10:30 a.m.

Annual Meeting and Election of Officers.

8 a.m.-Noon

Half-Day Seminar

Precise Boom Sprayer Calibration, Tank Mixing and Record Keeping

8 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Certification Re-Examination

8 a.m.-5 p.m.

Media Room Open

9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Trade Show

10 a.m.-Noon

Student Forum: Building Your Student Chapter

10:30 a.m.-Noon

Town Hall Meeting

11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

Friends of the Foundation Reception

Noon-1:30 p.m.

Student Chapter Lunch

1-4 p.m.

Chapter Newsletter Editors Session. The New Millennium-Making Wise Decisions. Presented by the United States Golf Association

2-4 p.m.

Student Seminar: From Student to Superintendent. From the Golf Course to the Boardroom: Essential Tactics for Becoming Your Facility's Chief Operating Officer. Presented by the Club Managers Association of America

Coordinating an Irrigation Design and Installation. Presented by the Irrigation Association

Shortages of Turf Equipment Technicians in the Green Industry. Presented by the Turf Equipment Technicians Association

4-5 p.m.

Student Mixer

6-7 p.m.

President's Dinner Show Reception. Presented in partnership with The Textron Group of Companies.

7-10:30 p.m.

President's Dinner Show

SUNDAY, FEB. 20

7:30-9 a.m.

Prayer Breakfast

8 a.m.-1 p.m.

Conference Registration

Media Room Open

9 a.m.-1 p.m.

Trade Show

12:30 p.m.


27-Hole Challenge Prize Drawing

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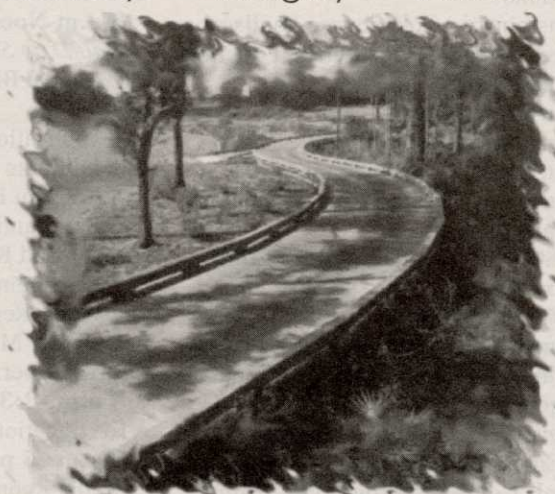
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