

A Town Hall With Steve Mona

GCSAA CEO addresses superintendents' concerns

According to a recent *Golfdom* poll of more than 110 superintendents, 30 percent said they are "very satisfied" with how well GCSAA serves their needs. Thirty-six percent said they are "somewhat satisfied," and 19 percent said they are "OK" with the GCSAA.

But while 85 percent of superintendents are at least content with the GCSAA, even supporters cited criticisms of the GCSAA, such as the association getting too big and too focused on clubs and courses with big money. We asked Steve Mona, the GCSAA's CEO, to address these superintendents' concerns. Below, we list the names of the superintendents and their concerns followed by Mona's responses.

Money, money

SUPERINTENDENTS' CONCERNS:

"Everything is very expensive. Education should be much more affordable for those of us at small facilities."

— Gattis Alton, superintendent of Flatonia (Texas) GC

"The cost of participating in the national convention is just about out of sight."

— Rick Tatum, superintendent of Grey Oaks GC in Naples, Fla.

Mona's response:

"We're attempting to move our education program toward one that is affordable, accessible and attainable.

That's why we've invested a lot of effort, time and energy in moving toward an Internet platform. What we see coming down

the pike soon is the day when you can take your education [courses] at 10 p.m. in your bathrobe and slippers and not have to travel to a conference site to sit in a seminar with 80 other superintendents for eight hours. There's going to be a need for [the classroom environment], but we see education increasingly moving more toward what I would call education on demand. [Also], I would beg to differ [that our education is too expensive]. If you look at the cost of one day of GCSAA education vs. private education providers, we're still very attractive [in price]."

Too big?

SUPERINTENDENTS' CONCERNS:

"The organization is getting too big. It needs to simplify operations to help save costs."

— Dan Dinelli, certified superintendent of North Shore CC in Northbrook, Ill.

"Downsize."

— Mike Rewinski, superintendent of Westhampton CC in West Hampton Beach, N.Y.

"Stop trying to get bigger — it isn't always better."

— John Gurke, certified superintendent of Aurora CC in Aurora, Ill.

Mona's response:

"Big is a relative term. I don't think we're too big, but we definitely have the perception of being a federal bureaucracy among some people. The

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problem is we're viewed as this big building in Lawrence, Kan., with about 120 faceless, nameless people. But if you dissect this organization, it's about 15 or so small business units operating within a larger structure. We don't see growth for growth's sake. It's not about having 25,000 or 27,000 members because then we generate X thousand more dollars in dues and then have an X million-dollar larger budget. We're seeking out growth objectives for reasons other than pure growth. Sure we want to grow our membership, but the main reason we want to do that is to be able to represent more superintendents and people allied to the organization, which can help us in Washington, D.C., when we're making statements to regulators and legislators. I'm not going to apologize for our growth, either. It indicates a level of success. Having said this, I can appreciate why people think [the association] has turned into this huge faceless mass. The only response I have for that is to [invite you] to come and spend some time with us. You'll see it's not that way at all."

ERS for free

SUPERINTENDENTS' CONCERNS:

(Editor's note: GCSAA's employment referral service (ERS) is a members-only weekly bulletin to help superintendents find jobs and keep current on employment trends. It costs \$50 a year.)

"Provide the ERS for free with [paid] dues."

— Charlie Fultz, superintendent of the Country Club of Culpepper (Va.)

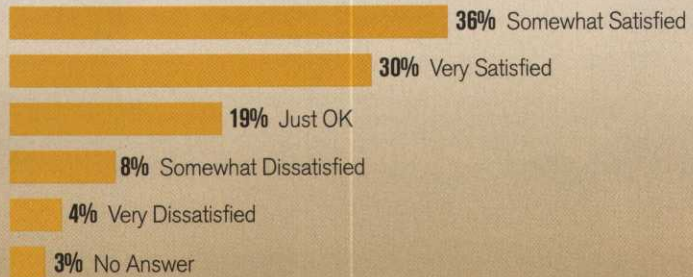
"Change the ERS."

— Bruce Williams, certified superintendent of the Los Angeles CC

Mona's response:

"This has come up before and has been discussed as long as I've been here. We can give the ERS away for

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free, absolutely. But the question is: What do we start charging for [in place of the ERS], or what do we reduce, minimize or eliminate [to save the money lost in ERS subscriptions]? There's a consequence for every decision we make. It's a simple equation and we can do it, but something else has to give."

What about the little guys?

SUPERINTENDENTS' CONCERNS:

"Cater to the smaller golf courses.

They never take the little guy into account or truly acknowledge them. Trust me, I know."

— Patrick Blum, superintendent of Colonial Acres GC in Glenmont, N.Y.

"Focus not only on the big high-budget clubs, but also the low-budget facilities."

— Scott Wohlers, superintendent of Arrowhead GC in Spencerport, N.Y.

"Support ALL superintendents, not just big budgets."

— Jeff Normandt, superintendent of Valley High GC in Houston, Minn.

"Quit catering to the rich and famous."

— Donald Pleger Sr., superintendent of the Cypress GC in Glendale, Ariz.

Mona's response:

"Obviously, there are strongly held beliefs that we're not about the little guy, and we're just about the big-budget

elite clubs. But the reality is different than the perception. A few years ago, we launched what was then known as our Limited Budget Outreach Program — which was not a membership recruitment program but designed to make available the resources of the association and its chapters to superintendents at limited-budget facilities. The program evolved and is now called the Technical Assistance Network because the stigma of 'limited budget' was deemed to be a negative. The program now works through our chapters, which identify facilities within their jurisdiction and region

"OBVIOUSLY, THERE ARE STRONGLY HELD BELIEFS THAT WE'RE NOT ABOUT THE LITTLE GUY."

that qualify for the program. The chapter can actually award a scholarship to a facility to be a member of the GCSAA for a year for free. Second, within our own public outreach efforts, I've instructed our staff to look for people and facilities to feature that are not the usual suspects. Are we 100-percent perfect with this? No. If someone from a big-budget facility wins a national award or does something outstanding, we feel an obligation to publicize that." ■