

As faithful readers know, I have previously returned from each year's GCSAA show with pockets stuffed full of indecipherable notes scribbled on cocktail napkins and matchbooks. I decided to change all that in 2002 by bringing along a high-tech digital Palm Pilot to record my observations and provide a well-documented and insightful article on the event. Unfortunately, I dropped the damned thing into a pitcher of beer my first night in town, so here's my usual rambling report.

Badges? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Badges! — A series of small mishaps and bad decisions snowballed into a disaster at registration on the show's opening day. The association decided to combine will-call, on-site registration and exhibitor registration into a single location. Then, after many folks hadn't received their 27-Hole Challenge scorecards in the mail, they sent them to — you guessed it — registration!

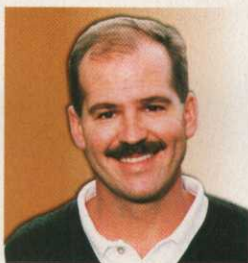
The result was like the theme from *Gilligan's Island* — a three-hour tour to nowhere. What really irritated those imprisoned in the line from hell was that — at about the two-hour mark — they shuffled by "VIP Check-In" where big wheels could pop in and get their badges in minutes without having to slum with the second-class citizens. All that said, kudos do go to new GCSAA honcho Chuck Borman who finally took matters into his own hands, apologized to those in the chain-gang and sent them into the show sans badges. Nice save, Chuck.

Never Say Never — When asked about the registration problem, Borman told me, "That will never happen again . . . and you can quote me on that." Funny, I remember being on the GCSAA staff a decade ago and telling the media exactly the same thing after a similar mess.

Apples and Oranges — The association cheerfully announced that attendance was 20,613, nearly equal to last year's (dreadful) show in Dallas. That's great considering economic and travel concerns, but it's an apples to oranges comparison. The show has historically been much stronger in Orlando than other sites because of the family draw and easy access for Florida superintendents who otherwise don't attend because they're in peak golf season. The last Orlando show in '99 drew 22,623, so let's be

Beer & Scribbles From Orlando '02

BY PAT JONES



THE SHOW HAS
BEEN MUCH
STRONGER IN
ORLANDO BECAUSE
OF THE FAMILY
DRAW AND EASY
ACCESS FOR
FLORIDA
SUPERINTENDENTS

realistic and call it a 10 percent to 15 percent drop. But at a time when most trade shows nationwide are down 20 percent or more, it's another sign that golf is healthier than expected.

Hammer(ed) — I was privileged to join Florida's Mike "The Hammer" Hamilton and a group of other distinguished — but occasionally grumpy — GCSAA online forum users for golf early in the week. What was remarkable about this — besides the fact that my cart partner, Max Bowden, can drink more beer than any human and still appear sober — was that the Doctor of Hammerology actually said something nice about GCSAA. I can't remember exactly what he said (mostly because Bowden kept restocking the cooler), but maybe he's a kinder, gentler Hammer when he isn't in front of the keyboard.

Bonus Booths — I had less time to wander around the show floor than ever before, but I did see some cool new booths that emphasized fun over sales pressure. Most noteworthy were UHS, with a bank of free video games; PBI Gordon, with a NASCAR simulator; and Bayer, with Golden Tee golf games and an appearance by hot Tour player Chris DiMarco.

Last, But Not Least — The word that GCSAA's Steve Mona collapsed and had to be resuscitated by EMTs and rushed to an Orlando hospital sent shivers through the event. Fortunately, he quickly recovered from what the association said was an "easily treatable" neuro-cardiac syndrome. A few words to this man we apparently almost lost: You're the hardest worker I've ever met (which may have led to this problem). You're honest, candid, kind and visionary. You have a great family. You're respected in both the golf community and around Lawrence, Kan. We can't afford to lose someone like you, Steve, so relax and stick around for a while.

Pat Jones can be reached at 440-891-3126 or pjones@advanstar.com