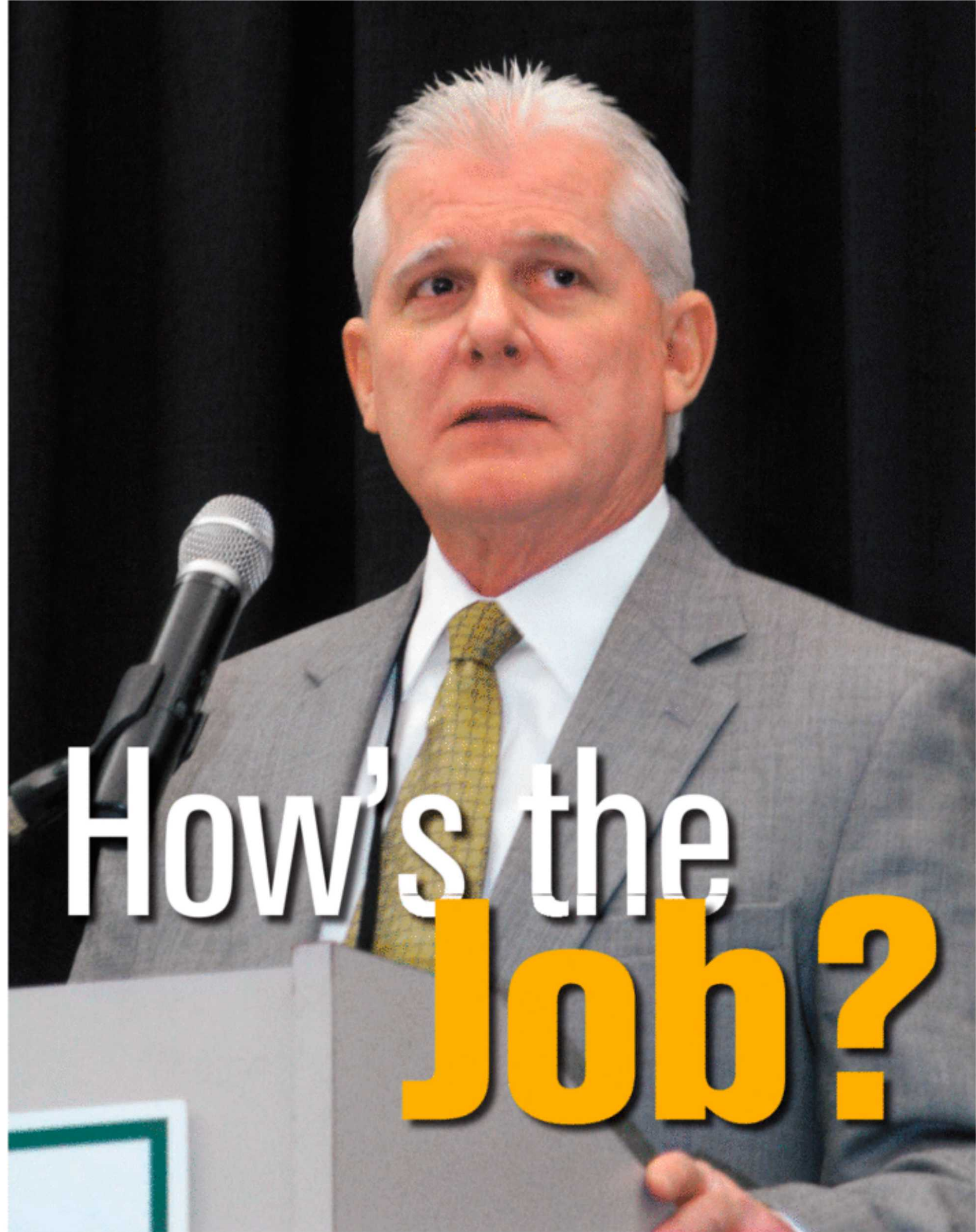




Mark Woodward talks about his first six months as CEO of the GCSAA and his plans for the association



BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Four days after hosting the U.S. Open on the South Course at San Diego's Torrey Pines last June, Mark Woodward packed up and moved his life and career to Lawrence, Kan., to become CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). Woodward, who began his post July 1, succeeded Steve Mona and is the first certified superintendent to lead the association.

Woodward, who became the director of golf operations for the city of San Diego in 2005, left Torrey Pines on a high note after an incredibly popular U.S. Open that included a finish for the ages — an injured

Tiger Woods defeating Rocco Mediate in a playoff. Incidentally, the course also made good news for its fair and challenging set up, not to mention its impeccable turfgrass.

“I couldn't have scripted it any better,” Woodward says of the U.S. Open. “It ended on a very high note for me and for my day-to-day operational career in the golf business.”

Golfdom caught up with Woodward recently to see how he's doing in his new job. Woodward, who was the GCSAA president in 2004 and a board member before that, talks about the economy, the association's members and how he plans to convince any naysayers that he's the right man for the job.

■ **So, Mark, what have you been up to for the past five months?**

■ There are a lot of things going on. I've been traveling a lot. Also, one of the things that I pledged to myself in my first 100 days was to interview all of my staff members — 112 employees. I want to get to know them personally. We talk about where they're from, their kids and their hobbies and their work here at the GCSAA. I've also been talking to the CEOs from the other golf associations and picking their brains about what they do in their organizations and getting their advice.

■ **Do you plan to change the GCSAA in anyway?**

■ We're a member-driven organization, and we're doing all we can to serve our members. I'll be the one out in the industry representing the association, so the face of the association changes from Mona's to mine. I've been to many shows as a member, and it's the first time I'll be on this side of the table. I want our members to know that we have 112 staff members here dedicated to providing programs and services for them. I want our members to know that we're here as a resource to them and to help them advance their careers.

We have great relationships with our allied golf associations, and that's something I'm going to perpetuate and enhance. That's one of the reasons I've been on the road so much — I've reached out to these folks and gone to their offices and sat down and talked to them and let them know that we really want to have a strong relationship with them as we move forward through the issues that are facing the industry.

■ **Have you thought about any long-term or short-term goals?**

■ I've put a lot of thought into them. The economy is a huge issue right now. Even when the economy was good, the golf industry was flat at best in some parts of the country. Even when the economy does recover at some point — and I know it will — will golf recover with it? That's one of the challenges we face because there's slow development.

One of the things we're really focused on

right now is that we've been selected as an industry leader in the environmental arena. As an association, we're the right people to lead in the environmental arena. You read in the paper every day and hear on the news every night about environmental issues. We play a key role in that. So we're going to lead the charge in collaborating with all of our allied golf associations, which gets back to us having strong relationships with them.

Another thing we need to focus on is our membership growth and retention. That's a challenge right now with the way the economy is. If we can retain our membership at the current level, I would be happy this first year or so until the economy gets better. But, ultimately, we need to grow membership.

The economy is a challenge for all of us. Right now, it's the No. 1 thing we're worried about. It affects our budget here at the GCSAA. I've gone through every single line item in our budget with my staff. It's a large budget. We did this so we can see where we can get the most value out of the money and resources that we have.

■ **How healthy is the association financially and from a membership perspective?**

■ The association is in pretty solid shape financially. We have no debt. We own our own building. We have a healthy reserve in case we get into troubled times like we are right now.

Membership in 2008 went up very slightly, but it has gone down a little bit the past few years. I would say flat is a good description of the growth of our membership. (Editor's note: Membership is about 20,000. A \$20 membership increase went into effect last May bringing annual dues to \$320.)

It's a challenge right now to get some of our members to see the value we provide as an association. But you never really understand the programs and services we have to offer until you get in this building and see them. It's really staggering and impressive. And that's my challenge — to try and get that word out to our members about what we have to offer them, whether it's through

Continued on page 36

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Woodward's Peers Like That a Superintendent Is Leading Them

Golfdom recently surveyed readers about Mark Woodward becoming the first superintendent to lead the GCSAA as its executive director. We asked readers: What do you think of the association's selection?

52 It's great that an executive director knows exactly how to do our jobs

35 Not every agronomist could do a good job, but Woodward is a good fit

12 We should have a professional association executive leading us

Based on 626 responses

Continued from page 35

troubled times or to help them do better at their jobs. One of the things I'm going to do personally is stay very engaged and connected with our members because I understand their plights. I've been through them in my career. After 35 years you see just about everything there is to see at one time or another. I plan to get out and speak to the chapters and interact with members and hopefully get feedback from them about what it is we can provide to make their association better.

■ **What do you say to members who say they're not getting the bang for their buck in terms of membership dues and education?**

■ That's an interesting question. I don't think I fully understood what the GCSAA had to offer until I sat in this seat right now. I think the association needs to do a better job of telling that story. If you have an issue or you think there's something we can do better, please tell us because we need your feedback. Also, there's nothing sacred around here in terms of programs and services. If we find that there's a program or service that's not meeting the needs of our members, I'd be glad to look at it, analyze it and do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis on it and see if it's something that we need to rethink, retool or eliminate and channel those resources into something that gives members the benefits they need. When we talk at our chapter meetings and we interact with our chapters and our boards and our members, invariably it comes out, "Oh, I didn't know the GCSAA did that." If you have our phone number — 800-472-7878 — and call us, we're going to be able to help you and give you the value you need. That's our mantra here — "members matter most."

■ **Are you re-examining the support and resources that GCSAA board members should and shouldn't receive?**

■ When I was on the board, I headed up a committee at one time to address that issue. I understand the members' concerns about this, but I also understand the other side

of the coin. Our board members put in a lot of time and blood, sweat and tears, and they have a lot of passion for what they do here. And they represent this association at many events around the country and even the world. And it's important they have the resources needed to do that job.

■ **As CEO of the GCSAA, what to you is money well spent, and what to you is money not well spent?**

■ Money well spent gets back to having staff to provide the members with programs and services that the members desire. With that in mind, however, I'm looking at every position here and making sure that we're aligned. Part of my job in the organizational structure is not only to look at the leadership team that reports to me, but to look at what's under that leadership team. In the past, it has been a little bit out of balance in terms of areas of responsibility. I want to clean that up a little bit from an organizational standpoint. That forces us to look at every position in the association to make sure we're getting what we need out of that position.

My focus as far as money well spent is getting the most bang for our buck in terms of member programs and services that we provide. We don't want to provide programs and services that don't have value.

When the economy gets better, I hope to grow the budget and get more resources. But right now I'm just focusing on what we can do with the resources we have. And it's pretty tight. I'm not going to kid anybody.

■ **Even though you're a superintendent, do you still feel like you have to prove yourself in this position?**

That's an interesting question. I've received many comments and e-mails and letters and phone calls from people who congratulated me and said I was the right choice. I'm sure there is a percentage of people out there who think I was not the right choice. I understand that. You're not going to please everybody in everything that you do at this level. But I will do my best to make this association better. I'll put my heart and soul into this place. If there are naysayers who aren't convinced I'm the right person for the job, I will convince them that I am. ■