

Education drives national show

by John Walsh

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The Golf Industry Show is nearing, and golf course superintendents are excited to partake in the big event. While most superintendents aren't necessarily there to make purchasing decisions, education and networking are the main factors for their attendance.

When Tom Ackley, CGCS, at Juniper Hill Golf Course in Northborough Mass., goes to the national show, he attends seminars for two days to maintain his certification and to keep up with new ideas about diseases, weeds, management and irrigation.

"I once tried taking four seminars one year, and it was very draining – now I take two," he says.

Ackley has been going to the national show since 1991 and looks forward to it yearly.

"The GCSAA is always trying to add new education seminars," he says. "As long as I've been certified, it's hard to

find worthwhile courses to take. I'm looking forward to a couple of seminars that haven't been offered before, and the USGA always has an informative session."

Mark Storby, golf course superintendent at Oneida Golf and Country Club in Green Bay, Wis., has been going to the show since 1996. Storby attends two one-day classes and spends two days at the trade show. He takes a mix of agronomy and business management seminars depending on what issues arise during the year. This year he's taking financial and risk management classes, the latter to learn about liability issues to protect the club.

Terry Boehm, CGCS, at Avon Oaks Country Club in Avon, Ohio, has been going to the national show since 1994 and hasn't missed a year. Boehm's first four years attending the show were as an assistant, but he says he doesn't have it in the budget to send his assistant this year.

Boehm takes one or two days of seminars to earn continuing education points, as well as other sessions.

"There's every seminar you can think of," he says. "The most important aspect of the national is the education."

Boehm also has been playing in the golf championship before the big event since 1998.

"It's a great networking opportunity," he says. "The seminars don't stop at the door. The [superintendent's] job is all about how to do more with less. And what's the best way to do that? I get that by talking to superintendents and attending seminars. I also use the show to recharge my batteries for the coming year and develop a plan of attack."

Ackley says the show provides good networking opportunities as well.

"The nice thing is that you meet people from all over the country and other countries," he says. "We help



each other out.”

Another benefit of the event is the trade show, Ackley says.

“The floor show is enormous,” he says. “I go through the list of vendors and pick out who I want to see. You could spend two days going through the entire show. I look for new products – grass seed, equipment or chemicals; or if I had issues with a piece of equipment, I look to get answers from technical guys.”

Ackley doesn't purchase anything at the show. Instead, he makes recommendations to his owner each winter and then the inventory is assessed. He says he rotates triplex mowers every five years and is looking at leasing for the first time.

“I haven't seen too much from equipment manufacturers in advertising, so it will be interesting to see what they have,” he says. “We're always interested in new equipment.”

Storby doesn't do much purchasing at the show either. About 2 percent of his total purchasing is done there, mostly small supplies and accessories.

He purchases larger equipment through local vendors.

Boehm isn't looking to buy anything at the show but uses it as an opportunity to talk to technical representatives.

“There's always a better mouse trap to tweak your operations,” he says.

Like many superintendents, Storby's wife usually comes with him.

“We socialize in the evenings, but we don't turn it into a vacation,” he says.

“I'm not into the political part of it,” he adds. “Other than seeing my comrades from school, I see the national as an educational opportunity. I've never found a need to network with other superintendents throughout the country. I do that locally.”

Having owners and clubs managers present at the show hasn't made a difference to Ackley. His relationship with Juniper's owner hasn't changed since the National Golf Course Owners Association has been a part of the show.

“My owner goes as a member of the NGCOA,” he says. “I meet up with him

and have dinner. It's nice on the business side for owners to understand more about what we do as superintendents. It's helping them out in a positive way. They know more about what to spend on chemicals and seed.”

Storby says he goes out of his way to show Oneida's ownership the benefits of attending the show. The Oneida ownership doesn't attend the show, but the general manager usually attends every other year.

Each year, Storby says he gets more out of the event, especially on the show floor because of the solutions centers.

“The expectation grows every year because the show gets more detailed every year,” he says.

Boehm says he doesn't expect the show to be that much different than it has been in the past.

“I'm happy for what's it's been,” he says. “It's a great show. I don't think there's anything missing at the show. No matter what you're going for, you get a chance to meet those goals.” GCN

Golf Industry Show

Web site: www.golfindustryshow.com

Location: Anaheim Convention Center in California

Presenting organizations: Golf Course Superintendent Association of America, National Golf Course Owners Association, Club Managers Association of America

Supporting organizations: National Golf Foundation, American Society of Golf Course Architects, Golf Course Builders Association of America

GCSAA Education Conference: Feb. 19-24

NGCOA Annual Conference: Feb. 20-23

CMAA World Conference on Club Management: Feb. 23-27

Trade show: Feb. 22-24

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