

Head Honchos



Hughes: 'We're trying to bring more value'

THEY LIKED THE IDEA for the Golf Industry Show (GIS) even before the event transpired. And they liked the idea just as much — or more — after the event occurred.

Mike Hughes says he heard good things from the National Golf Course Owners Association's (NGCOA) members when it was announced the organization would join the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) to stage the inaugural GIS last February. "I think the owners overwhelmingly approve of this," Hughes, executive director of the NGCOA, said at the time. He says he heard the same endorsements from members after the show was over. Golf course owners, accustomed to having their own annual show, were happy to join golf course superintendents to form one big event.

"I haven't heard a single, negative comment from any of our members," Hughes said recently.

They liked the show floor's design, Hughes says, adding that the show's solution centers, which featured educational displays and physical demonstrations, were also a hit.

So with one year under the belt, Hughes has no reservations about the NGCOA joining the GCSAA to put on a show.

"I'm really pleased with the relationship," he says. "I've found the GCSAA to be very fair."

While Hughes is content with the way things went last year, he says the NGCOA will do a few things differently at this year's show, set for Feb. 9-11 at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta. Like last year, the NGCOA will hold its Solutions Summit in conjunction with the GIS this year. But its educational sessions, set for Feb. 7-10, will be held in the convention center, not at a nearby hotel like they were last year in

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The "Building of the Green," a massive undertaking, was a big hit at last year's show. It won't be back this year but probably will return in the future, says Mike Hughes, the NGCOA's executive director. First, "everybody will have to forget about how much hard work it was" before they think about bringing it back again, Hughes says with a laugh.

MIKE HUGHES

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Orlando. It was hike for show attendees to get from the convention to the hotel and vice versa. The change will cut down on attendees' travel time and allow them to spend more minutes on the show floor, Hughes says.

Hughes wants time to be on the owners' sides this year so they can do just that. The NGCOA has changed the hours of its educational sessions this year so they don't compete with the hours that the trade show floor is open.

"Our presence [on the show floor] will be greater just for the fact that we'll be in front of people more," Hughes says. The move will undoubtedly allow for a better chance of interaction between superintendents and owners.

The NGCOA will also be more involved in the show's General Session, over which the GCSAA presided last year. Marcus Buckingham, author of "First, Break All the Rules"

and "Now, Discover Your Strengths," is the featured speaker. Buckingham will speak on starting your own personal strengths revolution.

Hughes is confident that many golf course owners and operators will turn out for the show, despite its relocation from New Orleans to Houston to Atlanta.

"Atlanta is as good a place for us as any place," Hughes says. "When we have an East Coast show, we always have good attendance. Because Atlanta is a business center and is easy to get in and out of, I think our attendance will be good this year."

Last year some superintendents voiced concerns about the Big Brother factor. They were worried their courses' owners and operators who were attending the show would be watching their every move. These superintendents figured they wouldn't be able to ditch a day's worth of educational sessions to play 18 holes or party into the wee hours of the morning at their hotel bars if their courses' owners and operators were around.

Hughes chuckles about the notion.

"I don't think it panned out that way," he says. "I don't recall hearing that [our members] somehow put a damper on the party."

Hughes is also aware that superintendents believe they could be the second choice behind owners if golf courses decided only to send one person to the show. Hughes insists the show needs both people there.

"The intention all along has been to do this thing as a team approach," Hughes says.

Consolidating the shows was a good business move, Hughes says, because it proclaims efficiency.

"We're trying to bring more value to both the suppliers and our own constituents, and I think that's exactly what we're accomplishing and will continue to accomplish," Hughes says.

Hughes believes the GIS has a solid future.

"In terms of trade shows in general, there's no substitute for face-to-face interaction if you're going to do commerce," he says. ■

You can reach Larry Aylward, the author of these stories, at 216-706-3737 or larryward@questex.com.