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## DIFFERENT, YET THE SAME

I'm currently recuperating from five days at the GIE + Expo in Louisville. As you may or may not know, GIE is the national show for the lawn care, grounds and landscape contracting industry. For those of you who've never attended – which includes, I suspect, almost every superintendent reading this – the show is similar to the Golf Industry Show in some ways, but different in others. The events, like this market, overlap but also diverge dramatically. Allow me to elucidate.

GIE is just about as big as GIS in terms of attendance (about 20,000) but significantly larger in trade show exhibit space, thanks mainly to an enormous outdoor demonstration area. The outdoor demo consists of acres of zero-turn mowers, brush hog-type doohickeys, trenchers, tree movers, chain saws and a long list of other cool gas- and diesel-powered toys. The outdoor area is a ball, but you have to duck occasionally because turbo-charged pieces of equipment kick up rocks and dirt clouds.

Like GIS, the Louisville show is the result of throwing a number of different associations into an enormous blender to create an industrywide milk shake. Take a deep breath and get ready for a virtual acronym orgy: GIS consists of the GCSAA, CMAA, NGCOA, GCBAA, etc. GIE + Expo consists of OPEI, PLANET (the old PLCCA and ALCA groups) and PGMS. Both shows are attempts to consolidate several trade shows into a single site and still allow some autonomy for education and activities by the host associations. So, you see a zillion badge types, concurrent seminars hosted by multiple groups, specialized zones on the show floor for each discipline and different types of professional meetings.

Show consolidation – however awkward – is an economic necessity these days and an alphabet soup mix of “partners” is the price we pay.

So, if you're interested in turf cut at an inch or less, you go to the GIS (or STMA if you're one of those athletic field dudes). Otherwise, it's Louisville for you. And that points out another difference between the shows – the GIE takes place in Louisville,

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whereas the GIS moves from Orlando to San Diego to New Orleans. I love GIE, but being rooted in Louisville is equivalent to locating the Super Bowl in Toledo until the sun goes dark. Variety is the spice of life, and you pretty much only get salt or pepper in Louisville. (One aside: the location in Louisville essentially makes that show a “superregional” event.)

Another difference: GIE is, first and foremost, an iron show. The golf business is dominated by red, green and orange, but you get the entire rainbow in Louisville. There are a dozen other manufacturers selling to the residential and commercial cutting market. You think golf's big three are competitive? The pro mowing market might be somewhat bigger than golf's, but there are five times more companies vying for your business.

Even though the GIE part of the show – historically the chemical and fertilizer segment – merged with the Expo part (the equipment side) a few years ago, the big soft goods manufacturers don't have nearly the presence in Louisville as they do at GIS. Why? Lawn care is basically a herbicide and insecticide market. Fungicides, growth regulators and other specialty products,

such as wetting agents and foliar, play a minor role in the segment.

The educational component of GIE+Expo is good but nothing like GIS. There might be 3,000 attendees signed up for seminars versus the 7,000 who attend the conference part of the golf show. Some of the education is agronomic, but the majority is business driven. How do I get more customers? How do I manage my lines of credit in a tough economy? What about H-2B and other labor issues? In short, GIE attendees are professionals working for small, medium and large businesses trying to figure out how to sell more services and boost their bottom lines versus simply trying to deliver better-quality turf.

The two shows have much in common in terms of general product categories, exhibitors and a mutual interest in turf and the overall green industry. But they're vastly different in scope, purpose and focus. Those differences often make it easy for superintendents to dismiss the lawn and landscape part of the green industry as second class. But look beyond the surface of the two markets

and think about our common interests. The small stuff is different, but we are inexorably tied by the big issues: water, development, chemical usage, nutrition, labor and a significant perception problem that we're only focused on aesthetics.

The “other half” of the green industry may be different, but unless we work as a whole, none of us will survive.

As the legendary former speaker of the House Tip O'Neil was fond of saying: “All politics are local.” That's particularly true in our business and golf and lawn care must work together in alliances to be effective. Because, as another great American, Benjamin Franklin, said about the vast disparities between his colonial colleagues, “We must hang together, gentlemen, or surely we will hang separately.”

Think about it. **GCI**



golf industry show

**GIE+EXPO**  
THE GREEN INDUSTRY AND EQUIPMENT EXPO