

## GCSAA Orlando exceeds expectations

With the golf economy in the doldrums, many in the golf course industry had low expectations for this year's GCSAA Conference and Show in Orlando.

And for good reason. Many clubs and national management companies simply couldn't afford to foot the bill this year for their superintendents. And despite the fact that Orlando is usually a top draw because superintendents can bring their families, left over travel concerns from Sept. 11 kept some from bringing the wife and kids along.

In the months before the show, the GCSAA reported that preregistration numbers were off and started offering payment plans to potential attendees like a discount furniture warehouse trying to unload hide-a-beds during a President's Day blow-out sale. It didn't inspire confidence.

Readings from my own pre-show barometer suggested that this one might be a dud. As with past shows, my daytime dance card was packed, but my evenings were less so because fewer companies were throwing parties and hosting events.

So when I stepped off the plane in the Sunshine State I, too, didn't

know what to expect. Would the show floor be a ghost town? Would exhibitors start packing up at 11 a.m. on Saturday in frustration and go play golf?

Quite the opposite. On Thursday, perhaps due to some well-timed thunderstorms, the show floor was packed. Registration lines stretched out the door. While attendance numbers were down from Dallas, they still topped 20,000 according to the association, and exhibitors reported that booth traffic and business were exceeding their expectations.

As one exhibitor confided: "The numbers may not be as strong, but the customers are better."

And not to worry, families

floor, the *Golf Course News* booth was hopping. Perhaps it had something to do with the comfortable couches, but whenever I returned to our home base to rest my tired feet, I wound up having five conversations at once. It was great to hear from all of our friends in the industry. Other highlights from Orlando 2002 included:

- The *Golf Course News* Golf Course Builder of the Year Awards were a blast. In years past, everyone who showed up at the Golf Course Builders Association of America's annual awards dinner already knew who the winners were. This year a veil of secrecy shrouded the winners. The vibe prior to the awards ceremony was electric as I heard numerous speculative bets spreading across the ballroom. It made for a fun night, and I would have given out 20 awards if I could have. See page 20 for full stories on the winners.

- When it came to the parties,

less was definitely more. It turned out that it was not only nice not to have to hustle off to three or four fêtes in one evening, but that companies were also more creative this year. Pursell Technologies' late night pancake party at the



Andrew Overbeck, editor



Show numbers were down only slightly in Orlando

made it down. The kids were everywhere on the floor, some hunting down freebies, some collecting product literature and most looking pretty bored.

Just like the rest of the show



The flaming wallet trick was a crowd pleaser at the 'International House of Polyon.'

International House of Polyon was ingenious, and their corporate magician kept me up nights trying to figure out his baffling card tricks. Syncroflo hosted an outing to a mystery dinner theatre that kept everyone guessing. And the most creative party award must go to Arturo Castro's Spanish Systems which rented out a couple of rooms and hosted a cigar party complete with an expert Cuban cigar roller. Good times, good times.

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GCN has added a new section called the "Databank." The section (see page 31) provides a monthly look at the golf course industry's leading indicators. In it you will find a stock chart of major industry players, monthly rounds data from Golf Datatech and monthly construction numbers from the National Golf Foundation.

## Maintaining seasonal workforce is an annual battle

By JOEL JOYNER

It's not an uncommon struggle, particularly with a larger seasonal workforce, for superintendents to find and retain reliable and productive employees. Having good employees is essential to managing a successful golf course maintenance operation. For some superintendents, obtaining the right combination of workers to match their maintenance programs is a yearly challenge.

According to *Golf Course News*'s recently conducted two-part News Poll (see page 7), 55 percent of the golf course superintendents surveyed said that more than half of their workforce is primarily seasonal.

### LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Location is one of the obstacles for maintaining a seasonal workforce, according to superintendent Kevin Goolsby at the Sportsman Golf Resort in Pensacola, Fla.

"I have trouble getting good employees because of my location from developed areas that have the workforce I need," he explained. "We are located along the Gulf Coast, and we depend on resort guests. I would like to find a great source for immigrant and migrant workers because of their excellent work ethics."

Economic factors also play a large role in the size and structure of several golf course maintenance staffs. Finding the right combination of employees and providing the right incentives are critical to running a smooth operation, according to superintendent Mark Lytle at the Salina (Kan.) Municipal Golf Course.



Joel Joyner

"We rely on seasonal employees for economic reasons," he said. "We use approximately 10,000 hours of seasonal employees and 6,000 hours are worked by full time employees."

"We give the seasonal staff free golf and reduced fees for golf car use to enhance their compensation each year," he continued, "and have been extremely successful with this program. The 10,000 seasonal hours cost us about \$65,000 per year. The 6,000 full time hours cost approximately \$90,000 per year with benefits."

Some of Lytle's seasonal workers have been with him for 12 to 14 years. "Most of them are retired and are very dependable, are never late for work, and are my most productive workers," he said.

### EXPERIMENTING WITH DIVERSITY

Experimenting and diversifying within different pools of the workforce and finding the right combinations – retirees, students, interns, housewives, etc. – may prove beneficial.

Blackberry Patch Golf Club in Coldwater, Mich., runs a high maintenance operation with minimal financial resources, according to superintendent Pamela Smith. Smith has successfully put together a team that combines seniors and students.

"The senior staff is critical to our department," she said. "They are quick to learn the operation of the equipment, are always dependable, and bring a wealth of knowledge and life experience to our operation. In addition, they are able to take the layoffs and return each year."

The combination of seniors and students creates a unique synergy, said Smith. "Young people who have never held a

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**Editorial Office**  
Golf Course News  
106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997  
Yarmouth, ME 04096  
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657  
aoverbeck@golfcoursenews.com  
jjoyner@golfcoursenews.com

**ADVERTISING OFFICES**  
Golf Course News  
106 Lafayette St., P.O. Box 997  
Yarmouth, ME 04096  
207-846-0600; Fax: 207-846-0657

**Midwest and Western U.S. Sales:**  
Jonathan Whitney  
207-846-0600, ext. 263  
jwhitney@golfcoursenews.com

**Eastern U.S. Sales:**  
Michael Pajak  
207-846-0600, ext. 223  
mpajak@golfcoursenews.com

**Marketplace and Classifieds:**  
Anne Washburn  
207-846-0600, ext. 230  
awashburn@golfcoursenews.com

**Subscription Information**  
Golf Course News, P.O. Box 3047  
Langhorne, PA 19047  
215-788-7112

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