

# Go Small or

GIS 2012  
SPECIAL

REGIONAL SHOWS ARE KEEPING SUPERS CLOSER TO HOME. THE INTERNET IS OFFERING MORE EDUCATION THAN EVER. DOES THE GIS NEED TO GO SMALL IN ORDER TO GET BIG? **BY SETH JONES AND BETH GERACI**

**R**hett Evans, GCSAA CEO, might not have been to too many Golf Industry Shows in his life, but he's fully aware of how important it is to the association he now runs.

"(GCSAA's) overall budget is almost \$16 million. The services and programs we offer — the education, our website, advocacy, government relations — a little over 50 percent of those services are funded by the GIS," he says. "That's a big piece of the pie."

And that slice of pie has shrunk at an alarming rate over the last few years. The largest Golf Industry Show ever was held in Orlando in 2008. That show welcomed almost 26,000 people to a trade show that exceeded 300,000 square feet. Last year, in the same city, the show saw only 14,781 attendees and a trade show of only 180,000 square feet. Respectively, the show saw 45 percent fewer attendees and was 40 percent smaller.

Has the GIS hit rock bottom? And how can the GCSAA keep the show relevant to today's superintendent?

## **Hemorrhaging members and rounds**

It does not take a Ph.D. to determine that the Golf Industry Show was hit hard by the slumping economy.

"The entire golf industry suffered significantly from the recession that gripped the U.S. and other parts of the world," says Steve

Mona, the CEO at the World Golf Foundation and the former CEO of GCSAA. "Golf depends on the facility being robust. You had facilities hemorrhaging members and rounds. It's a domino effect to the rest of the industry."

Sure, the economy has hurt the GIS. But is the national show looking over its shoulder at other factors, such as regional trade shows or the fact that more educational opportunities are available online for superintendents?

"I always viewed regional shows as complementary. Having said that, in the new world that we live in, I could see regional shows being perceived as being competition," Mona says. "To travel by car, for fewer nights and less expense? I could see that being a choice."

One regional show that is thriving is the Carolinas GCSA Conference and Show. In 2011, the show sold more education seats than it ever had before at 1,364. Trade show exhibit space was sold out, and the event netted the association \$600,000.

Tim Kreger, executive director of the CGCSA, says that the GIS will always be important to superintendents, but he also points out that the Carolinas show brings in the same speakers as the GIS.

"I think the main challenge is, when it comes to maintaining your own budget, one of the easiest things to do is cut out profes-

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# Go Home

sional development,” Kreger says. Consequently, he adds, clubs are making superintendents pay for the GIS out of their own pockets instead of the club paying for it.

Kreger says if he was a superintendent at a low-budget course and the money to attend a show came out of his own pocket, he'd choose the local show because it offers just as many benefits as the national show.

“When you're looking at percentages, clubs are paying more for superintendents to go to regional shows instead of national shows,” Kreger says. “They're relying more on

regional shows for educational opportunities. The cuts in budget and the opportunity for education at regional shows is making for the perfect storm.”

Brent Fuhrman, CFO and COO of FarmLinks, the research and demonstra-

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tion facility in Alabama, says regional shows and industry events such as those FarmLinks hosts do not prevent superintendents from attending the GIS.

"We just do not see ourselves as a competitor of the GCSAA," he says. "We are a complement to the overall educational desire in the industry... Obviously, when you're dealing with the economic realities in the industry and the demands on people's time personally and professionally, there are decisions people in the industry have to make on where they're going to spend their time."

FarmLinks and the Golf Industry Show offer two different things, Fuhrman says. FarmLinks allows for close interaction and deep conversation among colleagues seeking solutions to problems. National shows, on the other hand, allow superintendents to see all the options available to them.

"From my perspective, what's great about all these shows is you have an opportunity to see the breadth of options of what is available. There's a negative in that too in that you can't dig deep simply because of the time it takes to get around. You go wide but you can't go deep at a show," he explains. "But again, if I'm trying to get (educated) I think a show nationally or regionally makes a lot of sense."

### Change your model

Another potential enemy of a national trade show: the internet.

Mark Woodward, president/owner of Mark Woodward Associates, LLC, a golf operations consulting firm, and a former CEO of GCSAA, says that on-line education caught on with the implementation of the association's Professional Development Initiative.

"That was about attainable, affordable education, so members could maintain their status as a Class A or certified member," Woodward says. "People can now take online classes and easily get points at the local level. You can maintain your status by staying home."

Mona agrees the internet has changed the way business has been conducted in the last five years.

"People don't just jump on planes and fly halfway across the country to have a lunch meeting anymore," he says. "People are much more conservative in how they use their time and their resources."

### Hard times

Another major issue hurting the show is the cost of attending. It was the main obstacle that could keep people from attending, according to a *Golfdom* survey (see page 25).

"I know a lot of superintendents out of work right now. In my mind, the show is still something people should try to go to," Wood-

KEEPING  
THE GIS  
STRONG

## WE ASKED FOR ONE BIT OF ADVICE TO THE GIS, AND THIS IS WHAT WE HEARD.

**TIM KREGER**  
executive director,  
Carolinas GCSA

Condense. That's my one-word answer.

When you have a golf tournament and then you have the trade show, too, you could potentially be gone from your job for 10 days. People's time is way too valuable these days. We shrunk our conference from four days to three days four years ago and it was the greatest thing we ever did. Our vendors and the members really appreciated it. It benefited both sides equally.



**STEVE MONA**  
CEO, World Golf Village

Stay in tune with what is going on in the world generally, and in the golf course management industry specifically. And don't be afraid to try some things that are innovative that maybe aren't tried and true but could break some new ground.

Maybe get ahead of what people think they want. That was the beauty of the iPod—we didn't know we wanted it until we saw it.



**MARK WOODWARD**  
President, Mark Woodward  
& Associates

The GIS needs to be relevant and the superintendent needs to convince the owner that it's a value-added experience to spend that time away from the golf course.

When a golfer plays your facility, you often have a value-add so when he pays, he feels he got more out of his money. The GIS needs to make sure superintendents get that value-added experience, so they can show the owners it was worth the investment.







ward says. "But I fully understand the flip side of the coin. As I've traveled around I've heard comments like, 'I can't afford to go if my club isn't sending me.' And if they can afford it, they can't afford the time away from the course."

"When you hear of (attendees) having to minimize their travel expenses and share rooms because they're paying out of their own pockets, that's a recipe for disaster," Justin Apel, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association of America, says. "I think if the courses made the investment they would see immediate results. That owner, manager or operator ought to attend with the superintendent, because it's a team effort. There's just as many educational opportunities for them to attend. And then on the show floor, it's a team approach."

Until last year, FarmLinks surveyed superintendents attending its events on their views of the GIS. According to Fuhrman, leading up to the 2011 GIS, 43 percent of responding superintendents said they were skipping the show because of club budget cuts.

But the 2012 show will be different, Fuhrman says.

"I feel there is pent up demand for this particular show," he observes. Whereas club budget cuts stopped supers from attending the 2011 GIS, he says, "now there is certainly some possibility that people have been holding

off on buying equipment. So now they are in a position where they're going to make some major capital purchases. They now have needs they need to address."

Evans is confident that this year's show will at least be bigger than last year's show — and that's a move in the right direction.

"I think people hunkered down for a little while and said that the timing wasn't right," Evans says. "We're starting to see that come around. People have gone through that life cycle and they're saying, 'OK, I need to get back in the swing of things.' Our seminar seats are higher by 12 percent. That's a good sign."

### **Shorten the show?**

Evans says that the GIS is like the GCSAA's Super Bowl. There are a lot of practices and games that lead up to that one moment. "I love it because I can go out and attend chapter meetings, meet members, and then there's a culminating event where we can all come together," he says.

Evans plans to take care of the big game, and he is happy to say that he's been thinking about how the GIS can be changed for the better.

"The first thing we're looking into, and it's a key factor in bringing people together, is time. I think for the most part, budgets are

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**Superintendents don't have to travel to the national show to get CEUs anymore. Much more convenient, they're also available at the click of a mouse.**

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stabilizing,” Evans says. “But what they’re not given any more of is time. There’s only so much time in a day.”

Evans adds that the show may be too long, considering that from the beginning of the GCSAA Golf Championship to the end of

the educational conference, it’s possible a superintendent could be away from his course and his family for 9 to 10 days.

“That’s an extremely hard thing for people to do. How do we compress the week and consolidate things? Are there items that need to be overlapped? There might be choices you have to make during your stay,” he says, “but you have to shrink down the amount of time it takes to attend the show.”

Mona says he’s seen it firsthand with the Golf 20/20 meeting. Ten years ago, the meeting was 2-and-a-half days. Last year’s meeting was only seven hours long, he says, and yet half the group of 115 left at lunch. He plans on cutting the 2012 meeting to four hours.

“We’ll run it from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., then we’ll say ‘Here’s lunch if you want it, if not, have a great rest of your day,’” Mona explains.

Evans says that a condensed GIS schedule is still at least two years away. Contracts for the GIS — with convention centers, hotels, golf courses — are signed a few years in advance. But he sees that a change to the schedule could come as soon as 2014.

**Making the most**

What 2012 and Las Vegas holds for the Golf Industry Show remains to be seen. But Mona believes that the GCSAA is doing all it can to keep the show relevant.

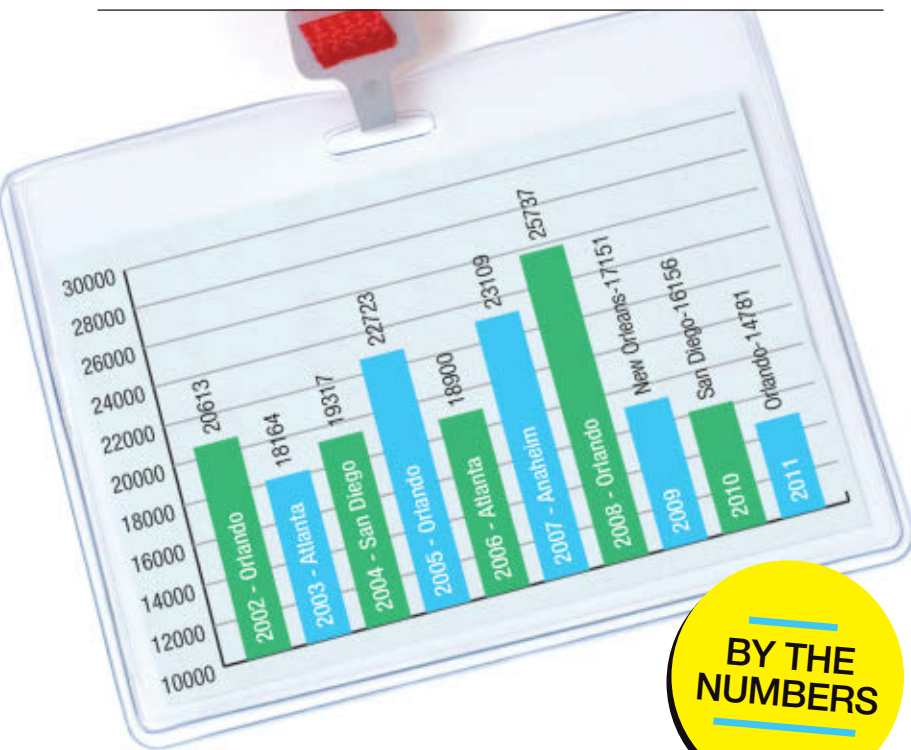
“During my tenure, we had it boiled down to three cities — Orlando, New Orleans and San Diego,” Mona recalls. “I’ve noted that Las Vegas and San Antonio are back in. I give GCSAA credit for going to cities that members want to go to.”

If the show never gets back to 300,000 square feet, that might not be the worst thing for attendees.

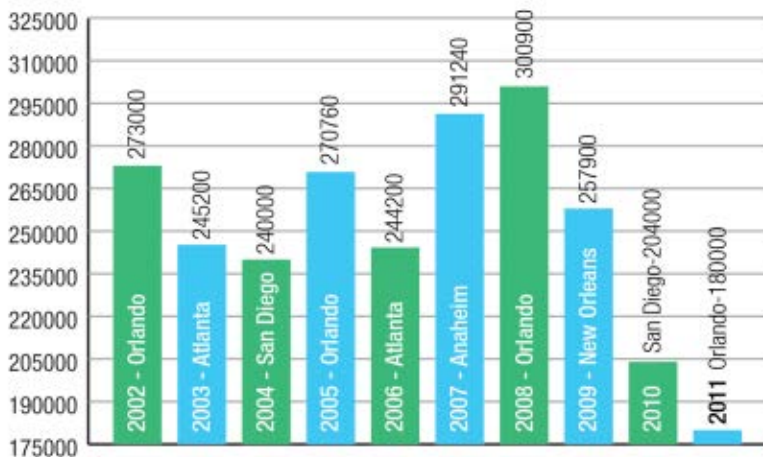
“Obviously the smaller shows would have a financial impact on the association’s revenue, but I’ve talked to a lot of superintendents who don’t mind the smaller shows of the last few years,” Woodward says.

“Until there’s more rounds, more revenue in the industry, our show is going to stay the same,” Evans says. “Is that a good thing or a bad thing? We’re making the most of it. We’re totally content with where it’s at.” ■

**GCSAA CONFERENCE AND SHOW ATTENDEES**



**TOTAL TRADE SHOW FLOOR SQUARE FOOTAGE**



Source: [www.golfindustryshow.com/aboutgis.asp](http://www.golfindustryshow.com/aboutgis.asp) and Golf Course Management