

I just completed one of my busiest years as director of communications for the Florida GCSA, and a large portion of my time and effort was spent on government-relations issues from A to W (arsenic to water).

It seemed like a lot of finger pointing and hand wringing from the environmentalists and media, which eventually filters up to the politicians and regulators for action, was generated by their continuous tunnel vision about golf courses. You know the mantra by now: big water users; runoff and pollution; rich man's game. Yada, yada, yada.

Their limited field of vision does not allow for the ebb and flow of natural forces. If something is dead or dying, man must have done something wrong, and heaven help us if a golf course is anywhere nearby.

This tunnel vision distorts their views so much they think we are sucking the aquifers dry, and spraying and fertilizing every square inch of the golf course every day. They never stop to consider that we might actually take a practical, logical, economical or environmental approach to managing our turfgrass by using alternative sources of water and applying chemicals and fertilizers only when and where needed. Will they ever see the light?

Unfortunately, tunnel vision is not limited to golf's detractors. Even the most proactive of our ranks can be just as guilty of the affliction. When the leaders, movers and shakers and visionaries dedicate themselves to Audubon's Cooperative Sanctuary Program, reams of best management practices, integrated pest-management ideas and volunteering, they end up associating with like-minded people. It is good to feed off the positive energy of all those trying to elevate our profession and the practices in the industry, but we often overlook those who don't get it, can't get it or won't get it.

And the reasons for not getting it are as varied as the duties of superintendents. You can chalk it up to the personalities of superintendents, owners and members. You can blame apathy, budgets and corporate mentality. You can blame arrogance, ignorance and intolerance. That doesn't mean that we don't have a problem right here in River City.

Both Sides Should Take Off Blinders

BY JOEL JACKSON



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While the do-gooders rightly embrace and espouse the advancements and changes to products and practices and lead the charge up Capitol Hill, there are scores of rusty weak links out in the ranks. Some of the corrosion is only on the surface, but in more cases than we'd like to admit the metal is on the verge of disintegrating and bringing us down.

In conversations with suppliers and especially superintendents turned salesmen, the stories of inadequate and disorganized pesticide storage rooms, mix/load facilities and equipment wash areas are too numerous to be acceptable. Their estimated percentage of poorly maintained facilities and lack of basic housekeeping would shock those who defend golf course operations in good faith.

We must never stop our outreach efforts and education. But we must also find a way to get fellow superintendents and owners, who ignore the sleeping giant of negative publicity, to embrace common-sense stewardship at their facilities. A broom, a can of paint and couple of bags of concrete will not bust a budget.

I want to offer my thanks to the owners who get it and understand that bad press about environmental pollution could damage their courses, reputations, pocketbooks and the game and business of golf. There are still too many owners who espouse a wait-and-see mentality and won't spend the needed dollars on infrastructure problems that continue to worsen right underneath their noses. Let's hope the light at the end of the tunnel isn't the spotlight on the six o'clock news.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.