

On With the Show

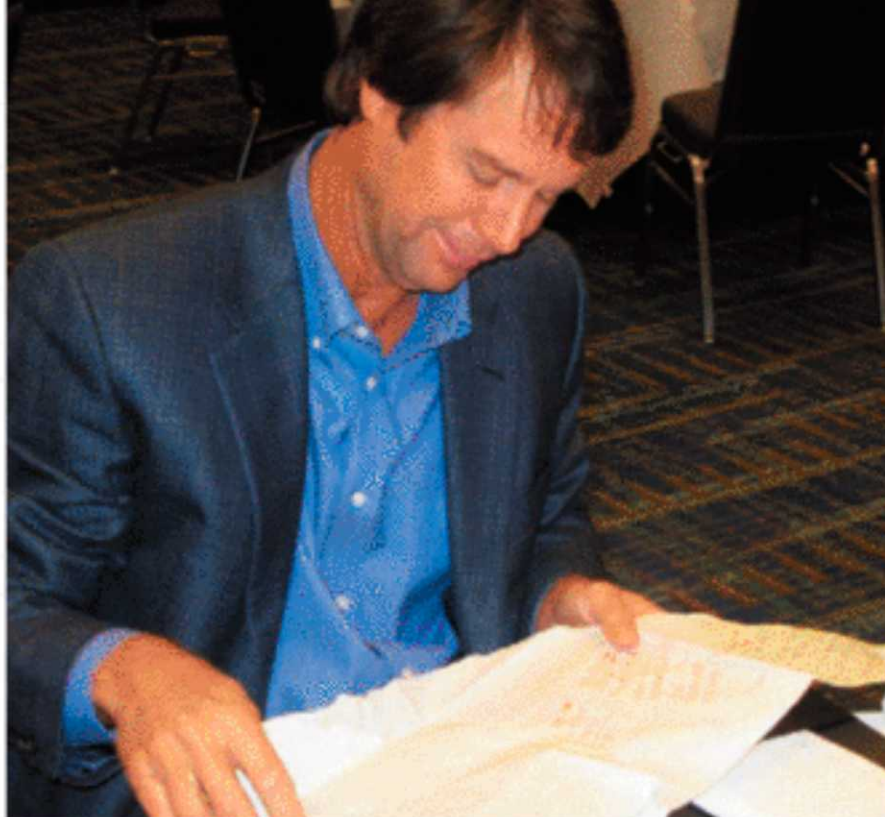
Continued from page 26

Attendance aside, there is plenty of news to report from the show. While we'd need a book the size of Chef Paul Prudhomme's cookbook (did you happen to eat at his restaurant K-Paul's Louisiana Kitchen?) to report it all, we'll do our best to report some of the happenings.

A Zinger of a Story

Paul Azinger, who delivered the keynote address during the opening session, reflected on his relationship with Mark Wilson, certified superintendent of Valhalla Golf Club, where Azinger captained the U.S. Ryder Cup team to a win last fall.

"Mark and I became friends immediately," Azinger told



Paul Azinger scribbled notes for his speech on ruffled paper.

have set up their home courses over the years.

Then Azinger told this story in his best Wilson voice about satisfying a request from Ryder Cup team member and well-known big hitter J.B. Holmes. It all started during a practice round when Assistant Captain Olin Browne called Azinger on the radio. Here's how it went, according to Azinger:

Browne: "Zinger, I'm standing by this tree on 16. It's like 300 yards off the tee. There's a tree limb up about 30 feet in

Continued on page 30

Looking For Answers ... In the Moment

Seminar speaker will never forget this education session

By Christopher S. Gray Sr.

I'm not really sure why it happened, but for the first time in many years of speaking at the Golf Industry Show, there was an uncommonly large amount of audience participation in the education session, "In the Moment ... The State of Public Golf." And to be absolutely honest, it was refreshingly wonderful to be a part of an open and honest exchange of ideas and stories.

Perhaps the economic struggles have hit home so hard that superintendents and owners alike feel the overwhelming need to share ideas and problems in order to see what others are doing simply to survive this particularly difficult recession. About 100 attendees passed on the newly opened trade show to attend this particular session in hopes of finding some practical methods and ideas in cost-saving programs as well as some interesting ways to attract new golfers while retaining the ones they already have. Or maybe they just wanted to share their problems.

In all, the session proved to be an emotional interaction, not only between the speakers and the audience, but also amongst the audience themselves.

I started the session with my presenta-

tion, "Creative and Affordable Environmental Stewardship Programs." While outlining the multiple programs that have saved my facility thousands of dollars, I was repeatedly stopped by audience members asking more detailed questions about the programs such as how to get started, what is the return on the investment and what tax credits might be available for certain programs. For me, this was a first. I had never had anyone ask questions during my presentation. Unlike years past, this audience was truly into the real applicability of these programs to their courses and wanted to learn everything they could about them — and in much more detail than I had ever anticipated for a 25-minute presentation.

I informed everyone that I would make myself available after the session to answer more specific questions. If I hadn't, I could have easily taken up the entire hour and a half.

When I finished, Brian Zimmerman from the Wisconsin Parks Department took over and spoke on a variety of successful revenue-driven programs. The audience again appeared to hang on every program Zimmerman introduced and hands shot into the air for a chance to ask specific questions on each of them. It was simply remarkable how

interested the audience was to learn of new way to attract more golfers to their facilities.

After Zimmerman's talk, the moderator opened comments and questions to the audience by asking, "What is the state of public golf right now?" The question struck a nerve. Attendees began sharing specific problems, such as dealing with shrinking budgets and reduced play, laying off assistants, and how to survive the upcoming season. The list went on and on.

To me, the feeling of the room was more of a support group than an education session. When someone finished telling a story, he actually had a look of relief on his face. It's a sensation I've never experienced before in an education session.

When the seminar reached its time limit, there was applause — not so much for Zimmerman and me, but more for everyone who participated in the open discussion and shared a small part of themselves for which we all emphasized and felt compassion. In the end, this was an education session that I, as a speaker, learned more from the audience than the audience learned from me.

Gray, general manager and superintendent of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky., is a Golfdom contributing editor.

