

GIS Vendors: So Far, So Good

Outside of a few worries, the Golf Industry Show thus far has almost everyone on the trade show floor smiling

BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ, MANAGING EDITOR

The Golf Industry Show, many vendors seem to agree, is “one big party” that benefits — and continues to spotlight — the superintendent. What few concerns there are about the annual conference seem to be specific to the size of the guest list and how to catalog the people listed on it.

Entering its second edition since incorporating the annual meetings of two golf course associations, the Golf Industry Show (GIS) doesn't significantly differ from its precursor, the annual Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) show. Yes, it's bigger, but, no, most believe, it's not radically altered, with less regard to the superintendent.

Mike Bandy is pleased with the show as is. The only thing that worries the marketing manager for The Andersons is the prospect of the GIS growing even larger.

This year's conference, slated for Feb. 9-



11 in Atlanta, again combines the GCSAA show with the annual meeting of the National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA). In 2007 a third group, the Club Managers Association of America (CMAA), will join the

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mix. And two other groups — the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) and the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA) — continue to have ties with the GIS.

If the growth were to stop at this point, Bandy would gladly live with it. But there is a ceiling to his content.

"I'm concerned that the show may get too big from a footprint point of view," Bandy says. "Obviously, there's a lot of ground to cover in the show. There is such a thing as too big of a show from a footprint point of view."

In addition to the physical layout, the philosophical direction of the GIS worries Bandy.

"As the GCSAA rolls other groups into the show, the show in essence kind of expands in its focus. It's even reflected in the name, going from the 'superintendent's show' to the 'industry show,' " he says. "I hope they continue to keep the superintendent No. 1 in mind and don't try to get too big and serve too many masters."

In a worst-case scenario, Bandy says, the downplayed superintendent gets bumped off the travel itinerary in favor of an owner or general manager.

"You could certainly have a situation where the owner or the green committee chairman decides, 'Well, I'll go to the show instead of you,' " Bandy says. "I really

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MIKE BANDY
MARKETING MANAGER,
THE ANDERSONS



GIS officials would be taking a gamble, some vendors feel, if they allow the show to get much bigger than it already is.

PHOTO (BOTTOM) COURTESY: BASF

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don't want to see that happen. It's dangerous for the show to lose too much of its focus on superintendents."

Not that there was anything wrong with the inaugural GIS last year in Orlando, Bandy says. "In fact," he notes, "I would argue so far that the changes have been a net positive."

Bandy commended show officials for last year's marquee event — the "Building of the Green." The construction project, which transpired in the middle of the trade show floor and lasted throughout the festivities, showcased the combined efforts of each group represented at the GIS.

"We were near the Build-

ing of the Green and we were concerned that there was going to be a lot of equipment noise and it was going to be a big distraction," Bandy says. "But it was actually an attraction. Overall, it was a good thing."

Dave Heegard has no problem with the size of the GIS. The bigger the better, says the vice president of sales and marketing for Pursell Technologies Inc.

"I think that everybody who is anybody in our industry should be there," Heegard says. "It makes sense for them to be there."

What isn't so logical to Heegard is the lack of attendee-specific information provided to vendors. He would like to see GIS officials begin to elec-

Dave Heegard, the vice president of sales and marketing for Pursell Technologies, would like to see a report that details the demographics of GIS trade show attendees.

tronically monitor the floor activities of each visitor.

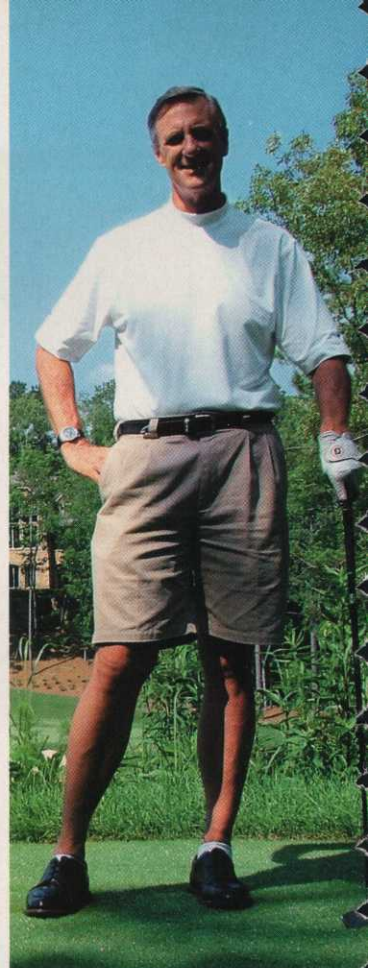
"I wish they would do a better job with all the suppliers of sharing how much time people actually spend on the trade show floor," Heegard says. "If 4,500 guys come out for education and only a thousand of them spend any significant time on the trade show floor, I'd like to know that. ... And the technology is out there to do that."

In the long run, Heegard adds, GIS officials might profit by providing such information — although a fee-for-service plan isn't the route to take.

"That should be a service they provide. It shouldn't be something I have to pay for," Heegard says. "If they were more aggressive and said, 'Hey, we've got 4,500 superintendents who are spending an average of 20 hours on the trade show floor, maybe they'll have the opportunity to charge more for their booth space rather than less.'"

Ultimately, Heegard says, trade shows may have to offer such perks in order to survive.

"Do I think my kids are going to be standing on trade show floors 20 years from now? No, I don't think so. I don't think that will be a way of doing business then. Ultimately, is what we've got a dinosaur that's going to be extinct? I think so; I just don't know what year it's



going to happen."

At Syngenta Professional Products, they are not only satisfied with the GIS thus far, they welcome the challenge of any nuances that might occur this year and in the future.

"The first thing we do is look into the mirror when we're done with these things," Joe DiPaola, Syngenta's golf market manager, says. "What could we have done better? And how do we move forward? The challenge is as much on our shoulders as the associations' in terms of getting things right."

DiPaola says he has seen no sign that the GIS diminishes the significance of a superintendent.

"In the end, I don't think the GCSAA will stay very long with something that presents that kind of threat

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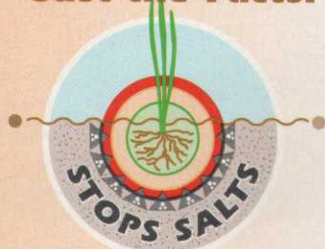
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**“We can’t just concen-
trate on one target audience.”**

MARGARET MCLEAN

SENIOR MARKETING
COMMUNICATIONS
MANAGER, SYNGENTA



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to its membership,” he says. “But at least they’re willing to try some things in a changing trade show environment to protect that investment.”

And if owners and general managers do have a heightened presence, what’s the big deal, he adds. Syngenta will adapt its approach and welcome, rather than resist, the more diverse clientele.

“We can’t just concentrate on one target audience,” says Margaret McLean, Syngenta’s senior marketing communications manager.

If anything, McLean adds, superintendents should relish the fact that their superiors are offered the opportunity to see them at their most professional.

“When you go to the show as an owner or manager, you’re seeing things that you didn’t even know the superintendents did,” she says. “It’s pretty much a grueling week for the superintendent when he or she goes there.”

Matt Armbrister, the associate customer segment manager for John Deere and Co., says whatever changes have occurred during the GIS transition have been “subtle,” thanks in large to the GCSAA and NGCOA.

“It was like merging two companies — you had two different entities with different ways of doing things and different ideas about the proper way to do things, coming together to create one product,” Armbrister says. “It was an enormous task, and I think they did very well with it.” ■