

PDI PUSHES PROFES

PROGRAM HELPS SUPERINTENDENTS; GCSAA PLANS TO PROMOTE CLASS A STATUS

A title is only a word unless there's something to back it up. With this thought in mind, golf course superintendents throughout the country are in the midst of putting substance behind the term "Class A."

In 1971, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America began a certification program for its members. However, it acknowledged the program, which bestowed the designation certified golf course superintendent on its recipients, was a rose that didn't smell too sweet.

Scott Woodhead was a superintendent in Montana for 25 years before becoming president of the GCSAA in 2000. Woodhead says all one had to do to become a Class A member was have a job as a superintendent for three years and pay annual dues.

"This was part of the problem superintendents had in terms of people's perception of them," he says.

With that criteria, it's difficult to challenge the notion that superintendents are little more than guys in muddy boots and jeans who mow grass. In contrast, people see PGA of America pros in a golf shop with a Class A designation, and the pros command respect because golfers know they had to meet certain requirements to earn that designation.

So, how will superintendents flip the script?

MUCH IMPROVED

In 2001, at the GCSAA annual meeting in Dallas, the membership passed a resolution to implement a new program called the Professional Development Initiative.

The mission was to improve the knowledge and skills of superintendents by instituting clearly defined competencies. This means members must pass certain standards every five years to be a Class A superintendent.

"Seventy-five percent voted for implementation of membership standards," says Woodhead, who now works for the GCSAA as the senior manager of governance/member standards.

To earn the Class A designation, members must have three years of experience as a superintendent, hold a job in that capacity, earn various degrees of continuing education points (based on prior formal education, such as a four-year agronomy degree) and pass an integrated pest management test.

Eighty-two percent of all GCSAA Class A and superintendent members who responded to the survey had a two-year certificate, an associate degree or a higher degree of formal education.

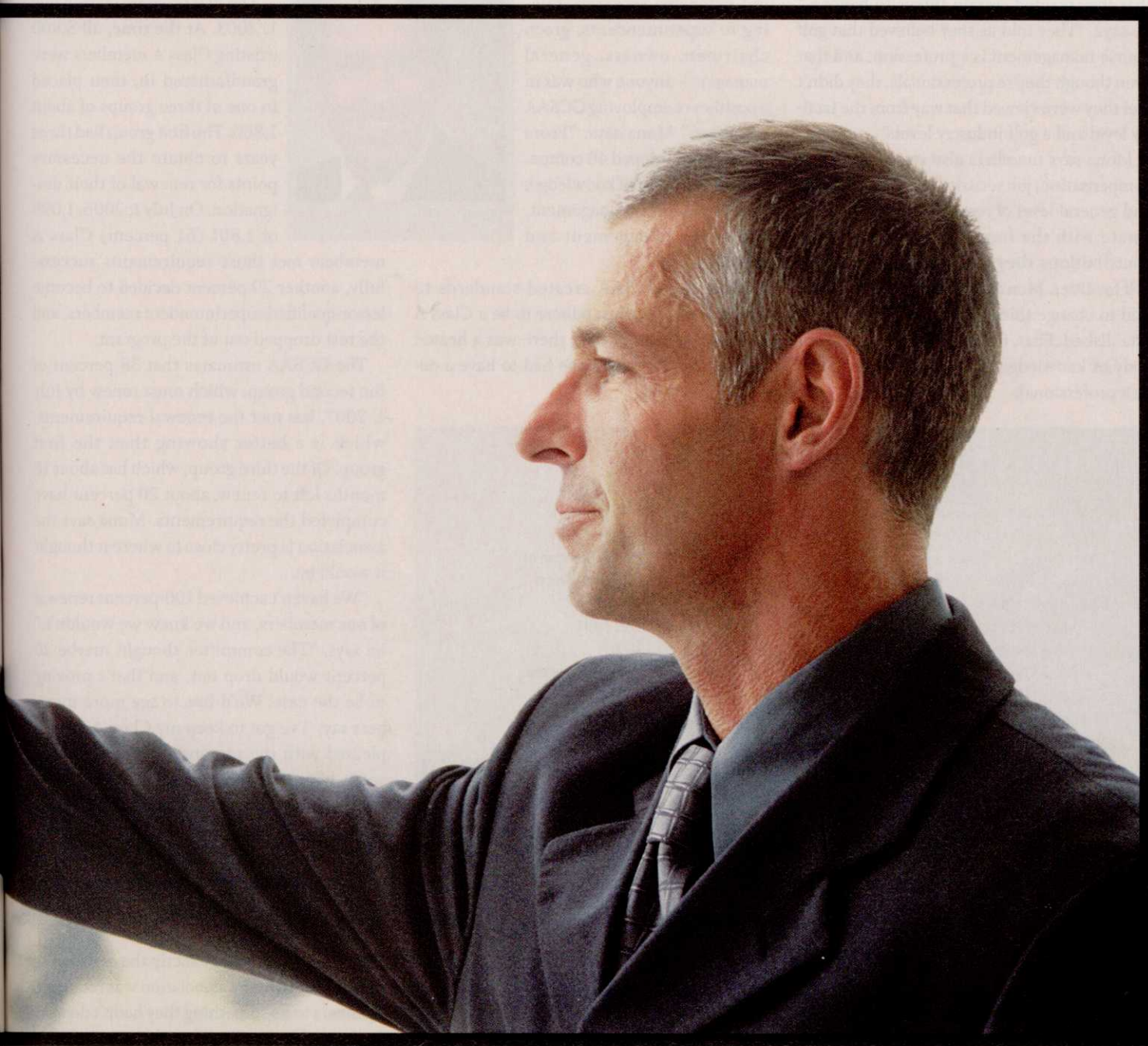
The process of establishing the PDI program, from broaching the subject to implementation, took five years, Woodhead says.

"We know superintendents are staying on top of their game," he says. "We just made a mechanism so we could report back to golfers



PROFESSIONALISM

BY T.R. MASSEY



and employers to tell them exactly what their superintendent was doing.”

Steve Mona, c.e.o. of the GCSAA, attended his first national meeting in that capacity in 1994. He says delegates from all 104 chapters discussed emerging issues and the direction of the association.

“The members were clear to the board that they wanted certain things to happen,” he says. “They told us they believed that golf course management is a profession, and that even though they’re professionals, they didn’t feel they were viewed that way from the facility level and a golf industry level.”

Mona says members also stated that their compensation, job security, job opportunities and general level of respect wasn’t commensurate with the formal education and the contributions they make to the success of golf facilities. Mona and the board agreed, but said to change things, two criteria had to be established. First, there must be a recognized body of knowledge that one must master to be a professional.

“You can’t just hang out a shingle and say you’re a doctor or lawyer,” Mona says.

Second, there must be a requirement to continue to claim a professional designation, which means ongoing education. The GCSAA hired the Stanford Research Institute to determine the contents of the body of knowledge.

“For about two years, they did extensive research, talking to superintendents, green chairmen, owners, general managers – anyone who was in a position of employing GCSAA members,” Mona says. “From that, they developed 48 competencies, the body of knowledge, such as resource management, personnel management and many others.”

Next, the GCSAA created standards to which members must adhere to be a Class A member. As part of that, there was a heated debate about whether one had to have a degree, Mona says.

“At end of the day, we voted ‘no’, but we created a sliding scale,” he says. “You must achieve a blend in five areas: formal education; continuing education; job experience; service to local chapter, community and the national organization; and a pesticide license or [a passing score on] a test that’s equivalent to it.”

The PDI program started July 1, 2003. At the time, all 5,400 existing Class A members were grandfathered in, then placed in one of three groups of about 1,800. The first group had three years to obtain the necessary points for renewal of their designation. On July 1, 2006, 1,099 of 1,801 (61 percent) Class A

members met those requirements successfully, another 29 percent decided to become lesser-qualified superintendent members, and the rest dropped out of the program.

The GCSAA estimates that 38 percent of the second group, which must renew by July 1, 2007, has met the renewal requirements, which is a better showing than the first group. Of the third group, which has about 18 months left to renew, about 20 percent have completed the requirements. Mona says the association is pretty close to where it thought it would be.

“We haven’t achieved 100-percent renewal of our members, and we knew we wouldn’t,” he says. “The committee thought maybe 20 percent would drop out, and that’s proving to be the case. We’d like to see more members say, ‘I’ve got to keep my Class A.’ We’re pleased with the response, but we’d like to see it higher. Ideally, everyone would do it except those who are leaving the profession or retiring.”

Woodhead says the contentious part of the debate came when members voted for the PDI program, but since then, there haven’t been many complaints.

“I don’t know what exactly the arguments were, other than the association was requiring members to do something they hadn’t done in the past,” he says. “Just having requirements



Mona

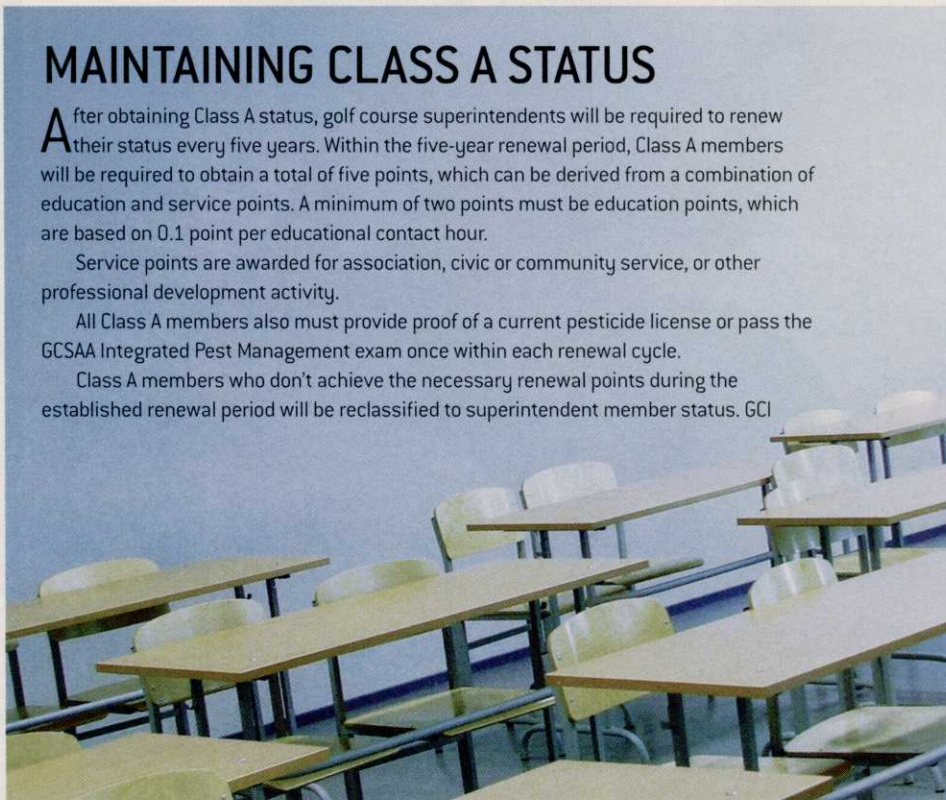
MAINTAINING CLASS A STATUS

After obtaining Class A status, golf course superintendents will be required to renew their status every five years. Within the five-year renewal period, Class A members will be required to obtain a total of five points, which can be derived from a combination of education and service points. A minimum of two points must be education points, which are based on 0.1 point per educational contact hour.

Service points are awarded for association, civic or community service, or other professional development activity.

All Class A members also must provide proof of a current pesticide license or pass the GCSAA Integrated Pest Management exam once within each renewal cycle.

Class A members who don’t achieve the necessary renewal points during the established renewal period will be reclassified to superintendent member status. GCI



was the problem for some.”

Mona knew some would oppose the program – those who didn’t want to be told what to do or didn’t believe it would impact their employment.

“That’s fine, but for the most part, people are saying they asked for it, and they wanted definitions,” he says.

MEMBER FEEDBACK

Keith Pegg, an international member of the GCSAA who’s currently working in Japan, doesn’t think much of the program.

“The PDI is a joke,” he says. “We had certification that was great, and we didn’t need PDI.”

But Pegg seems to be in the minority.

Richard Staughton is president of the Georgia chapter of the GCSAA and golf course superintendent at Towne Lake Hills Golf Club in Woodstock. Though he hasn’t renewed his Class A status, he claims to be a continuing education geek.

“It’s always a good thing,” he says. “It comes down to continuing education. You have to stay on top of current trends.”

Gary Carls, golf course superintendent at Sunnyvale Golf Course in California, is in the third renewal group and thinks it’s great to have member standards.

“In some ways, I wish it was even stronger,” he says. “But once it gets rolling and the guys get renewed, the standards will get tougher down the road.”

Carls says the profession has changed a lot since he started in Michigan in 1978. Twenty-five years ago, degrees weren’t required. One just joined a crew and worked his way up.

Nowadays, most of those coming into the business have an agronomy degree.

“When I started, I was out mowing and working with crews,” he says. “Now, there’s more budgeting, managing and meeting with the board and the shop about how to drive rounds and the business side of it. It’s not just about growing grass anymore.”

That’s why Carls believes the Class A designation has to mean something.

“They’re just starting to promote the Class A designation now that the first group has been renewed,” he says. “During the past few years, we’ve talked about its value, and the owners have come back with the idea that they might use this designation as hiring criteria.”

Bill Davidson, golf course superintendent at Naples Grande Golf Club in Florida, was in the first renewal group and says it was exceptionally easy.

“If you just go to monthly meetings with your local chapter and take a limited amount of continuing education units to keep up your license, you can get enough points,” he says. “The biggest problem is that guys rely on people to do things for them. Guys get points and don’t turn them in. You have to manage your own certification. You can’t just go to a meeting and hope.”

FINANCIAL BENEFITS

There’s evidence the program is paying dividends financially. According to a recent GCSAA salary survey of superintendents, annual compensation rose from \$44,000 in 1993 to almost \$69,000 in 2005. The average salary of those who’ve earned a Class A designation rose to \$80,489 in 2005, an increase from \$56,994 in 1995. Class A superintendents’ salaries averaged 15 percent greater in 2005 than superintendents without a Class A designation.

Mona says GCSAA research shows the perception and favorable opinions of superintendents are on the rise.

“The two main messages are, one, that having a Class A designation is a key to the economic vitality to the golf course,” he says. “Second, superintendents play a crucial role in the golfers’ enjoyment of the game. What makes a round enjoyable? The golf course itself, in the end, is the primary differentiator of the quality of the experience. Golf course conditions influence your enjoyment of the game.”



Carls

Mona says the GCSAA board promised its members to market them if they passed the PDI.

“If we can get these messages communicated, recognition and respect and job security will take care of themselves,” he says.

Mona acknowledges the jury is still out on the recognition and awareness campaign.

“We have great research data that shows we’ve raised the level of awareness of our members,” he says. “But the long-term goal is still out there. Ultimately, when an employer hires a superintendent, we want them to say, ‘I have to have a Class A GCSAA member because the risk of not having one is too great.’ And we want golfers to know who their superintendent is by name. We want them to say the work they do is having the most impact on their enjoyment of golf. It’s not a competition between pros and superintendents, but we want our fair share of the recognition.”

In that regard, Mona says the association targets employers and avid and influential golfers to send the message about the importance of the Class A designation.

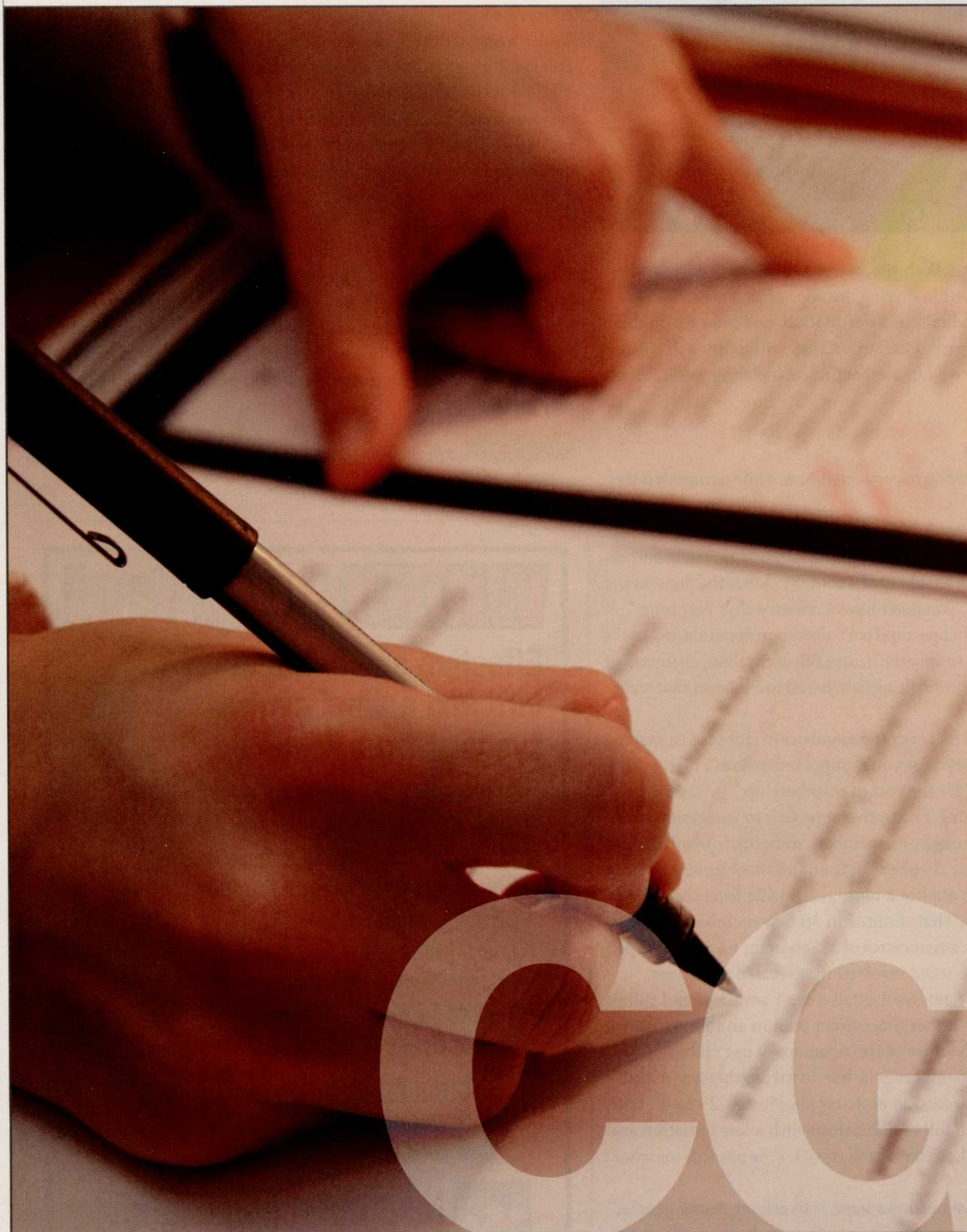
“They understand in general terms what it takes to be a Class A member and what it takes to continue, so they can ascribe value to it,” he says. “We are communicating to these people where they live. We’re targeting different media outlets they tune into.”

The GCSAA has made a substantial investment with the Golf Channel this year via ads and other programming that will begin in March, Mona says.

“We’re also running particular ads in publications focused on golf course decision makers,” he says. “The message is that the Class A GCSAA member brings certain attributes to the facility, and employers should insist on a Class A member. It all loops back to where we started, when we said we want respect, job opportunities and security.”

When that happens, a title is more than just a word. **GCI**

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BY JOHN WALSH

A designation worthy of pursuit?

Some superintendents say it's a no-brainer to become certified; others question the value

If you're a certified golf course superintendent, you're in the minority among your peers. Of the 19,889 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America members, 1,895 (10 percent) are certified golf course superintendents, according to the association. Superintendents have mixed feelings about the value of being certified, but the association doesn't. Some members disagree about how much value the association portrays in being certified.

The GCSAA encourages its members to become certified because it's a way to help them substantiate their work and accomplishments through continuing education. The Certified Golf Course Superintendent program is designed to

recognize those accomplishments and members' expanding knowledge as they keep up to date with recent developments in the industry.

Some of the benefits of earning the CGCS designation, besides preparing members for the future demands of the superintendent profession, are:

- Better salaries and jobs, providing an edge in the job market with a proven commitment to producing the best playing conditions;
- Recognition and respect by peers and employers;
- Increased knowledge about the industry, association and profession; and
- A sense of accomplishment, from demonstrating proficiency to contributing to the improvement of the profession.

Completing the certification process also can benefit superintendents' employers because it:

- Is an effective, meaningful and objective measure to determine qualifications of potential employment candidates;
- Shows a willingness to not only commit to long-range self-improvement but long-range improvement of the profitability of the golf facility;
- Increases the chances of having con-

sistently superior course conditions;

- Provides knowledge to manage a golf course budget efficiently and still maintain top conditions;
- Shows leadership skills needed to develop a well-trained, well-managed staff resulting in strong team morale and reduced turnover; and
- Allows them to stay up-to-date in the latest golf course management techniques and products through continuing education.

Historically, golf facility leaders have supported their certified superintendents. Eighty-eight percent of employers support continuing education efforts, according to the GCSAA. Certified superintendents consistently have earned higher salaries in recognition of their advanced level of experience knowledge, skills and abilities. In 2003, the average salary of certified superintendents was 32.6 percent higher than that of non-certified superintendents, according to the GCSAA.

Allen Brissenden, CGCS, at the Dunedin Country Club in Tampa, Fla., has been in the industry since 1980, has been a superintendent since 1989 and became certified in 1994. When he was an assistant, he decided he wanted to become certified shortly after he joined

the GCSAA. When he prepared for certification, he says qualifications included:

- Being a golf course superintendent for five years;
- Meeting educational requirements, which meant a certain amount of GCSAA credits – more credits were needed without a degree or with a two-year degree than with a four-year degree;
- The GCSAA verifying your records once you applied;
- Passing a six-hour test that included knowledge of the certification program, pest control safety, financial and organizational management, the Rules of golf and an agronomy section.

“You had 12 months between the time you sent in your application and taking the test,” Brissenden says. “During that time, you also had to have two certified superintendents visit your course and send in written documents about three projects you completed on your course. Qualifications now are stricter than they used to be.”

Brissenden says it was challenging to prepare for certification.

“You have to be dedicated to be certified,” he says. “You really have to work at it. You have to set time aside to study. You can’t just blow it off.”

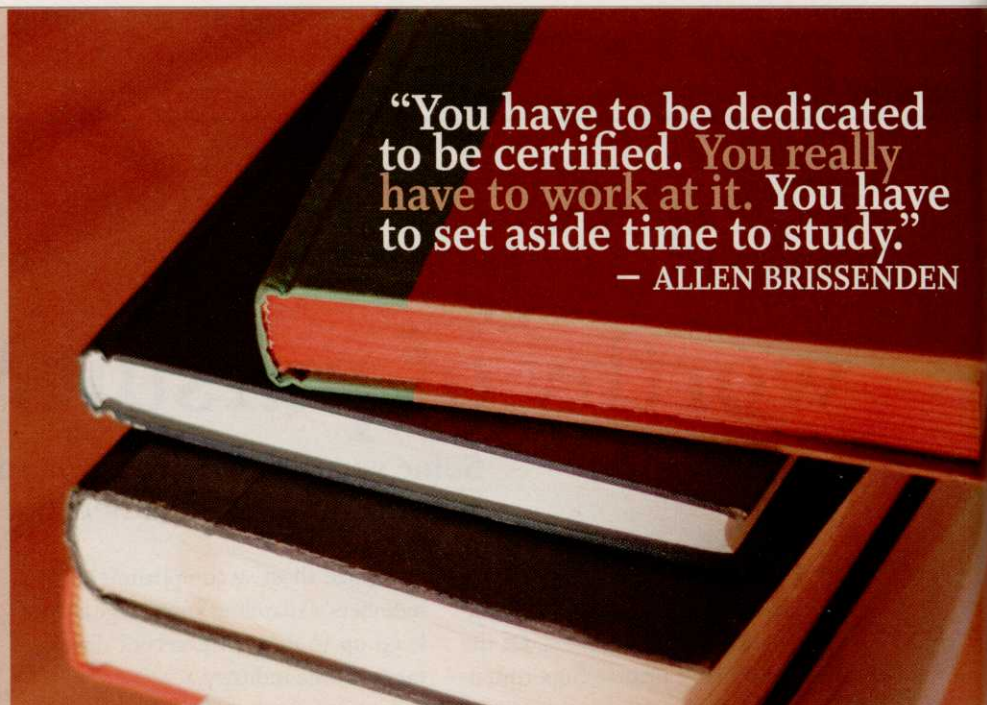
While studying, Brissenden says he learned much about organizational and financial management that he uses daily.

“I learned different ways courses are structured financially,” he says. “I learned how to structure a crew and be more efficient with time management.”

Brissenden says because superintendents work long hours, finding the time to become certified can be difficult. The exam is challenging, too, he says.

“I found that the Rules of golf was the hardest part of the test,” he says. “The turfgrass management part was the easiest. But I had to rewrite two of the six sections within the first year that I took the test before I passed and became certified,” he says. “There aren’t many who pass all six sections the first time.”

Certification is renewed every five years,



which means one has to keep up with continuing education.

Brissenden says his certification was a large part of getting his current job.

“Before this job, I worked for one owner for 12 years, and after he sold the course, I was out of a job,” he says. “There were 100 applicants for the job I have now. Certification really helped.”

Brissenden also says certification definitely helps with pay, citing that those who are certified earn 5 to 10 percent more than those who aren’t.

Tom Lavrenz, director of golf for the city of Cedar Rapids Golf Department in Iowa, is a GCSAA member who has a slightly different take on salaries. He says salaries and promotions are based on being certified in certain parts of the country, such as the East Coast and at some of the bigger, well-known clubs, but that’s not the case in Iowa.

“Experience counts more,” he says.

Brissenden says being certified has been a big plus with Dunedin’s membership, and he says he receives more respect from board that hired him.

“It puts you out as more of a leader in the industry,” he says. “Many certified guys are contacted first when it comes to surveys and things like that.”

PERCEIVED VALUE

Yet Brissenden says some superintendents don’t feel they need certification because they’ve been at a club for 20 years.

“But I say to them, ‘What if you get fired?’”

Darren Davis, director of golf at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., is an accomplished superintendent who isn’t certified. Davis, who was hired at Olde Florida in October of 1992, has been a superintendent for 14 years and a member of the GCSAA for 17 years. Before Olde Florida, he spent time as an assistant at the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, Fla., and some time at Augusta National in Georgia and Golden Eagle Country Club in Tallahassee, Fla.

“Although I’m not certified, that doesn’t mean I don’t see the value in it,” he says.

However, Davis says he’s an engaged member of the GCSAA nationally and locally, and he’s been published six times in *Golf Course Management* and has been on-air host for the *Superintendents Video Magazine*.

“I love the profession,” he says. “I dedicate double-digit hours to it aside from my job.”

Davis has been through the certification program twice, but hasn’t taken the test.

“At the time, I had other things I wanted to do, such as be active in the Florida chapter,”

he says. "I personally found the things I do more rewarding than being a CGCS. What I have gained from my involvement in the GCSAA has helped my career.

"My employer has never seen or expressed that value added if I were a CGCS," he adds. "My employer is unaware of the certified program, but it's not the fault of the GCSAA that he doesn't know. If I saw the value in it to my employer, I would do it."

Davis says if he were to leave his job, he most likely would become certified because he wouldn't want not being certified to be a factor in why he didn't get a job.

"It's not a matter of spite, I just never saw the value," he says. "If certification ever became an issue during an interview, I would dispel that. I'll get my foot in the door and sell myself. But if an owner wants me to be certified, I would make that a priority in the first six months [of a new job]. However, when you look at job ads, CGCS isn't required. You don't see that much."

Davis says being certified is a personal choice, and that at one point, eight out of 10 superintendents at the top 10 golf courses in the country weren't certified.

Still, Davis, who's a Class A superintendent, is happy about the GCSAA's promotion of the Class A designation.

"The GCSAA is showing the value of Class A to owners," he says. "It has promised the membership that the Class A designation sets them apart from their peers. The GCSAA doesn't say that about CGCS. Class A is the standard that all superintendents should aspire to be." (See related story about the Professional Development Initiative on page 72.)

Davis says he strives to improve himself daily and currently is working toward a bachelor of arts degree in communication.

PROFESSIONALISM

Lavrenz, a 12-year member of the GCSAA who's been with the city of Cedar Rapids for 29 years, has been a superintendent for 21 years. Being certified has crossed his mind several times during his career, but he says he never had the time to become certified.

"I did serve as a beta tester for the certification test, but I didn't study and missed passing it barely," he says. "I haven't been hindered because I'm not certified, but I won't allow myself to fail."

"Although certification wouldn't have meant a great deal to me, I would advance someone under me quicker if he's certified because that shows me he's willing to take that extra step," he adds.

At this point in his career, Lavrenz, who's a Class A member, has no intention of becoming certified. He has health issues and doesn't know how long he'll be with the city. At age 47 and having worked 30 years for the city, he says he can retire with a nice pension in about eight years.

"The GCSAA doesn't do enough to show members the value of being certified," he says. "If I had 10 years left in my career, I would get

I've never seen that kind of attitude in Iowa amongst my friends. But at the same time, 99 percent of the superintendents who feel they don't get the respect they deserve, don't walk the walk."

More important than certification is image, Lavrenz says.

"If you're not going to represent our profession professionally, certification doesn't matter," he says. "I have one CGCS working for me and another is in the process of getting certified, and it's great, but you better dress the part and carry yourself appropriately."

Two reasons Lavrenz says more superintendents aren't certified is that it takes a lot of time and the perceived lack of benefit of it.

"Superintendents haven't taken the time to promote themselves even though they are the most important person on the golf course," he says. "They undersell themselves. Certifica-

"Certification doesn't make or break a superintendent, but it's another added bonus to try and take the profession to a higher level."

— TOM LAVRENZ

certified, but it's not going to do me any good at this point. It's just like the college degree was years ago. It used to be that a four-year degree wasn't needed. Now you need one."

Being certified or not, Lavrenz says superintendents should be all about promoting themselves and being professional.

"Generally, if you're a CGCS, you tend to carry yourself with more professionalism than those who aren't, and that's too bad. You'll never see a CGCS attend a meeting not dressed up. Superintendents are perceived differently than members of the PGA because of that professional image."

On a national level, Lavrenz says some certified superintendents throw their designation around in a negative way, and it disturbs him.

"Not everyone does it," he says. "But just because they have a designated title, that doesn't mean they are automatically better.

tion tends to bring out a sellable quality in a person as it relates to his course. I believe in the process but wouldn't turn someone away because he wasn't certified. Titles are good, but image is everything."

Lavrenz says certification has merit but not as much as the way superintendents present themselves to customers.

"Certification doesn't make or break a superintendent, but it's another added bonus to try to take the profession to a higher level," he says. "It's a stepping stone I want to see this profession move toward. You don't have to be certified to be successful, but you need to carry yourself with the respect the profession deserves. As superintendents, we don't do that as a whole. We don't carry ourselves like the professionals we are." **GCI**

For more information about certification, visit www.gcsaa.org/mc/certification/default.asp.