

Longtime readers may recall that I annually return from the GCSAA Conference & Show with indecipherable notes jotted on napkins, business cards, my forearm, etc. This year's big event in Atlanta was no exception. But with the help of that brilliant guy from *A Beautiful Mind*, I was able to decode my pile of useless scribbles into the following insightful (not) and in-depth (hardly) report on the 2003 show.

Atlanta didn't stink

OK, let's just say it at the top: My fears that Atlanta would be a lousy site for the show were largely unfounded. The convention center was good, the hotels were closer than expected and the bus system actually worked well. Nobody was mugged. Even the weather cooperated.

It was as if the ghost of Scarlett O'Hara hovered over the event to ensure that our visit to Tara would be as pleasant as peach pie and we'll all would want to come back again *reeeaaaaal* soon. Well, frankly Scarlett, we don't think so.

Great expectations

Exhibitors — the folks who pay the light bill for the association by ponying up for expensive booths — left the show pretty much happy. Most told me the show exceeded their expectations. Despite the lowest total attendance in years, suppliers felt that quality attendees made up for weaker traffic.

Staff of greatness

Big-time kudos to the GCSAA staff members for putting something extra into the management of the show. They knew this show would be under a microscope given last year's logistical problems (picture 1,000 angry people standing in line for badges) and concerns about the site and economy. But the execution was flawless and by week's end staff members sported weary smiles that seemed to say, "Whew! We dodged a bullet."

Know when to fold 'em

The GCSAA board bagged the planned vote that would have essentially empowered it to move the association's headquarters at will. If the board's straw poll was the same as our poll, its members knew at least five of the largest

Jots & Scribbles From Atlanta

BY PAT JONES



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chapters had told their delegates to vote against the idea. In short, the vote was a nonstarter.

Two former board members who've seen this type of stuff from the inside essentially told me the same thing: Trusting the elected leadership is one thing, but allowing a major decision like relocation to potentially come down to a 5-4 split vote just didn't sit well with anyone. Despite this setback, rest assured that the fat lady has not sung on the idea of relocation. "The board wants this badly," said one past president. "They are determined to do it."

Speaking of location

With all the talk of moving, I've been asked several times lately why GCSAA ended up in Lawrence to begin with. Well, ironically, the man who helped attract them to Kansas passed away recently. Back in 1972, Bob Billings — a visionary Lawrence developer and civic booster extraordinaire — made it affordable for the association to construct the previous headquarters next to his new Alvamar GC. Say what you will about the shortcomings of Lawrence, but Mr. Billings was a truly great man who was a great booster of the association. Our condolences and best wishes to Bev and his family as well as to certified superintendent Dick Stuntz and the whole team at Alvamar.

The final word

The relatively low attendance but overall success of GCSAA/Atlanta is reflective of the state of our chunk of this happy little industry. Sure, there are rough spots along the way, but the core of the market remains strong. Now it's on to San Diego in 2004. Great city, great weather, great golf courses ... does that combo equal a great conference and show? Stay tuned.

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