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## Off The Fringe

# Charting a Course for Growth



HAMLIN AIMS TO 'SERVE' MEMBERS AS LEADER

OF IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

She persevered over a field of 80 candidates to capture the executive director post of the Irrigation Association. But it won't be the biggest challenge for Deborah Hamlin as she leads a "fragmented" and growing Irrigation Association, which bid farewell to long-time executive director Thomas Kimmell in November.

Hamlin addressed her association's members for the first time at the International Irrigation Show in November in San Antonio.

"You can't effect change unless the entire industry is behind it," she told the crowd.

*Golfdom* spoke with Hamlin recently about her goals and vision for the association, based in Falls Church, Va. She's a certified association executive and the former executive director for the International Association of Plastics Distributors, which she operated for 10 years. During her tenure, she developed a comprehensive educational program, grew membership, reorganized the volunteer structure to streamline projects and bolstered participation at association meetings.

### Why was IA a good fit for you?

I worked for an industry association that was basically manufacturers and distributors for the past 10 years, so that certainly helps my understanding of the business and the way things are manufactured and distributed. What I'm trying to learn more about are some of the technical issues and some of the political issues.

I spent the last 10 years in Kansas City, so I'm very familiar with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (located in Lawrence, Kan.) — and I know we've had a long-term relationship with them — but I'm hoping that my connections there and my existing relationships will help build a stronger relationship.

### What is top of mind for you now eight weeks into the position?

One of the biggest things is the fact that we're partnering with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its WaterSense program. The first rollout of this WaterSense program is individual certifications. Next year, it will roll out product certifications, where you would label a product like you would an Energy Star product, except for water conservation.

Within the next couple of months, we're hoping that all of our landscape and golf exams will be EPA-endorsed. So if a person passed an IA program that has been approved, then the EPA will allow him or her to put a label on his or her business cards and brochures to prove they are using water-saving techniques in their day-to-day business. That's pretty cool.

*(Editor's note: The EPA announced Feb. 22 that the Irrigation Association Certified Irrigation Contractor and Certified Irrigation Designer programs were the first professional certifications to earn the WaterSense label. That is pretty cool.)*

### What are the most important issues that require continuity in transition?

Specifically, I'm using Tom (Kimmell) in continuity in governmental

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# Off The Fringe



## Hazard, Indeed

Joe Hubbard, certified superintendent of Broken Sound Golf Course in Boca Raton, Fla., has a new digital camera. And the alligator pictured here on Hubbard's golf course, known affectionately as Norman, has become a popular subject of the man behind the lens.

Hubbard says he's not worried about getting too close to Norman, who's about 5-feet long. "He poses no danger at this time," Hubbard says. "His dad, a 10-to-11 footer, is another question."



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relations. He can talk easier to these congressmen because I don't have the industry background right now.

### **What are your main goals in the short term of your tenure?**

One of my personal goals is to grow our relationships with our affiliate organizations.

We have a staff person that currently is traveling around and meeting with those people, so it's been an emphasis for about a year now. But I'd like to formalize the relationship and benefits for those members.

### **What will be your biggest challenges?**

Serving our diverse members. I was drawn to the industry association because you can do much more with more people and because you have the voice of everyone, but when you have everyone, each segment wants to be different. So we're in the process of coming up with programs and services to cater to each of them. We can no longer just give the same information to everybody. But electronically, we can individualize our approach. It's one-to-

one marketing; we can figure out what one person gets out of the organization and then market that to them.

### **Will you expand the IA's staff to do it?**

I don't have permission yet for that, but over the next year, it's definitely something I want to pursue.

### **How will you ensure that IA's certification program is a premium credential?**

I envision a certification board for the industry where it is an umbrella, and we acknowledge all of the certifications out there under one body.

In conjunction, there needs to be some sort of training and assessment at the lower level, and I think we are missing that. The certification board is looking at that to determine whether it is their role, and if so, is there a market for that, or should that be something that stays on the education side of things?

### **What got you on the association executive track?**

My dad had an association management company. I went to Europe for one year

of college, and I came back and had no money and no options but to work for the family business. And I thought there would be no way that I would do it for very long. So I went to get my MBA so I could make the jump to the for-profit world. But I've been able to move forward in this career and am satisfied with the positions and challenges I've had, so I haven't had to crossover yet. But it still could happen someday.

### **What are some ways you strive to hit a work/life balance?**

They key to balance is building an excellent staff that you can trust that does the things the way you know you are comfortable with so you don't have to be managing them. So in order to balance your life, you've got to spend the time in the beginning to build the culture in your office environment that allows you to balance your life so you're not worried and can let go.

I asked a mentor years ago how she balanced her life. She responded: "I got a cleaning lady." She was right. I've found that I spend money on things I never thought I'd spend money on so that I have my weekends to myself when I am home. ■