

## Superintendents should strive to raise visibility of profession

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has been the topic of many animated discussions over the last several months, and for good reason.



Andrew Overbeck, editor

Any time an association as large as the GCSAA proposes a substantial dues increase there is bound to be chatter amongst its members. But when you add a possible relocation, PDI implementation and a public relations flap over excessive (or necessary) board of director travel, conversations among GCSAA members get downright heated.

We've tackled the above issues in the pages of *Golf Course News* this month. In the Point/Counterpoint below, the merits of changing the GCSAA's articles of incorporation in order to ease relocation are debated. Our page one Q&A with GCSAA CEO Stephen F. Mona, however, puts this debate and other issues in proper perspective.

The GCSAA has a long list of initiatives, but what exactly is it trying to accomplish?

According to Mona, it all boils down to "providing the best possible future for our members." And

a key part of that is raising the level of recognition, visibility and credibility of the golf course superintendent. By doing so, Mona hopes that superintendents will have more job security, more lucrative jobs and increased career opportunities.

These are worthy, and needed, goals.

I went to Boone, N.C., this fall to talk to the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents about these goals, and what superintendents could do to achieve them.

At the cocktail reception the night before my talk, the bartender, who assured me he played golf, asked me in a hushed voice, "What exactly do these supervisors do anyway?"

His question may be ignorant, but it makes sense. Superintendents are supposed to do their jobs as quietly as possible. They have to get on the course early, get the work done and get the heck out of there and let the golfers play. Superintendents, then, must take another avenue to "advertise" their importance.

I've seen plenty of examples this year of superintendents in-

creasing their profile and it all boils down to communication.

Superintendents in Pennsylvania and New Jersey worked with their local DEPs to negotiate fair water restrictions. Superintendents in the Carolinas wrote letters to local newspapers explain-

ing why they could irrigate while homeowners had to let their lawns die. And superintendents handling numerous renovations wrote regular articles in club newsletters keeping members aware of project timelines.

By communicating proactively, these superintendents increased their effectiveness, profile and importance. So don't just rely on the GCSAA to do it for you. Get out there and practice the art of self-promotion.



Of course I'm one to talk, my

father-in-law doesn't even know what I do for a living. According to this year's family Christmas letter, I am the editor of "International Golf Club News" and get to "play at prestigious golf clubs around the world." I wish.

### POINT

## Changing articles subverts system of checks and balances

By STEVEN COOK, CGCS

The GCSAA is considering a proposal to change the association's articles of incorporation, removing the name of Lawrence, Kan., as its principal office and place of business. This change would allow the board of directors the freedom to relocate the association – without membership approval. While this proposal has some merit, many GCSAA members feel the amendment would put absolute power to relocate in the hands of too few people.



Steven Cook

This is not an issue of trust. Neither is it an issue of the merits of relocation, but rather it is an issue of empowerment. Unrestricted empowerment – without a system of checks and balances – limits the GCSAA's effectiveness and draws unfair criticism to the leadership.

Those who support amending the articles have the best interests of the association at heart. They are considering numerous facts and judiciously exploring options. They worry that without the latitude this amendment will bring, the board will be unable to quickly respond to market conditions. They also worry that consensus among GCSAA members will be difficult to achieve in a timely manner and thus prevent relocation if an attractive offer for our current building is tendered.

These worries are not unfounded, but they can be addressed and still allow the membership a voice in the process. Market conditions will always fluctuate and there will continue to be offers for our current headquarters. The GCSAA board of directors should communicate to the membership the merits of relocation, justify where and why we are relocating and provide the associated cost-

Continued on next page

### COUNTERPOINT

## A sound relocation process will lead to a sound decision

By TIMOTHY T. O'NEILL, CGCS

Be it their profession, the environment, their facility or their national membership association, golf course superintendents on the whole are passionate individuals. Therefore, I was not surprised emotions have been high since it was announced that GCSAA was considering a change in the location of its headquarters. Rather than being disappointed by the comments on the subject, I was encouraged that the sentiments verified members are passionate about their association and what it represents.

I was appointed by GCSAA president Michael Wallace, CGCS, to coordinate the communication of the process that will ultimately answer the relocation question. Having this responsibility has afforded me the opportunity to hear from a variety of constituents with a variety of comments, questions and concerns on the issue.

Rather than focus on whether GCSAA should be located in Lawrence, Kan., Orlando, Jacksonville, Atlanta, Houston or any other city, I would like to direct my comments to the process we are undertaking. The opinion of the GCSAA board of directors is a sound study will determine the best location for the association's headquarters. This process will analyze the financial implications, the ability to service the membership and the opportunity to advance the association in the eyes of key constituents – most importantly the members.

Why was Lawrence selected in the first place? At the time, Lawrence was a logical location – the association was offered a



Timothy T. O'Neill

Continued on next page

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## GCN adds Thomas, Hirsh to advisory board

*Golf Course News* has added superintendent Steve Thomas and golf course consultant Laurence Hirsh to its advisory board in a move to further bolster its position as the business newspaper for the golf course industry.

Thomas, who has been working on golf courses since 1990, is currently the director of agronomy at Pelican Hill Golf Club in Newport Beach, Calif. He oversees the superintendent at Pelican Hill, as well as the one at its sister course, Oak Creek Golf Club in Irvine. Both facilities are managed by ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance.

Thomas got his start at Baltimore Country Club and then moved on to Wakefield Valley Golf Club in Westminster, Md., where he worked for three years with Gary Angell. After receiving his turfgrass management degree at the University of Maryland, Thomas was hired at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md., where he worked under Paul Latshaw. At Congressional he had the opportunity to work on both the 1995 U.S. Senior Open and the 1997 U.S. Open. Thomas

followed Latshaw to The Riviera Country Club in Los Angeles to help prepare for the 1998 U.S. Senior Open.

"Moving to California and working at Riviera was an opportunity of a lifetime and it opened many doors for me," said Thomas. "We had only seven months to prepare the run-down course for a major championship. With a lot of hard work and many long days we came through with flying colors."

Thomas got his first superintendent job at Oak Creek Golf Club in 2000.

Hirsh brings 15 years of golf property consulting experience to *Golf Course News'* advisory board. He founded Golf Property Analysts in 1988 and is a member of the Counselors of Real Estate and the Appraisal Institute. A graduate of Penn State University, he has served as past president of the Central Pennsylvania chapter of the Appraisal Institute and the Society of Golf Appraisers.

Hirsh has been involved in development and brokerage of numerous golf course properties and is a widely published author on golf property valuation and related economic matters.

## Changing articles wrong way to approach relocation

Continued from previous page

benefit analysis.

After these issues are approved by an informed membership, the articles should then be amended, thus empowering the board to act. In any healthy organization, it is incumbent upon the leadership to build consensus. If the argument is convincing enough, developing the necessary consent is not to be feared.

The other concerns have merit as well, but they can be addressed without such a drastic measure. If for instance, Orlando, Fla., is an attractive location, a satellite office could be opened for an interim period until attractive market conditions present themselves. We discovered the value of a satellite office when GCSAA opened its Singapore branch in the early 1990s. It gave us the opportunity to observe the markets in that region until we discovered it was not in our best interest to be there. There should be no rush to change the articles before the members specifically know where we are going and the costs of going there.

There is precedent for the limitation of power. Many country clubs limit the amount of money a board of directors can spend without membership approval. Governments too, institute controls for the appropriation of funds. Referendums are frequently placed on election ballots, enabling communities and school districts to pass bond issues, then leaving the details to the elected leadership.

A financial restriction on board spending would allow the GCSAA membership a greater voice and it would encourage due process. Spending in excess of this monetary limit would require member approval. This kind of restraint does not weaken the board's ability to negotiate; it strengthens their ability to bargain with self-assurance

and the support of the membership. Also, it ensures that every stakeholder has a voice and it ensures that the veracity of our leaders remains intact.

Apathy is normal in large organizations. However, one way to increase apathy is to erode the power of the constituency by allowing fewer and fewer people a voice in the process. We can keep the membership engaged if we keep control of the association in the hands of the majority of the members. Additionally, we shield the board of directors from accusations of impropriety if we place limits on their powers.

Do we want to amend our articles of incorporation first, and unconditionally empower the majority of a nine-member board to relocate our association? If this is the path we choose, five people will control whether we move and where we move – without member approval. I suggest we leave the articles alone until the members have had an opportunity to review and endorse the process.

Before changing the articles of incorporation, let the members vote on the course of action. Once approved, the articles can be amended, allowing the board of directors the autonomy to proceed. Our delegate system will assure this is done quickly. In this manner, the staff and board will have the members' full support and trust to act in their behalf.

By enhancing a trusting relationship among staff, leaders and members, future issues needing membership approval will find fewer roadblocks. Only by instituting a system of checks and balances can we protect the larger issue: that of maintaining the integrity of the process. ■

Steven Cook, CGCS, is superintendent at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

## Relocation process sound

Continued from previous page

favorable real estate transaction, the area was a hub for two major airlines and it was centrally located to facilitate communication with members in all areas of the nation. Lawrence has been a good home for GCSAA and the association has strengthened since establishing the community as its headquarters location.

However, times have changed. Other areas of the nation have become more accessible, communication technologies have made physical location practically irrelevant and geographic/climatic characteristics make a re-examination of the headquarters location a sound business exercise. By engaging this study, we will determine what opportunities exist in terms of operational efficiencies, a potential relationship with a golf facility and/or hotel and conference center and in expanding our activities with golf's governing bodies.

In the final analysis, the study may indicate that Lawrence is the best place for GCSAA's home, but all of us deserve the thoughtful consideration this study will provide. Relocation is not a new subject. It has been discussed numerous times, as a response to offers made on the current headquarters facility. Those discussions, while based on considerable thought and integrity, did not employ the thorough analysis that will be required during this re-examination. If we decide not to move, the study will provide the data for us now, and also for the foreseeable future if the subject is ever broached again. Without the study, we would be left making a decision in a vacuum, now and in the future.

Associated with the relocation feasibility study is an amendment to the articles of incorporation that will be voted upon at the annual meeting. If approved, the amendment will remove 1421 Research Park Drive,

Lawrence, Kan., and the state of Kansas as the resident agent from the second article of incorporation and allow the board of directors to act on behalf of the membership in regards to its location.

By allowing the board of directors to vote on relocation, the association would have the ability to negotiate and act expediently on an offer that may or may not be available for a future vote at an annual meeting.

I am confident the GCSAA leadership has approached the subject thoroughly and professionally. We have engaged experienced professionals with expertise in these matters. The process could have been stopped at any point (and still can) if the information does not support further investigation. We have reached a point where we have received enough data to support continued exploration.

I am also confident we have and will continue to allow members to provide input on this subject. In the early phase of the study, much of the research had to be done without public disclosure due to the sensitive nature of the information. However, as the study moves ahead, the process and the information will become more public. The GCSAA leadership has pledged to communicate early and often as it moves ahead in the study.

Additional information on the relocation study can be found by accessing the recent GCSAA Chapter Delegates Meeting presentation at [www.gcsaa.org](http://www.gcsaa.org). You will also have a chance to communicate your thoughts at the GCSAA annual meeting, 8 a.m., Friday, Feb. 14 in Atlanta. If you are attending Conference and Show, I encourage you to participate in that forum. ■

Timothy T. O'Neill, CGCS, is superintendent at the Country Club of Darien (Conn.) and serves as a director for the GCSAA.

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