

Trends, bends, ups and downs dotted the landscape of the entire Green Industry this year. The wild ride of the economic slide slowed down a little bit and gave people a chance to evaluate their business operations. Budget cuts seemed to hold the line in many cases, and small gains were made here and there depending on how much the economy stabilized in various regions of the country.

Feedback indicates that lots of strategic planning is happening in all agricultural and Green Industry commodities and associations as they discuss how they will move forward in these uncertain times. The uncertainty was hammered home all the more this week when the congressional Super Committee couldn't reach an agreement on managing the national debt. If our representatives in Congress need a lesson on doing more with less, they need only to return home and visit the superintendents on their local golf courses.

Clubs learned that superintendents can't really do more with less, but superintendents did learn they could still maintain their courses with less than before. It takes more creative management, teamwork and a big dose of understanding by the membership to make it work. Thanks to the slight leveling of the economy, some clubs were able to put money back into their budgets, giving superintendents the resources needed to maintain acceptable course conditions.

Communications was an area ripe for learning on many levels. The most obvious is how, when and where a superintendent communicates with club members and management. While golf club operations and expectations vary across the board by type and location, certain elements remain constant. First you have to know how to read people. You also must know how best to deliver your message. To offer your best assessment of any issue, always be honest and do your homework.

Second, try to identify allies among the club's members. You don't have to fight all your battles alone. By continuous reports in club newsletters and on websites and blogs, you can reach a lot of members and inform them of

Lessons Learned from 2011

BY JOEL JACKSON



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what's happening on the course.

Another lesson learned in 2011 was that strengthening communications and cultivating relationships with regulators and legislators can pay dividends. One of the best examples is the GCSAA Action Alerts that allowed all of us the opportunity to easily make our voices heard on several national issues, such as water quality regulations, visiting worker labor laws and disaster relief. At the local level we continue to educate water authorities about just how efficient superintendents can be regarding water use.

While south Florida was placed on Phase 1 restrictions beginning in March, the district included a variance application process for those courses engaged in renovation and regrassing projects. Through conversations with people in the Green Industry, the district now understands the economic impact of golf courses and has learned we are efficient stewards of our water resources. We still face possible restrictions as an exceptionally dry cool season is being forecast and the flocking winter snow birds will be stressing the slow-growing turf.

Last but not least, we learned that we need to do a better job of communicating with the media. We need to educate reporters on the big picture and give them a golf course tour when activists aren't grabbing the headlines with outrageous claims. We need to let the media experience the wildlife and natural beauty on our courses. Then we can demonstrate to them how we use the science-based principles of biology, ecology and hydrology to manage turfgrass. Most of all we need them to understand that activist ideology is not a science.

Happy Holidays to all. Hope to see you in Las Vegas!

Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.