

The Book on

# Chapters

Meeting attendance and volunteerism continue to pose problems, but association leaders are discovering ways to combat them

BY LARRY AYLWARD,  
EDITOR

**T**here are 102 affiliated chapters under GCSAA's expansive umbrella. Like people, no two of them are alike. Some have hundreds of members and some a handful. Some are located near big cities, others border the backwoods. But these local associations have one thing in common: the problems and challenges of satisfying members.

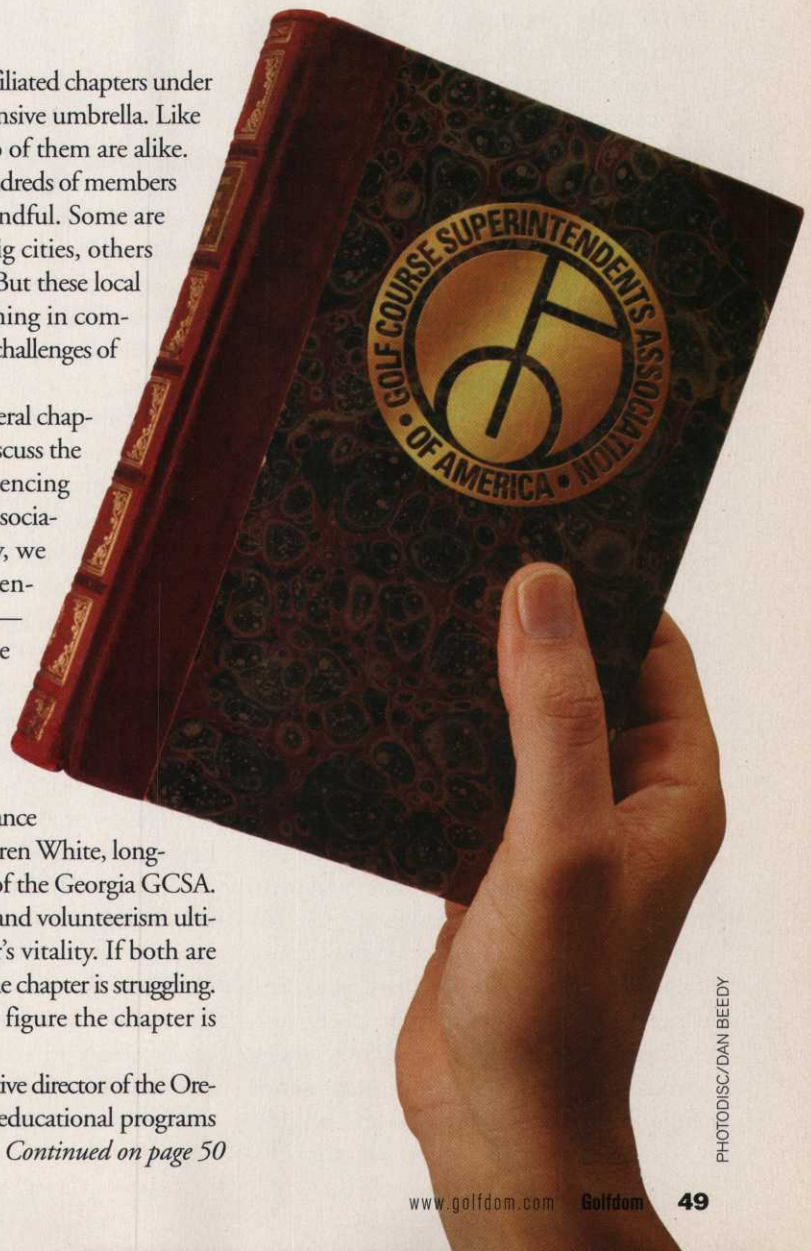
*Golfdom* spoke to several chapter leaders recently to discuss the problems they're experiencing and the states of their associations. Not surprisingly, we heard that meeting attendance and volunteerism — two problems that have plagued chapter associations for years — continue to be headaches.

"You would *always* like to have more attendance and volunteers," says Karen White, long-time executive director of the Georgia GCSA.

Meeting attendance and volunteerism ultimately reflect a chapter's vitality. If both are down, you can assume the chapter is struggling. If both are up, you can figure the chapter is sound.

Allan Clemans, executive director of the Oregon GCSA, says strong educational programs

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will attract more superintendents to meetings. Clemans says he's constantly challenged with providing value to members through worthwhile seminars. "You have to make them *want* to come," he adds.

Clemans says chapter associations must also make their educational programs interesting enough so superintendents can convince their clubs to pay for them to attend the meetings. Years ago, Clemans says chapter associations were regarded as "good ol' boys clubs." Superintendents would go to the monthly meetings, have lunch and play golf.

"But that has changed," Clemans says. "Clubs are no longer going to pay the bills for meetings like that."

Lynn Cannon, executive director of the Cactus and Pine GCSA in Arizona, says the association's meeting attendance has increased dramatically in the past few years because of improved educational programs. "We try to bring in good speakers that members know," she adds.

Rex Floyd, superintendent of Wilson CC in Franklinton, N.C., and immediate past president of the Carolinas GCSA, says more superintendent speakers will help increase meeting attendance. "I've noticed the rooms are always full when they're speaking," he adds.

Chapters also shouldn't downplay venue as a magnet for increased meeting attendance. John Shaw, certified superintendent of Rolling Hills CC and immediate past president of the Greater Pittsburgh GCSA, says attendance has nearly doubled in the past four years, partly because meetings are held at top area golf courses.

Geography will also have an impact on attendance. Brian Bossert, immediate past president of the Midwest Association of GCS, says attendance is strong at chapter meetings, except if an assembly is held outside of the Chicago area, where most of the association's members work.

Clemans says the Oregon GCSA's meeting attendance is strong, except from the far corners of the state. "It's a logistical problem," he adds.

Cannon has tried to combat a similar prob-



### **"You would always like to have more attendance and volunteers."**

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
GEORGIA GCSA

lem by moving Cactus and Pine meetings around the state. "If you go to where they are, they'll come," she adds.

Another key to improving meeting attendance is communication, association leaders say. Don't let members know of a meeting a week before it's scheduled. Georgia's White recommends mass e-mails to keep in touch with superintendents about meeting schedules and other important information.

If a chapter is healthy, more superintendents will want to volunteer for various activities. While many superintendents don't have time to volunteer, they'll find the time if they feel they're making a contribution, experts say. So when a chapter does get volunteers on board,

it has to use them effectively and not waste their time, says Don Bretthauer, GCSAA's director of member/chapter services.

"If there's not a clear understanding of what you want volunteers to do, they could become frustrated," he adds. "The key is that volunteers end up gaining from their experiences—personally and professionally."

Success of a chapter association starts at the top. If it has a strong executive director or administrator, its board of directors is able to pursue important goals and not be bogged down in busy work and bureaucracy.

Case in point: the Carolinas GCSA and Chuck Borman. For about 25 years, the association employed a part-time executive director until it hired Borman as full-time executive director in 1995.

"There was a lot of controversy about hiring him because we knew we would have to pay him a good salary," Floyd says. "We didn't know what we'd get out of him."

It turned out to be a good move by the association. Borman, who left the Carolinas GCSA last year to become GCSAA's chief operating officer, helped the chapter grow in numbers and thrive professionally, Floyd says.

Cannon is another example that chapter

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OREGON GCSA

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success has everything to do with who's running the show. When Cannon became executive director of the Cactus and Pine GCSA about four years ago, the association was floundering. Cannon says the chapter was in a sorry state partly because its board members, working superintendents, didn't have time to run it.

"But if you have someone who's hired to think and act on behalf of the membership, you'll have a stronger organization," Cannon says. "Members gave me the authority to lead them in the direction they needed to go. By having me as executive director, the board gained power and leadership."

White, who has been at Georgia GCSA



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CACTUS AND PINE GCSA

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for 12 years, started as part-time executive director but convinced the board it was a full-time job. She must be doing something right — the association has grown during her tenure to about 900 members from 350.

White says it's her goal to keep in touch with her superintendents' concerns. "We do our best to walk in our members' shoes," she says of her staff.

White and Cannon have created strategic plans for their chapters, which is vital to their success, Bretthauer says. "A clear direction of where a chapter is heading will provide incentive for people to become involved with it, which will help the association achieve its goals," he adds.

But chapter associations will always have their critics. Clemans says smaller Oregon superintendents say they feel alienated by the Oregon GCSA. They claim the association costs too much to join and is only for selected members. "They view the association as that 'country club group,' and they don't want to be a part of it," Clemans says.

Clemans sympathizes with the detractors, but he says they should consider joining, mainly for professional reasons. "They need to know that it's good to be involved in an association," he adds. ■