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## A TOUGH YEAR IN TEXAS

**“W**e live in the world’s most technically sophisticated society, yet we are now right back where we were three thousand years ago, praying for rain.” – Garrett Ward, Texas Drought 1997

The last year may have turned more Texans back to religion than an evangelist, with many praying for rain. In 2010, we were praying for less rain and fewer floods. Texas is known for its extreme weather, and we have proven it again. It’s hard to believe the heat wave of 1980 – in which I recall watching news clips of Texans frying eggs on the hood of cars while I was building a golf course in relatively cool Wisconsin, was cooler than this year. Or that the legendary “Dust Bowl” which inspired books and movies was less severe than this year.

Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of Texas experienced drought conditions, with 97 percent experiencing “severe drought.” The luckiest 0.83 percent of the state had it easy – they only experienced “moderate drought.” Crop and livestock losses total \$5.2 billion, with home and real estate losses also estimated in the billions. Parts of the Trinity Aquifer, running west of the DFW Metroplex and supplying much of our water, have fallen nearly 80 feet, also a modern record. Most golf courses are facing watering limits, either local or state mandated Stage 1 or 2 drought restrictions. Worst of all, some predict it will be a multi-year drought, worsening conditions.

Golf course superintendents here didn’t need to watch the news to know the severity of the situation. Most golf courses suffered. From a technical side, superintendents and conditions conspired to show us just how little water golf courses could survive on, even if few of us really wanted to know this in anything other than theory.

Golfers, surprisingly, accepted it as a part of nature. If brown wasn’t beautiful to them, at least brown golf was better than no golf, as long as the superintendent was able to keep at least greens and tees in decent shape. Slightly off color fairways were also accepted. This may end up being a great “teachable moment” to golfers convinced that green is the only acceptable color for golf.

Texas superintendents are also using it as a “teachable moment.” They have used their local

GCSAA chapters for public relations efforts, based in large part on programs developed by Georgia’s superintendents, who experienced similar conditions a few years back and launched a multi-pronged program to educate golfers in accepting current conditions, and with legislators to influence the future condition of golf. I foresee a watershed moment in the role of golf organizations to become more legislatively and less fraternally oriented. It’s not that we didn’t see it coming, but it takes memorable events like this drought to crystallize our direction.

Our “take away” from this year is that keeping courses viable will consist of a mix of many small details rather than one “pat” solution. Besides banding together at state and federal levels, it will also mean individual courses will accelerate all efforts to prepare water management and contingency plans, and to tune their golf course

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designs, irrigations systems, maintenance practices for water savings whenever they can find them. Next month, I will share some specific tips irrigation designers and golf course architects have passed on to save water.

We had a tough Texas summer in another way. Former North Texas Golf Course Superintendents Association President (2004) and 2010 A.C. Bearden Superintendent of the Year Award recipient Stephen Best passed away on Oct. 16, 2011 after a long and exhausting battle with melanoma.

Bearden maintained an unbelievably upbeat and positive attitude and used his experience to motivate and inspire other Texas superintendents to take care of sun protection, which is a valuable reminder for all outdoor workers in golf, as well as golfers themselves.

He also reminded us often that health, spiritual and family aspects of life should take precedence over the problems you face every day in your profession. **GCI**