



If I Ran the Golf Industry Show

... I'd get Bill Murray (Carl Spackler) to speak and I'd host a laser-tag game on Saturday morning — among other things

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.

I've been attending the Golf Industry Show for more years than I can remember. Now, each year always seems to be a little different than the one before — sometimes for the better, sometimes not. The GIS powers that be are constantly looking for new ways to improve our wintertime, week-long conference and show experience.

I, for one, applaud this very valuable effort, so much in fact that I'm going to offer a few light-hearted ideas of my own that I feel would drastically improve the GIS. For the record, the powers that be can feel free to implement any or all of my suggestions.

The keynote speaker

I have two words for you — Bill Murray. This is the easiest decision to make since it was decided that jelly should be spread on top

of peanut butter. Few industries have a cult-worshipped icon the magnitude of the “Caddyshack” character Carl Spackler, played by Murray. While some superintendents feel his “unprofessional demeanor” insulted our profession, most of us feel the exact opposite, not to mention the millions of golfers who quote the movie like gospel. We embrace his over-the-top, gopher-hunting antics and flower-demolishing golf swings, while recanting the “Cinderella story.”

The “real” Cinderella story would be Murray standing up at the GIS to give us 45 minutes that would live for an eternity in our memories.

The trade show

I've always wondered exactly where the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America finds the door attendants who

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guard the trade-show floor entrances like it's Fort Knox. These often elderly Wal-Mart type greeters take their very limited authority a little too seriously at times by stopping us and carefully inspecting our name badges for the correct color to gain access.

Perhaps it's time to end the reign of the door-Nazi concept and begin a new tradition of runway models handing out Krispy Kreme doughnuts and Starbucks coffee. As Homer Simpson poetically stated, "Donuts. Is there anything they can't do?"

I would also award .25 continuing education units (CEUs) to any members who can walk the entire trade-show floor in less than six hours. I would further award an additional .25 CEUs if those same members don't have to take multiple doses of pain relievers the next day. Seriously, the show floor is getting so large that soon attendees will need compasses to navigate it. I can hear attendees say now, "The Toro booth is three clicks northwest of the John Deere booth and two clicks south of the media center."

By far, the most frustrating thing about the trade show is walking through the aisles and having to zigzag around the small cluster of attendees who feel that the middle of the aisle is the ideal spot to hold conversations. These incredibly inconsiderate people are so oblivious to the other people who are actually walking in the aisle that they should immediately be removed from the show floor and placed in small detention cells outside the entrance doors for others to openly mock.

OK, let's talk about the ribbons. Can we pass some type of rule that limits the number of ribbons that one attendee is allowed to wear on his or her name badge? This is getting way out of hand. I think I saw one attendee actually trip over his ribbons last year in Orlando. People, this is a professional association, not the military! More ribbons do not indicate a higher rank of membership. (My apologies to the certified

golf course superintendent member who also serves on a GCSAA committee, and is his chapter's voting delegate as well as a member of the Golden Tee Club.)

I would make sure that the "employees" who run the GCSAA Bookstore are a little more familiar with what the GCSAA is and does. Last year, an "employee" who took my credit card and bagged my new \$65 GCSAA logo golf shirt asked me, "What do you guys do again? Play golf?"

Unbelievable.

Vendors

I have a huge amount of respect for the amount of work it takes vendors to set up and man their booths for two and half days of sheer networking fun and excitement. However, there are a few areas that warrant some changes.

Companies should not be allowed to have a trade-show booth that exceeds a typical golf course maintenance facility and clubhouse — combined. People literally get lost going from one side to the other in these behemoths of the trade-show floor. Is it really necessary to show every piece of equipment every year at the show? Do us all a favor and scale down these enormous booths.

Also, the excuse of keeping it so big because the "other guys have booths that are sooo big" no longer has value. Remember what your mother always said, "If the other guy jumped off a bridge, would you jump too?" If your answer is "yes" to this question, then it certainly shows who is leading the industry and who is following.

I would also enforce a booth mandate that states that companies that have not changed their booth designs since the Richard Nixon administration will be forced to dress in 1970s-style clothing.

You know who you are!

And if you decide to keep that retro-style design, you must take it a step further in your wardrobe. Just think how far out you will look wearing those lime-green leisure suits and bell-bottomed pants!

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Can you dig it?

Any booth playing obscenely loud music or any other completely obnoxious attention-getting marketing ploy will be forced to pay double its original booth fee and triple its original drayage charge. I will, however,

waive the drayage charge if you can simply and accurately explain to me what “drayage” means.

One final note: Every attendee will get to vote for the coolest booth on the show floor. The winner of the coolest booth gets free booth space for the following year’s show. And, by the way, “cool” is completely subjective.



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Special events

I would hide five “golden membership” tickets throughout the trade-show floor. Whoever finds one gets an automatic upgrade in GCSAA membership — superintendent members move up to Class A and Class A members move up to CGCS members. Sorry, CGCS people, you are ineligible for this event because you have reached the pinnacle status in the eyes of the GCSAA. But, hey, you still have the invitation-only lunch to look forward to.

Speaking of the CGCS invitation-only lunch, I would have 10 unidentified Class A members crash the event so they can learn what it means to be “recognized for their superior levels of achievement in golf course management,” according to GCSAA marketing materials on certification.

Superior? Really?

In the center of the show floor, I would have each of the Big 3 equipment companies enter a new, yet slightly modified greens mower into a large-scale version of a Battle Bots competition — three go on, only one comes out. Think of it in terms of Mad Max in “Thunderdome.”

And, finally, on Saturday morning the show floor would become the scene of the “Guinness Book of World Records” largest indoor laser tag game. Talk about a way to increase traffic flow on the most boring and desolate day of the show!

Game on! ■

Gray, general manager and golf course superintendent of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky., is a Golfdom contributing editor and editorial advisory board member. He is available as a consultant (paid, of course) to the GCSAA to help plan next year's show.