

The Scoop from Dallas



Here's our report of what went down during the 72th GCSAA Conference and Show

Editor's note: The weather stunk and the city is boring. So what's a Golfdom staff member to do? His job, we guess. So here's our comprehensive report from the recent GCSAA Conference & Show in Dallas, where the association also celebrated its 75th anniversary.

PDI: Thumbs up

The expected tight vote on the Professional Development Initiative never materialized. The initiative easily cleared the two-thirds vote needed to pass. The final vote was 75 percent in favor to 25 percent against.

"It's a significant mandate," said GCSAA CEO Steve Mona. "[Most superintendents] want higher standards [for] a Class A superintendent."

The new PDI requirements for Class A membership will be implemented by July 1, 2003. Superintendents who reach Class A status before then will be grandfathered in at their current designation.

Outgoing GCSAA president R. Scott Woodhead said the association reached a milestone with the passing of PDI. "It's about a stronger association and positioning the superintendent to do a better job, day in and [day] out," Woodhead said. "We've raised the bar with PDI. The marketplace drove [its passing]."

New GCSAA president Tommy D. Witt said association members made a statement by passing PDI. "We are committed to taking bold steps to enable us to advance our profession by improving recognition, potential higher compensation and additional job opportunities," he added.

PDI and the fat lady

The overwhelming vote in favor of the PDI-related bylaws changes may seem like the end of the story but, as the old saying goes, the opera ain't over until the fat lady sings. So *Golfdom* asked some of the most vocal opponents to PDI whether they thought the fat lady had crooned the last note in the PDI saga.

Continued on page 32

Prerequisites for PDI		
Education	Years as a superintendent to become a Class A	Education points to become a Class A
4-year turf degree	3	3 (Minimum of 2)
4-year turf degree + 2-year turf degree/certificate with equivalent hours	3	3 (Minimum of 2)
Other bachelor's degree	4	5 (Minimum of 3)
Associate's turf/plant science degree or comparable 2-year turf certificate (i.e., Michigan State, Penn State)	4	5 (Minimum of 3)
400-contact-hour turf certificate	5	16 (Minimum of 6)
2-year other associate's degree	6	10 (Minimum of 6)
No degree or recognized certificate	7	40 (Minimum of 32)*

* A maximum of 30 education points can be received retroactively from previous college experience.

Quotable

"A hero in life is somebody who helps somebody else. The individuals who rescued me are my personal heroes."

— *Capt. Scott O'Grady, one of the show's featured speakers, who survived six days behind enemy lines when his F-16 fighter plane was shot down over Bosnia in 1995.*

"I'd like to thank God for providing me with such a great career."

— *A gracious Dave Solga, certified superintendent of Giants Ridge Golf & Ski Resort, upon accepting his Environmental Steward Award for resort courses.*

"I hope you realize how much pressure you put on a speaker when you give him a standing ovation before he speaks."

— *Retired Army Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, addressing the crowd after the standing ovation before his keynote address.*

"There's a lot of history and a lot of gray hair."

— *Keelan Pulliam, head of Syngenta's Professional Products Business Unit, on the company's legacy. Syngenta is the recent result of the merger between and Novartis and Zeneca.*

"It's bad design that I can't see that side mirror."

— *Overheard from a Dallas shuttle bus driver, who was piloting through rush-hour traffic during a driving rain. His comment didn't do much to make the passengers crammed in the bus feel safe.*

Continued from page 30

"She's on key and belting out the blues! PDI will go forward, but the apathetic folks will get a rude awakening when their notice arrives telling them that they have fallen short on their (educational) quotas. That's when all hell will break loose."

— Al Jansen, Baraboo CC, Wisconsin.

"I am afraid the singing is over, but the melody may play in the background for a few years until the true ramifications are realized." — Corey Eastwood, CGCS, Stockton (Calif.) G&CC.

"Is PDI here to stay? Yes. Is PDI as passed in Dallas here to stay? No way. What is the future of PDI? I envision GCSAA wanting to control the job market, which it will not be able to do. I don't know if GCSAA hopes to make the association a large management company for golf courses or what. It's obvious to me that it is just a question of time until the only new members that will join will have four-year degrees and probably be required to be at least 6-foot-2 and have blonde hair and blue eyes." — John Baranski, New Albany (Miss.) CC.

"I believe the debate has just begun. The questionable voting procedure, the way in which legal and other counselors were used at the annual meeting have started to affect many within the association. The sense that the association has lost touch with its 'regular' members has many feeling that they are dealing with a large corporation rather than an association for the betterment of superintendents." — Scott Hiles, Fredericton Golf & Curling Club, New Brunswick.

"PDI is what we have to live with. I would like to see at least a change in how the standards are changed. I would like it to require a two-thirds majority instead of the current simple majority. I expressed my disappointment about how the meeting was held, but I have no plans to fight on." — Ted Cox, Running Fox GC, Ohio.



Bunker mentality

Of course, there was more to the show than PDI. Seminars ruled. But in general, the seminar on bunkers was a snoozer (if you listened carefully during the pauses in the speaker's speeches, you could actually hear snoring coming from the back of the ballroom as

superintendents nodded off). But the comments of John Scott from the PGA Tour perked up some ears.

"You want the sand firm so balls don't get buried," Scott says. "We do a lot of work before an event to make sure players don't have to deal with unreasonable lies. It's a full stroke penalty if the ball's unplayable, not the half stroke that is commonly thought."

Scott's words drew some sharp comments from superintendents as they left the room.

"What's the point of having bunkers if they're not going to be hazards?" said one superintendent. "You might as well not have them on the course at all."

The perception among superintendents is that the PGA Tour expects them to baby the players by producing unrealistic conditions. They feel the PGA Tour's meddling frequently renders their courses toothless.

Somehow, we don't think *that* was the message GCSAA was hoping superintendents would take away from the seminar.

Movin' on

It was weird seeing Paul R. Latshaw hanging out at the Signature Control Systems booth rather than walking the show floor. Latshaw, in case you haven't heard, recently retired from Winged Foot CC in Mamoroneck, N.Y., ending a stellar 37-year career as a superintendent.

But the 60-year-old Latshaw isn't walking away from the industry completely. He'll work part-time as director of agronomics for Irvine, Calif.-based

Continued on page 34

The Scoop from Dallas

Continued from page 32

Signature, which specializes in irrigation management control.

Latshaw, who was replaced by Eric Greytok at Winged Foot, said he began losing his enthusiasm to be a superintendent last year. "It's a young man's job, and you need a lot of energy," he said.

Latshaw also broke his ankle last year, which slowed him down and made him think about his future. "It took forever to heal," he says. "I was always behind because I wasn't very mobile."

Latshaw says he joined Signature because he doesn't have any hobbies.

"It gives me an opportunity to stay involved," he says. "I'll be able to visit golf



Paul Latshaw has moved out of the superintendent business and into the consulting business. "I've always been a pioneer in trying new stuff," he says.

courses, but I won't be responsible for day-to-day management."

More than 50 of Latshaw's assistants have become superintendents, many at top U.S. courses. "I want to be remembered as someone who tried his best to help our profession," Latshaw says.

Latshaw's advice to young superintendents is to be "bold and demanding." Latshaw recalls quitting the profession in

his early 30s after 10 years and opening a fabric store with his wife, Phyllis. But the general manager at Oakmont GC near Pittsburgh wooed Latshaw back to the profession less than a year later.

"But when I went back, I did so with a completely different attitude," Latshaw says. "I became very demanding. When I went to meetings, I said, 'I want this, and don't tell me I can't have it.'"

Latshaw says he got what he wanted and the course became better. "That was the turning point in my career," he says of taking the job at Oakmont.

It only got better. Latshaw went on to gigs at Augusta and Congressional, as well as other courses. In his career, he hosted four Masters, two U.S. Opens, one PGA Championship and one U.S. Senior Open. He was one of the top paid superintendents in the country.

Blow your own horn

Tommy Witt, GCSAA's new president and the new certified superintendent of the Kiawah Island Club in Kiawah Island, S.C., taught the informative one-day seminar, "Enhancing Your Value as a Golf Course Superintendent." Witt told attendees that they're important components in the financial equation of the golf course.

"You guys are generating revenue left and right," Witt said. "Don't let people forget that."

Those "people" are general managers, green chairmen, pros and golfers.

Witt stressed the importance of photography in helping superintendents gather information to improve their value. Witt said that simple before-and-after photos of golf course projects arm superintendents with tangible evidence that they're making a difference.

While Witt's philosophy makes perfect sense, there were some concerns from seminar attendees. "You're riding high for maybe a season, but how soon they forget," one of the attendees told Witt.

But Witt responded to him and all

attendees that they can't let their superiors forget the good work they do. That good work, Witt reminded them, could lead to better benefits.

"People are getting things in incentive packages that you never dreamed you could get," Witt said.

Norm!

We enjoyed Norman Schwarzkopf's keynote address at the opening session. So did others, who noted the former U.S.

Army general was one of the best speakers GCSAA has ever had.

We liked Norm's talk because he didn't just focus on how he and his 800,000 troops kicked Iraq's butt in Operation Desert Storm. He talked about what it takes to be a leader, whether

at work, at home and everywhere in between. Norm said there's no such thing as a born leader.

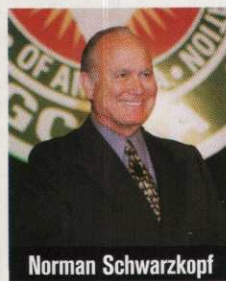
"I don't believe that certain circumstances of your birth have anything to do with your ability to lead," he stressed. "If you look back at the people in the history books who were called 'great leaders,' you'll generally find that they were rather ordinary people who found themselves under extraordinary circumstances. And because they were able to rise to the occasion, they are forever remembered in the history books as great leaders."

Another thing about Norm: He *looks* like an ex-general. We wouldn't want to cut him off in traffic.

Meet the press

As members of the usually reviled media, it was refreshing to sit in Max Utsler's media training session. Utsler, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Kansas' Lawrence campus, advised superintendents to embrace their media responsibilities, which he says could mitigate negative stories about their courses.

"You want to be out in front on stories, particularly if the press will be able to find out the information on its own,"



Norman Schwarzkopf

Utsler said. "You need to shape the story, and the only way to do that is to contact the media and give them the information first. Otherwise, someone else will end up telling your story for you."

Utsler suggests superintendents practice interview skills with their staff members before talking to reporters. Know what you want to say ahead of time, and keep that message in the forefront of your mind, Utsler said. Speak slowly when there's an important point to make, and repeat information if necessary — so the big, dumb lummoxes in the press get it right.

"The more you practice it, the better you'll become," Utsler said. "It's a lot like golf in that sense."

Sort of — except the golf ball isn't grilling you about the chemical spill on the back nine.

Don't forget the FFA

Those of you who missed the seminar on how to tap Future Farmers of America students for help on your golf course program missed an inspirational speech by Spokane (Wash.) CC superintendent Jeff Gullikson. Gullikson, whose passion and enthusiasm electrified the audience of FFA students, FFA teachers and superintendents, established a statewide partnership with the FFA as president of the Western Washington GCSA.

"Working with these students benefits everyone," Gullikson says. "The kids benefit, we as superintendents benefit and the FFA program benefits. There's no downside."

He said golf courses provide untold opportunities for students to perform experiments in soil saturation, floral design and wildlife management — not to mention turfgrass management.

"You can't believe the response you get from these kids when they come out to your course for the first time," Gullikson says. "They're amazed by all that you do. Even if they don't end up doing something in the green industry, it's possible you may turn them into golfers for life."

"Besides, there are some projects they
Continued on page 39

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The Scoop from Dallas

Continued from page 35

can help you with that free you up to do other things," Gullikson says. "It's been a great partnership, and I urge other state organizations to get involved."

Those who'd like to talk to Gullikson about the program can email him at jgulliksonwvgcsa@hotmail.com.

Back to the future

Forty years after Turfco developed the first mechanized topdresser — with the help of a superintendent — vice president Scott Kinkead decided it was time to give something back. So the company did — to the tune of \$10,000 for the GCSAA.

"We've always enjoyed talking to superintendents and using their ideas to make our products better," Kinkead says. "We decided it was time to give something back."

Kinkead posed with outgoing GCSAA President R. Scott Woodhead and a remarkably big check. Woodhead accepted the money on behalf of the association.

Woodhead turned to Kinkead and quipped, "When I first started in this industry [27 years ago], we never saw a topdresser on our small, rural course. Where were you guys?"

Kinkead pointed to the antique topdresser he had on display at the booth. "It was right there," he said, drawing laughs from the assembled crowd.

Turfco donated the money to coincide with GCSAA's 75th anniversary celebration.

Ash you think

USGA specs don't call for it, but the root zone at a particularly scenic spot on your golf course might contain — in addition to sand, soil and peat — the ashes of a departed club member. We were struck with that possibility during a discussion among a small group of professional baseball and football turf managers at the show. On

a bus ride back from the Ballpark at Arlington, they traded stories of individuals seeking permission to scatter the ashes of loved ones over their sports fields.

"Only on the sidelines," is the policy one of the turf managers came up with. Others said they consider each request individually, although they often leave the

License to Mail Gophers

It had to be one of the great public relations moves in GCSAA show history.

Prior to the show, Syngenta PR reps sent this nifty gopher, who actually sings and dances *I'm Alright*, the theme from *Caddyshack*, to industry reporters to promote its press outing during the show.



decision to a higher authority...within their organization that is.

Ringin' with anger

There wasn't a seminar or speaking event that we attended where someone's cell phone began ringing or playing some stupid song, as they're programmed to do. Even during General Norm's gig, someone's phone was chiming. Whoever that was is lucky that Norm didn't come down off the stage and berate him like Sgt. Carter chewing out Private Pyle. Cell phones ringing during these events is the epitome of rudeness. Turn 'em off next time!

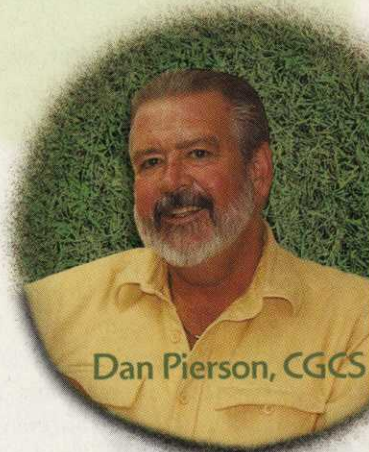
On several occasions, we felt like pulling a Bluto Blutarski in *Animal House*. Remember the scene when the dude was strumming his guitar and singing, "I Gave My Love a Cherry"? Remember what Bluto did to the guitar?

Only we wouldn't apologize for smashing your phones to smithereens. ■

Golfdom's Larry Aylward, Frank H. Andorka Jr., Pat Jones and Ron Hall contributed to this report.

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