

GCI GOES GLOBAL

Over the past decade, there has been a steady migration that's a little like the pioneers who crossed North America 200 years ago to stake a claim on new ground and build a new life. But this time, the movement has been West to East and – instead of settling new lands – these pilgrims are bringing golf to millions of new potential players.

With the U.S. golf market dogpaddling to stay above water, designers, builders, suppliers and even superintendents have packed up and headed to the new promised land... Asia.

And now, GCI is heading Eastward, too.

I'm pleased to announce that we are partnering with the Singapore-based Asia Pacific Golf Group to publish GCI International, a digital magazine that will bring relevant and much-needed turf and course management content to the region. The first issue will be published next month and distributed electronically to 30,000+ folks at more than 4,300 courses in eight countries. APGG has vast Asian experience, connections and circulation reach. We bring content, industry knowledge, U.S. relationships and (ahem) a little attitude to the party.

GCI International will combine original stories, technical features, product guides and more from U.S.-based experts with localized content created by our APGG partners. The core magazine will be in English, but technical and how-to pieces will be translated into Mandarin, Korean and Bahasa Indonesia so a superintendent in Seoul or a course manager in Beijing can get the core information they need to better manage their turf and operations.

By the way, if you work regularly in Asia as an agronomist, researcher, consultant, designer/builder or supplier, we want to hear from you NOW! We want you to share your expertise, ideas and experiences with our new readers there. Email me please.

We've been considering going international for a long time, in big part because everyone keeps yapping about how "China is booming." We've published stories and talked at length about how the People's Republic is the only place on the planet new courses are being built and how, despite a government moratorium on

new construction, facilities were still springing up like lotus blossoms across the vast nation.

The only problem with "China is booming" is that it's not true. Yes, about 500 courses are now operating on the mainland. Yes, the potential is enormous as the Chinese middle class is set to grow explosively and the trappings of Westernized success – like golf – seep into the country's culture. Yes, the opportunity to bring golf to billions of people is staggering. And yes, if you're a golf course architect looking to do new construction, it's the only game in town.

But dig down and you'll find that China isn't golf's version of El Dorado, where streets are paved with gold. It's incredibly hard to do business there. Things move slowly. The political and business landscape shifts constantly at every level from the

central government to local officials who may need some "encouragement." U.S.-based contractors and designers seem to have difficulty getting paid sometimes.

The courses that have been built struggle with achieving quality conditions because maintenance staffs simply are inexperienced, can't get the products they need and are

sometimes using the wrong products because of kickback-driven deals done by higher-ups. As a result, despite incredible demand and amazing designs, the golf experience isn't always what it should be.

And another thing about the China boom myth – as my new friend Mike Sebastian of APGG has tried to show me – is it obscures the fact that the wider Asian market is perhaps even more interesting and more promising in the long run. Business practices are more predictable, golf is growing nicely and maintenance is appreciated by players and operators.

So, let's replace "China is booming" with "Asia is growing and learning" and start with the simple goal of giving our brethren there solid information about turfgrasses management.

So, we're off like Marco Polo on a bold, adventurous voyage into the unknown – well, admittedly more likely a United 747 to Beijing via Heathrow. Tag along – figuratively, of course – and together we'll figure out what golf and turf maintenance looks like in a global era. GCI



Pat Jones
Editorial director and publisher

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GIE Media, Inc.
4020 Kinross Lakes Pkwy, 2nd floor
Richfield, OH 44286
Phone: 800-456-0707
Fax: 330-659-0823

EDITORIAL

Pat Jones
Publisher/Editorial director
pjones@gie.net

Mike Zawacki
Editor
mzawacki@gie.net

Bruce Williams
Contributing editor

Kyle Brown
Associate editor
kbrown@gie.net

Jim Black
Contributing editor

SALES

Russell Warner
National account manager
330-523-5385

Ted Schuld
Account manager
216-236-5937

Bonnie Velikonya
Classified sales
330-523-5322

Martha Corfman
Manager, books
330-523-5366

Maria Miller
Conferences manager
330-523-5373

Jodi Shipley
Marketing coordinator
330-523-5368

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