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## THE NATIONAL

**M**y heart is heavy these last days of 2009, unusual for a guy who loves this time of the year. It was always too early to worry about winter injury or snow mold infection, and the upcoming golf season is months away, giving me days of relative normalcy.

It is also the season when we would make plans to travel to the National, or the Golf Industry Show in today's parlance. Usually several of us traveled together to the show city and we had a lot of fun choosing hotels, travel modes, rental cars and routes, pre-conference seminars, seminars and daily schedules during the week.

I have always referred to it as the National. Many my age are guilty of the misnomer as I am. It took a long time to call it the GCSAA Conference and Show, so you can imagine how often I speak about the GIS.

Starting with Boston in 1973 through New Orleans in 2008, I didn't miss a single National. The event was an annual highlight of my career for all those years. I always viewed it as a great privilege my club provided me with, and I took it seriously. Members would ask if I was going to any golf meetings over the winter, and I would launch into an extensive narrative about the National. Too often they would think I was headed on a boondoggle, undoubtedly because that is exactly what winter meetings in a warm climate meant to them. But it was most assuredly not that to me.

The fact is the National is all about education. There is nothing like it in the world of golf when it comes to keeping current on the science that is so essential to a successful golf course operation. The same is true for new products and new machinery. We are given the chance to attend seminars taught by the best turf faculty in the

country. We can listen to America's great golf course architects speak about course design and our best builders talk about the latest in construction techniques. And it was the one time of the year to see all of the Green Section staff together at once, and to attend their national conference as a part of ours.

I have always been inspired by the show, acres of turf equipment and those responsible for bringing them to us. If you didn't get answers from the show floor, you probably couldn't get those answers anywhere.

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For many who attend, the National is like an alumni reunion. Students graduate from a turf program, scatter across the country and don't have many opportunities to see one another. Except at the National. Those collegiate friendships are renewed and strengthened at least once a year.

A lot of relationships made in the business over the decades and treasured greatly are renewed each year at the National, too. I could hardly wait to see Don Hearn and Mel Lucas, Joel Jackson and Mike Vogt and Peter Salinetti and dozens of others; I loved getting caught up on their lives and families and careers. Time spent with them at the National was precious time with true friends, time not available any other way or any more often than at the National.

The National gave me the chance to

see nearly all of America's great cities, and I enjoyed that so much. Some are surprised when I say my favorite conference cities were Boston, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco. San Diego was pretty good, too.

Where else but at the National would a person like me get the chance to meet and visit with America's greatest golfers, some of America's leaders, and a few of our bravest heroes? The Old Tom Morris Awards and the keynote speakers did that for me and thousands like me. It was wonderful!

Even though I am retired, I could still attend. But there is one small detail – nowadays I travel on my own dime. Some colleagues did that over the years of their career, and do I ever respect them for that now that I find myself in those circumstances. I appreciate my employer's generosity even more. It simply doesn't make sense for me to travel to the West Coast this year for the National, other than for sentimental reasons. Retirement has a set of sensibilities.

I'm still going to think about the people I so enjoyed. I'll wonder who is signing books at the bookstore, and think about what is new with the GCSAA staff who I have known for so long. I will wish Cheryl and I were headed to the "Dell" for lunch and then a drive over the mountains for a day or two in Palm Springs. I won't be able to hear Judy Rankin speak, and I will miss the chance to kick some tires on the show floor. The Wisconsin Hospitality Room will go on, and it will be a great evening.

Already I am thinking beyond this upcoming February and planning for February 2011. The National will return to Orlando, and for me that is a short drive.

I promise myself I will be there for that one. **GCI**