



The Golfdom Conversation

Keith Ihms

GCSAA's new president discusses his departure from CC of Little Rock, his plans for the future and how being on the job hunt will impact his year as president.

BY SETH JONES

Barely a month after the conclusion of the 2014 Golf Industry Show, at which Keith Ihms accepted the gavel and became the new president of the GCSAA, a surprising announcement was made: Ihms was no longer the head superintendent at the CC of Little Rock, where he had been employed since 2005.

Golfdom caught up with Ihms recently to discuss the nature of his leaving CC of Little Rock, his next steps and where he hopes to land from here.

Golfdom: Keith, thanks for taking the time to chat with me. Before we get going, and I'm sorry to get touchy-feely, but with a recent tragedy in your life (Ihms' wife, Nita, passed away last year), and now being at a career crossroads, I just want to ask: are you doing OK?

Keith Ihms: It's been a difficult road. It's one that people say you can't prepare for, and you can't. You really don't know how long it's going to take to recover from it. I have my moments, but I'm moving forward. I have a large support group, my second family and my first family... so yeah, I'd say I'm doing fine.

Golfdom: Good, good. So, you an-

nounced recently that you have left CC of Little Rock... what are your plans moving forward?

Ihms: It's really kind of interesting. When I was in Dallas (at Bent Tree CC), I was there about ten years... I think we did a really good job, giving them good conditions, we did a renovation, gave the golf course back to them at a different level. I went through a personal tragedy in my life then with the separation from my wife... I was looking for a change, so I moved to CC of Little Rock.

This is parallel to that in some ways. I've been here about 9 years, we maintained a golf course in top condition, we did a renovation, gave them another golf course at another level. Then, of course, I had a personal tragedy here.

I'm looking forward to moving to a new



opportunity. I don't want to say I want to put things behind me totally, but you know, there are a lot of different memories, a lot of different things that play into when you're somewhere... I think an opportunity to move to a new location and a new challenge, whatever that may be, I think that will be good for me both personally and professionally.

Golfdom: Are you pretty wide-open as to where you'd be willing to go, or do you have a specific region you're targeting?

Ihms: Well... I'm kind of on my own, so I don't have anything holding me back. I would like to stay close to where I'm at now. Texas is always a possibility, that's where I'm from. I might even be interested in the Florida market; I've got family there. The long and short of the story is, I'll go anywhere that there is an opportunity that is good for me, but I have some areas I'm focusing on.

Golfdom: Keith, this one is the tough one, but it's the one I've been getting calls about the most... can you tell me any more about your exiting CC of Little Rock?

Ihms: In this business, people understand job changes and what can and should be said about it. What I would say is I still have a very good relationship here

with my membership and the people I work closely with. When you're at a private club, you're hired by a group of people on a board, and in seven, eight, nine years that entire board changes and sometimes there are philosophical differences. I can't really say anything specific except that I left on good terms.

Golfdom: Being in a job search right now, how will that impact your year as president of the GCSAA?

Ihms: I think it would be foolish for me to say that it doesn't have some effect on how I do my work for the GCSAA, but that being said, having a job in this business, and volunteering at this level, all of those things are going to effect being able to

serve as president of the GCSAA.

My intent is to continue and go along as I have been doing. It's not just about me. There are eight other members on that board, there's a great staff at headquarters... it's not going to change what my goals were, from how it would have happened if I continued to work at the CC of Little Rock... things are still moving forward. I just got back from China... I don't foresee it changing in any way, quite frankly.

Golfdom: Along those lines, let's talk about the commitment of serving on the GCSAA board... you mentioned you're just coming back from China, there is so much travel... do you think your service on the

board has been burdensome to your career?

Ihms: I wouldn't say it's been burdensome, I would say it's improved me as an individual and as a golf course superintendent in many ways. To give you a couple examples, I'm a much better manager of my time. That comes from necessity. You have obligations from work, obligations from family and obligations from GCSAA, so you really have to manage your time well, and I've gotten better at that.

I think GCSAA has afforded me a lot of opportunities from a business standpoint to be a better golf course superintendent... being involved with the level of budgets, budget planning, meeting planning and

Continued on page 28

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Continued from page 27

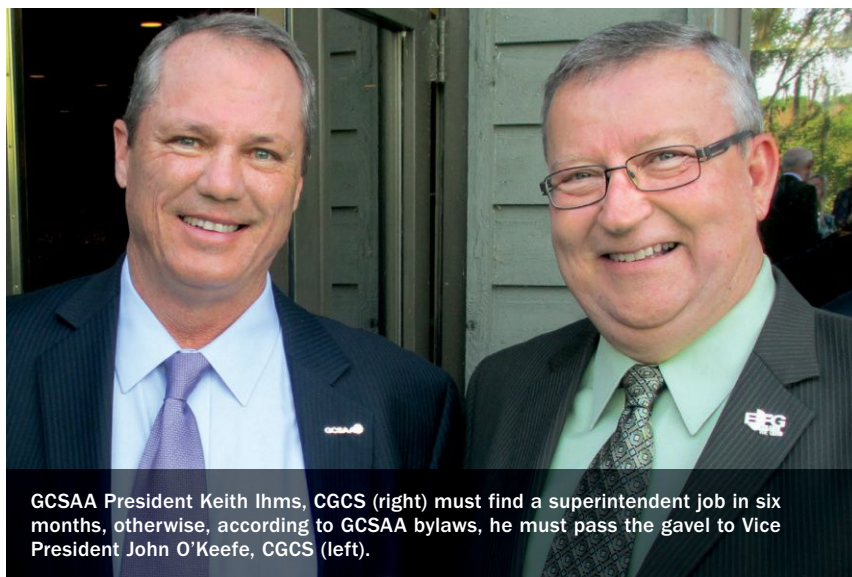
all of that has impacted how I serve my members at my facility. I've been told by my greens chairman and my club president that they saw growth in me over the last several years. I'd say there's much more positive than there is negative.

Sure it takes time, honestly, but I would not do anything differently.

Golfdom: What does GCSAA's bylaws state about the president not being a working superintendent?

Ihms: There is a bylaw restriction that you have six months to become reemployed. You have to be a golf course superintendent. You cannot become president and then decide, 'Hey I'm just going to focus 100 percent on GCSAA and not work.' That is not allowed. I want to have a superintendent position (within the next six months), that is definite.

Golfdom: What kind of reaction have



GCSAA President Keith Ihms, CGCS (right) must find a superintendent job in six months, otherwise, according to GCSAA bylaws, he must pass the gavel to Vice President John O'Keefe, CGCS (left).

you received from GCSAA members since you made your announcement that you were no longer employed at your old club?

Ihms: I've had many calls and messages, as you can imagine. All have been positive and supportive. The first

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question is always, 'how are you doing?' followed by, 'what are your plans going forward?', both from work and GCSAA perspectives.

There, of course, have been a number of people very surprised, but most have either dealt with this type of thing themselves or known someone who has gone through it. As I have said before, our membership is a great group who honestly have concern for their fellow superintendents.

Golfdom: That's great Keith. Thank you again for taking the time. I do look forward to hearing where you go from here. I would think there are many courses out there who would be honored to have a superintendent such as yourself, who has reached your level of professionalism, as their superintendent.

Ihms: I hope you're right! And thank you, Seth, for giving me this opportunity to address these questions. 

IN LATE MARCH, GCSAA PRESIDENT KEITH IHMS MADE THIS ANNOUNCEMENT VIA GCSAA.ORG:

A message from GCSAA President Keith A. Ihms, CGCS

Although it has been nearly a month since I was elected to lead your national association as president during the GCSAA Annual Meeting and Election in Orlando, I am still humbled and honored by the opportunity I have been given. The trust that you have placed in me to lead this organization through changing times in our industry is something I do not take lightly.

Recently, I have been witness to the changing nature of golf course management at a very personal level, and I felt compelled to notify GCSAA members about these changes. Effective March 1, I left my position as the director of grounds maintenance at the Country Club of Little Rock (Ark.), a position I had held since 2005. Per GCSAA bylaws, I will continue to serve as your national president during this time of transition. I want to assure you that while I am exploring new opportunities in my career as a golf course superintendent, the duties and responsibilities that come with the presidency of GCSAA will never be far from my mind and will continue to receive my full attention and focus during this period.

During both my career and my time of service on the GCSAA Board of Directors, I have always adhered to an open-door policy, and that certainly will not change during this time of transition in my life. I appreciate your thoughts, and thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,
Keith A. Ihms, CGCS
GCSAA President




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