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SO WHAT IF GIS IS SMALL?

“When was the last time you could stand on one end of the equipment show and see the other end?” asked one GCSAA member of another as they surveyed the show floor at February’s annual industry conference and show.

It was an oft-asked question in Orlando. I didn’t actually hear anyone complain about a smaller show floor and fewer exhibitors. The comments were mostly an expression of mild surprise and maybe even approval.

Clearly, these observations were made by superintendents who worked during golf’s boom times of the not too distant past and who have seen the “big” shows. Grizzled old veterans, like myself, can remember a time when a show the size of 2011’s would have been huge; there have been regional turf shows in recent times that rivaled in size the first GCSAA shows I attended in the early 1970s.

In many ways a smaller show floor is better – even much better. You have a chance to see all of the booths and exhibits. A smaller show gives you time to do some serious shopping, spend time with manufacturers and look long and hard at machinery and products that interest you. You can question engineers and research scientists who are at the show for that exact purpose.

A smaller show is more social because you have the time to stop and talk with colleagues and friends you may only get to see at a conference. For me, that includes people I’ve known for nearly four decades now. Seeing them is very important to me.

And, when you are on my side of, say 50, physical demands of a smaller show are more reasonable. A show like Orlando provides areas to sit, relax, chat and enjoy lunch. Some past venues provided absolutely no relief from sore feet and a tired back.

In fact, one reason I didn’t like the first couple of shows shared with CMAA was their enormity. Before organizers got smart, the two interests – golf course and clubhouse – were so totally integrated you had to walk the entire show floor just to see course management products.

The size of this year’s show reflected the economic realities of our times. In past years, when we had a big banquet dinner and entertainment, attendance figures were announced from the head table with great fanfare. It was expected each conference and show would break the previous year’s attendance. “The bigger the better”

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was the goal. Those were the zenith days of golf and they are over, at least for a while. In singing the praises of a smaller equipment show, I admit to the luxury of ignoring the revenue aspects of a larger one. The advantages for me are worth whatever that cost is. GCSAA is managing their economic situation pretty well, as near as I can tell. Attending the conference and show is still a very worthwhile and terrific experience.

Even if it is smaller.

Let me finish with an expense report of my successor and his assistant, Chad Grimm and Jake Schneider. They had another productive and

enjoyable conference, and they didn’t break their travel budget to do it. Here’s how they attended the Orlando GIS for only a \$306 charge to their education budget.

1 A former summer employee now works for an exhibitor at the show and invited them to ride to Orlando with him. They bunked with him on the overnight during the trip to Orlando. In the time leading up to departure they kept an eye open for a cheap flight home, found one and paid for it with World Points from their golf course charge card.

2 They stayed with three other people in a condo just south of the Hilton Hotel and only had to pay 40 percent of the bill. They also prepared almost all of their meals at the condo and shared the grocery bill; other meals were taken as business clients, in hospitality rooms or GCSAA events. They were able to ride a shuttle bus to and from the convention center. The condo bill was \$418; food and miscellaneous expenses totaled \$188.

3 They pre-registered last fall for \$700, the best time for the lowest price.

4 Summing expenses gives a total of \$1,306. They received a \$1,000 World Points cash card to cover most of the cost, resulting in a charge to the budget of \$306.

Also worth noting is that they traveled on the bookend weekends and missed only a week out of the shop. Golf was planned on a nearby resort golf course where a former junior golf player at our club is the assistant golf professional. Even their fun came cheap. **GCI**