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# FLASH!

Breaking news often comes at inconvenient times for those of us who are still in the business of printing it on dead trees and entrusting it to the Pony Express...er, I mean U.S. Post Office...to deliver to you.

So, predictably, Mark Woodward's surprise resignation as CEO of GCSAA came at just such an inconvenient time – just as we were readying to go to press with this issue. (*Editor's note: The above revelation may have been quite a shock to all nine of you that still don't have the Internet. I'll give you a minute to digest this information. Perhaps you can calm your nerves by taking a stroll outside your cave and watching the brontosaurus graze in the field out front.*)

We posted the Woodward announcement on our website and on Facebook within minutes of getting confirmation of it and, within a couple of minutes of that, the emails and calls started coming in. All of them basically asked one question: Why?

Well, as I sit here a few days later, that question remains unanswered. Perhaps by the time you read this, all will have been revealed and any speculation I could give you now will be equally old news. So, I won't speculate about why, but I will offer some observations.

First, I never heard anyone question Mark's performance or energy in the job. He's a good guy and he was always fair and patient with me, even though he couldn't have liked it when I wrote unflattering things about the association. I am a professional pain in the ass and he put up with it.

Second, the circumstances of his tenure were – in the words of philosopher Thomas Hobbes – “nasty, brutish and short.” His two years at the helm were dominated by the economy crapping out, trade show and advertising revenue shrinking and the resultant need to downsize about a quarter of the staff in Lawrence. It couldn't have been much fun to be forced to be the hatchet man.

Third, I stand by what I wrote when he was hired that there are inherent challenges associated with being a recent president who tries to move into the role of staff executive. There is a vast difference between the elected

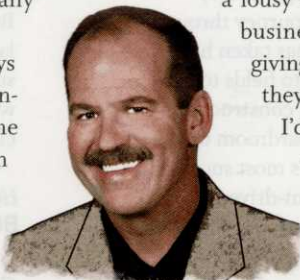
leader and someone who serves at the leadership's pleasure. Going from giving orders to taking them from your former colleagues can be awkward and, perhaps, grating.

So, all we really know is that the board will once again embark on a search for a new CEO – a costly and time-consuming process, by the way – and that we'll have someone new in the job sooner or later. What kind of person should they hire? Who will drive the process within the board? What will the political ramifications be inside and outside the walls of headquarters?

Here's my answer: I don't know and I really don't care. When Woodward's resignation was announced, it occurred to me that this was the first “real” news I'd heard from GCSAA in ages. Honestly, they just haven't seemed to have done much of anything new in years. In their defense, they were busy managing through a lousy economy and reshuffling their business to keep the GIS cash cow giving milk. In a sense they did what they're mandated to do. However, I'd argue that extraordinary times create extraordinary challenges that require extraordinary solutions. I'm not trying to be snide here but what has the GCSAA done lately that has been extraordinary?

There was a time when I paid a lot of attention to GCSAA internal politics. The whole PDI thing. Board members losing their positions. The saga of Steve Mona applying for other jobs. Their inability to lure prime candidates before the job eventually went to Woodward. Staff dissension and downsizing. It was a lot of fun for a while, but it's just gotten old.

Frankly, I've come to the conclusion that the GCSAA is increasingly irrelevant to the average superintendent – and therefore to our editorial interests – these days. Yes, they run a fine education program. Yes, the show is an important, albeit smaller, platform for the industry. But does anything else the GCSAA does or says really mean a whole lot to your day-to-day life? **GCI**



**Pat Jones**  
Editorial director and publisher

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## Waiting for things to even out

I read with interest your May 2010 cover story "In Munis We Trust" (page 20). As co-owner of a family-owned, 18-hole public golf course in Western Massachusetts, established by my parents in 1963, I feel more than qualified to weigh in on this subject. We have six municipal golf courses within a 20-mile radius of our area, each in direct competition with us. My dad built our golf course for the average golfer, with a business philosophy of offering a quality product at a fair price. Our customer base is the average player, providing what Dennis Lyon calls "accessible, affordable, quality golf."

Recently, we have seen some of our local municipals receive benefits that go beyond tax breaks. In 2007 we saw the Ledges Golf Course in South Hadley receive a nearly \$250,000 "Urban Parks" grant from the state to build its new clubhouse. Several years ago, Franconia Golf Course in Springfield received a \$1 million state grant and a matching bond from the city to install an irrigation system. These are just some of the most egregious examples of

what we have to compete against. It sure would be nice to have access to some of these free gifts out here in the private sector.

Mr. Lyon sure was right when he said there are no level playing fields when it comes to competition between golf courses. However,

out here in Western Massachusetts we're still waiting for things to even out.

Mark T. Perez  
East Mountain Country Club  
Westfield, Mass.

## Your point

In your article "In Munis We Trust" (May 2010, page 20) you missed a couple of points.

- Muni prices are not break-even prices in most cases; the tax payers foot the bills and have no idea how much they are.
- Muni courses pay no real estate taxes. True.
- Muni courses pay no payroll taxes. True, who does?
- Muni courses pay no insurance. True, who does?
- Muni courses don't pay labor. True, who does?
- Muni courses take away tax base and add to the taxes of private business. True.
- Muni courses can buy equipment at government contract prices. True.

The point here is that muni courses charge way below what the product is worth and they are driving private business out of business. There may not be a level playing field, however that does not mean that government inefficiency, cronyism, corruption, etc., should be running us out of business.

Brian Christman  
Christman's Windham House  
Windham, N.Y.



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## An easy target

I have a comment about Charlie Birney's Pro/Con article ("A Cautionary Tale," May 2010, page 28). I've been around golf long before the boom that brought so many business owners looking for a quick buck. The result: owners who knew little about golf wanted the municipalities – who were there for many years and who provide recreation for the less fortunate who want to play – to go away. It was all about not wanting competition. The question became: "Why is government in golf?" And the answer: "Because the private sector will only do it if it makes money."

Parks & Recreation departments are not revenue producers – they are tax supported. The essence of this is to provide recreation for the masses. Ice arenas, tennis courts and playgrounds are not being built by the private sector for similar reasons. Are some municipal courses losing money? Yes. Many are not making it because too many courses were built around them. In the Minneapolis/St. Paul area there were more than 110 courses added to

the metropolitan area since 1970 (2003 Clasp Report by the NGF). Think about capacity and dividing the pie. Who is the easy target to go away? No one addresses who built all this oversupply.

Next, we have the courses built for land sale with walk-away realtors. They could care less about the cost of golf or how to run a facility. But the older courses are left with increased green fees that hurt everyone. It helped destroy the game we all loved. Now we reap what was sown by strictly profit motivations. There is a place for government run course where private enterprise cannot afford to provide for the amenity, especially in urban centers.

**John Valliere**  
General manager  
Braemar Golf Course  
Edina, Minn.

## Hearing the message

Just read Pat Jones' April 2010 column ("Huh?" pg 58) – good stuff. I too suffer from hearing loss, and the older I get the worse it

is for me to "get a grip on my problem." I've been a "rocker" for as long as I can remember. As a Golf Course Superintendent I stress the importance of hearing protection. I've been a "super" for more than 20 years. I'm 44-years-old and I can hear an owl from a half mile away but I cannot hear my assistant talking to me from the end of the lunch room table.

I too witnessed Pete Townshend and The Who – damn those lymie bastards... (Pat's line). I tell all my young guys once your hearing is gone, it's gone. Now when I use a chainsaw or even weedwack I have hearing protection on. The young guys are following my lead.

"We" cannot stress the importance enough. As always I'll continue to read my Golf Course Industry magazine from back to front.

**Tom Niebling**  
Columbia Golf & Country Club  
Germantown, N.Y.

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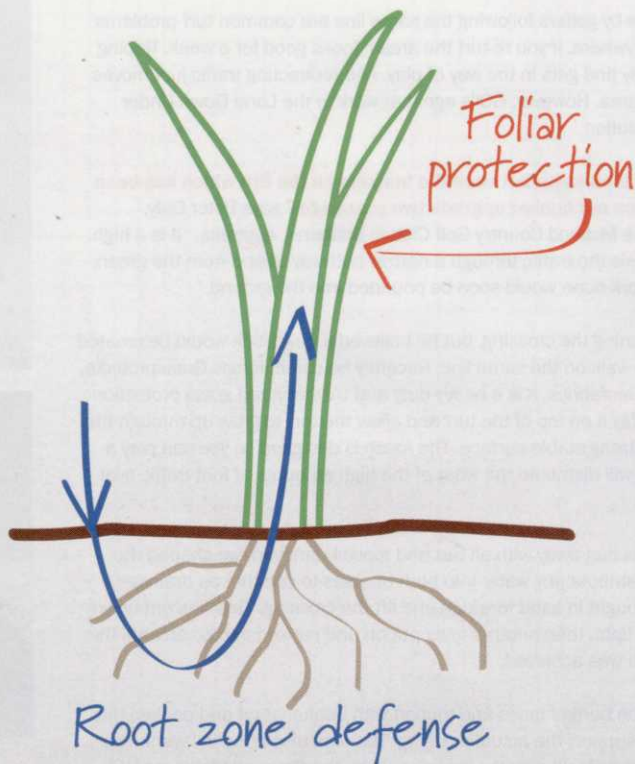
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# A path to follow

**W**ear areas made by golfers following the same line are common turf problems for supers everywhere. If you re-turf the area it looks good for a week. Roping off the area looks ugly and gets in the way of play. And redirecting traffic just moves the wear to another area. However, GCI's agent at work in the Land Down Under reports a possible solution.

**"We have one area, a crossing between the bunkers on the 8th which has been a major problem since our bunker upgrade two years ago,"** says Peter Daly, superintendent at The McLeod Country Golf Club in Brisbane, Australia. "It is a high traffic area that funnels the traffic through a narrow pathway to and from the green. Consequently, any work done would soon be pounded into the ground."

Daly considered widening the crossing, but he believed a new track would be created as everyone tends to walk on the same line. Recently he came across Grassprotecta, a new product from Geofabrics. It is a heavy-duty and UV-stabilized grass protection mesh. The idea is to lay it on top of the turf and allow the turf to grow up through the mat creating a very strong stable surface. The mesh is designed so you can play a golf shot off it, and it will distribute the wear of the high amounts of foot traffic over the whole of the grid.

"The original path was dug away with all turf and topsoil removed, we shaped the sub soil surface to distribute any water into both bunkers to use that as drainage," he says. "We then brought in sand to widen and lift the crossing. This was put down in layers and packed tight, then another layer put on and packed and so on until the right height and width was achieved.

"We then repacked the bunker faces and topped with bunker sand and packed this as well, thus helping support the actual crossing. This was also done in layers. The area was watered and turf laid over the crossing. Then the Grassprotecta was laid out, cut to shape and then pegged down. We let the turf take root and grow through the grid."

Well, five weeks later and the area is back in use. Daly is amazed at how well the matting distributes the wear. And once the turf grew through it was impossible to lift the matting. Most importantly, the golfers are happy and Daly even had some play a shot off it with no problems.

**"Overall, I think this is a great solution to some of our areas,"** he adds. "It will be interesting to see this long term and also how it goes through winter as the couch is already slowing down its growth rate. But as a solution to traffic wear problems, the cost wasn't too high and it was easy to put down and get back in play very quickly."



Grassprotecta, a heavy-duty grass protection mesh, lays on top of turf and allows it to grow up through the mat to create a strong, stable surface.

