

Put Into Words

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What does show merger spell for superintendents and owners?

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It's coming. You can hear its heavy footsteps plodding along with a thump, a boom and a rumble.

Its destination is the galactic Orange County Convention Center on International Boulevard in Orlando, Fla. That's a good thing because the most towering building in this sun-splashed city couldn't host this beast of an event.

The event is bigger than it was last year. In fact, some people might think it's becoming colossal.

But rest assured. While it's gargantuan and green, it's not Godzilla. It's the greatest show on turf — the Golf Industry Show, formerly known as the meek and mild GCSAA Conference and Show.

This is the maiden voyage of the Golf Industry Show (GIS), which now combines the annual trade shows of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) and the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA). Two smaller groups, the American Society of Golf Course

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BY
LARRY AYLWARD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Architects (ASGCA) and the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBAA), have also officially joined the GIS, although they have played roles in the GCSAA Show in previous years. In 2007, the 6,500-member Club Managers Association of America (CMAA) will join the GIS.

Earlier this year the respective leaders of the GCSAA and the NGCOA, Steve Mona and Mike Hughes, said they received nothing but positive feedback from their members regarding the merging of their shows.

"In a word, it has been tremendous," Mona, CEO of the GCSAA, said in the summer. "I've learned never to say never and never to say always, but I think the feedback that I've received has been as close to 100 percent positive as any initiative I can think of."

Some superintendents, however, have concerns about the "new" show. They're concerned that it's getting too big. They worry the GCSAA will lose its identity now that it's part of a larger show (even though the organization is the driving force behind the event). They wonder out loud,

"What's happened to our show?"

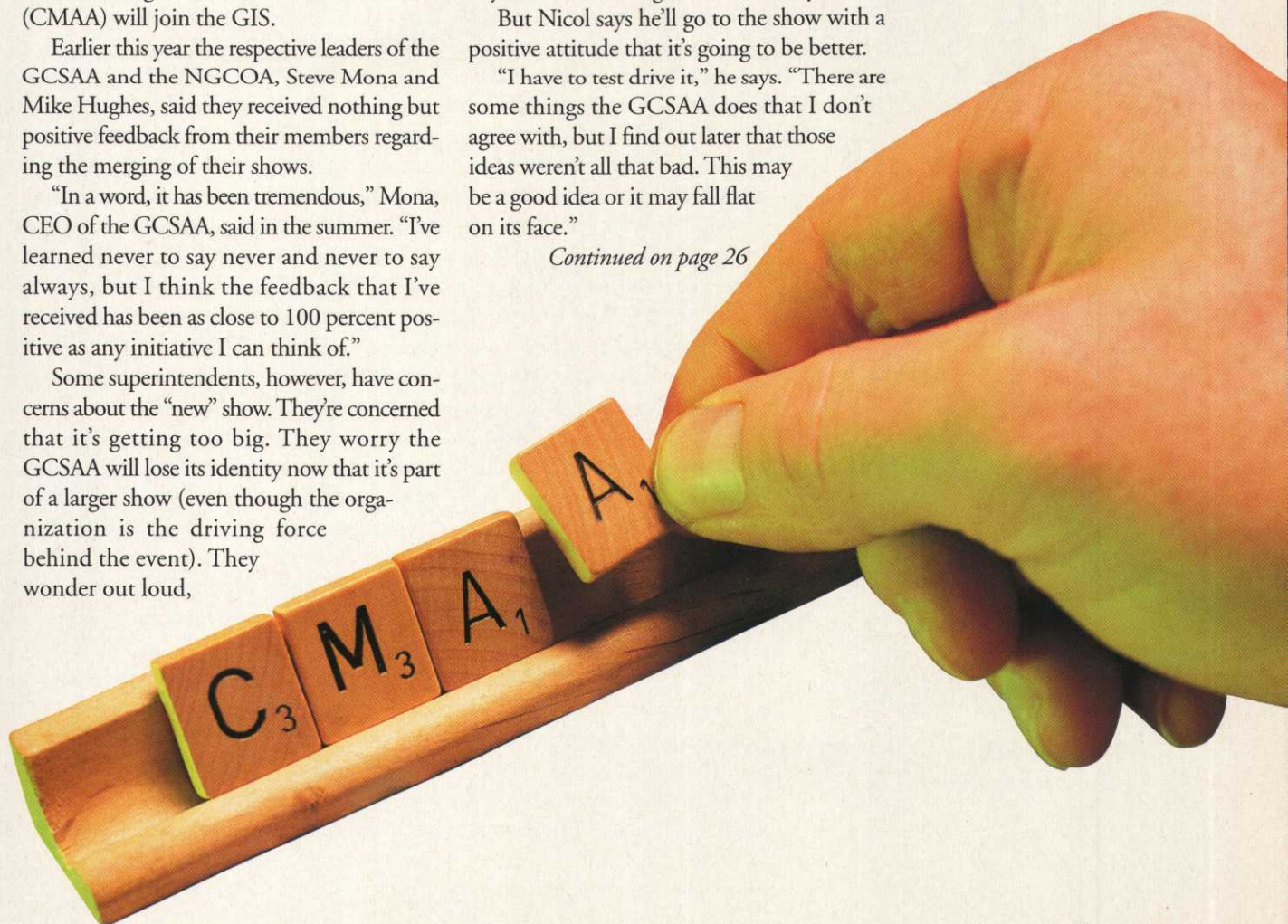
Jim Nicol, certified superintendent of Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., is concerned about all of the above.

"It's not the golf course superintendents' show anymore — it's the golf show," he says.

But Nicol says he'll go to the show with a positive attitude that it's going to be better.

"I have to test drive it," he says. "There are some things the GCSAA does that I don't agree with, but I find out later that those ideas weren't all that bad. This may be a good idea or it may fall flat on its face."

Continued on page 26



Continued from page 25

Incoming GCSAA President Tim O'Neill, the certified superintendent of the Country Club of Darien (Conn.), realizes that superintendents are concerned that the show is growing too big. While he understands how they feel, his advice to them is don't distress.

"There's a perception the show will be bigger than what it's really going to be," O'Neill says.

For those who believe the trade-show floor will be as infinite as outer space, O'Neill is here to tell you that it will only be slightly bigger than last year. There were 684 exhibitors that covered 240,000 square feet at the GCSAA show in San Diego last year. The GCSAA projects the show floor will grow to 800 exhibitors and about 255,000 square feet this year. "That's not much of a difference," O'Neill says.

Jeff Bollig, the GCSAA's director of communications, says about 21,000 attendees and 6,000 qualified buyers are projected to attend. That's compared to 19,314 attendees and 6,000 qualified buyers last year.

Mark Clark, certified superintendent of Troon Golf & Country Club in Scottsdale, Ariz., who first attended the show in 1980 in St. Louis, says attendees shouldn't worry about the show's growth because it's already big.

"It's so big now that what we're talking about is a pimple," Clark says in reference to the NGCOA joining the event.

John Carlone, certified superintendent of the Meadow Brook Club in Jericho, N.Y., has attended the GCSAA show every year since 1986, and says he has no problem with the owners joining the show even if their presence increases the event's size and scope. "It's a non-issue," he says. "We welcome them."

The bottom line is super-

intendents must get out of the show what they put into it regardless of its size, says Carlone, who plans his schedule ahead of time and jots down the companies' booths he wants to visit.

O'Neill says the NGCOA Solutions Summit, which the owners are calling their educational segment of the show, will provide opportunities for superintendents looking to enhance their careers.

"We've done surveys showing that a certain number of our members aspire to be something more than superintendents," O'Neill says, noting that GCSAA members are interested in becoming general managers and directors of golf. "It's great if our members can take advantage of those educational resources."

Carlone says he would love to own a golf course someday, and he'll only benefit from attending owners' educational segments that provide insight on how to do that.

Nicol says his curiosity will lead him to the NGCOA's show segment. "It's part of our business, so I have an interest in it."

Big brother factor

Nicol believes some superintendents go to the annual show just to play golf. "The show is secondary for them, and the golf is primary," he adds.

Not surprisingly, superintendents believe there could be an Orwellian factor at the show — as in their owners watching their every move. Will superintendents now think twice about blowing off a day's worth of educational sessions to get in 18 holes if they know their owners are watching them?

O'Neill says he's heard the big-brother-is-watching theory from others. But O'Neill says superintendents who bring their owners to the show are only helping their causes.

"The idea is to get your employers there so they can see how complex our business really is," says O'Neill, noting that the GCSAA has encouraged superintendents to bring their employers to past trade shows. "I've brought my employer to the [GCSAA show] a few times, and it has always been a positive experience."

Carlone says "it's a sad state of events" if superintendents are worried about their owners attending the show and watching over their shoulders.

Continued on page 28



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STEVE MONA,
CEO OF THE GCSAA

Continued from page 26

"It's immature," he adds. "What a superintendent should be thinking about is the good it can do [to have his owner at the show]."

For instance, it's a lot easier for a superintendent to convince his owner that he needs a new piece of equipment when he can show his owner the equipment in person, Carlone points out.

The CMAA factor

When the CMAA joins the Golf Industry Show in 2007, the show floor will grow even more — to about 300,000 square feet. While that figure is a whopping 25 percent increase from last year's GCSAA show, it's still not as

big as it sounds, says O'Neill, who recalls the good ol' days of the late 1990s when the GCSAA show floor alone was about 285,000 square feet.

An obvious reason the CMAA will follow the NGCOA to the former GCSAA show in 2007 is to please the equipment suppliers and attendees of all three of the organizations' shows. Mona says companies that exhibited in the GCSAA, the NGCOA and the CMAA shows find the prospect of going to one show "quite attractive." "Beyond the obvious efficiencies and savings, the fact that so many key decision makers are going to be in the same location is being very well-received," he added.

Superintendents won't argue the economics of the decision, but they wonder if they'll be on the outside looking in at future shows. If courses tighten their financial belts in the future and decide to send only one person to the show, some superintendents believe they'll be low on the totem pole to go.

O'Neill, however, believes a superintendent's presence at the show can't be replaced. No offense to general managers or owners, but O'Neill stresses that most of them don't have the buying experience to purchase a

major piece of equipment for a course.

"It's way more complicated than just going and kicking some tires and figuring out which is the cheapest mower to buy for the club," he adds.

Identity crisis?

Most everyone knows the GCSAA has been determined to pump up superintendents' image among other golf segments, such as pros and general managers. So why would the GCSAA want to take the word "superintendents" out of its show name?

"If [the GCSAA] is so worried about branding and marketing, why is it diluting its name out of the show," Nicol asks.

Carlone understands Nicol's point and doesn't disagree. "But I'd like to see how it plays out," he says. "Let's let a couple of years go by and see if people forget who we are."

Clark says it's more important for superintendents to promote the game itself than it is to promote them. Hence, he doesn't mind the event's new name.

"Without the game, we don't have jobs," Clark says. "I'm all for anything that's going to label or franchise or market golf. I don't think [superintendents] have to be the front-runners. "We're not going to survive in this business if we can't work together as a team with [the industry's other segments]."

O'Neill says the show has always been about change. "This is another evolution of that. We're trying to think about the future and be ahead of the curve on trade shows in what is a tough business and economy for the golf industry."

That said, the last thing O'Neill wants to risk is GCSAA losing its identity against the backdrop of the Golf Industry Show. Hence, GCSAA will not relinquish the items that helped define its show in the past, such as its popular golf tournament, distinct educational sessions and presentation of the Old Tom Morris Award.

Carlone believes the 21,000-member GCSAA will not lose its image, even after the CMAA joins the GIS, because it is the engine that drives the show.

"They're always going to be in with us," Carlone says of the other associations involved in the show. "It's never going to be us in with them." ■



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**JIM NICOL,
SUPERINTENDENT**

Show Floor at a Glance

Superintendents (and owners who have been to the GCSAA Conference and Show in the past) will notice a major difference on the floor of the first Golf Industry Show this year.

"The show floor will be set up in a way you've never seen before," says Tim O'Neill, certified superintendent of the Country Club of Darien (Conn.) and incoming president of the GCSAA. "It will be set up so it's easier to navigate."

Attendees can navigate seven different "solution centers." The centers each feature educational presentations, displays and physical demonstrations in the same area of the floor. Insiders say the setup provides superintendents and owners with networking opportunities and access to golf course management solutions.

"It will be easier for people to find the areas that interest them the most without walking all over the place," O'Neill says. "There will be activities on the show floor that will hopefully keep people more interested in being on the show floor for extended periods of time."

The seven solution center topics include:

- Green construction, which focuses on the design and construction of various greens. Billed as the trade show's centerpiece, a 6,000-square-foot green will be built on the show floor. Two-thirds of the construction will take place prior to the opening of the show, and the final stages will occur after the show opens. On Saturday, Feb. 12, the green will be complete and playable.
- Agronomics, which focuses on environmental best-management practices at the golf facility, including water management, integrated plant management, wildlife and habitat management, among other things.
- Clubhouse, which will host a series of physical demonstrations, presentations, one-on-one interviews, consultations and displays on the various aspects of clubhouse management.
- Electric vehicle test center, where attendees can test-drive electric golf cars and utility vehicles from various manufacturers.
- Equipment and maintenance, which focuses on building and maintaining the most efficient and effective golf maintenance facility, including planning, budgeting and design.
- Range, an interactive area that features a driving range, putting green and chipping surface, as well as teaching and technique demonstrations. Education sessions will focus on running a range for profit, and discussing various player development initiatives aimed at growing the game.
- Water, which features a variety of physical demonstrations and educational sessions developed in partnership with the Irrigation Association. Activities include a full-scale pump station demonstration, and education on irrigation system components, among other things.

— Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

**Did you know that different peats
can be processed to *look* the same?**