

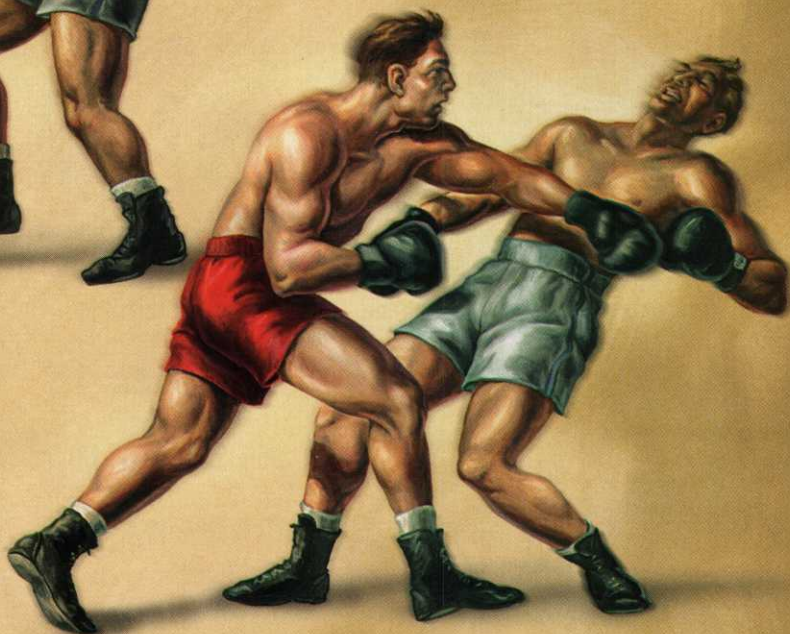
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Arysta LifeScience

Harmony In Growth



If you aspire to be a general manager, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America can help. It has been developing an educational track to provide superintendents with the training necessary to become viable candidates for general manager positions at golf clubs.

But what if superintendents want to take it to the next level? What if they wanted to become golf course owners?

There are a handful of them out there already, so the idea isn't completely wacky. Getting the funds to purchase a golf course is likely the obvious challenge, but it is possible.

John DeMatteo, one such friend of mine who has joined the golf course owners' ranks, shared with me some tips, pointers and reality checks that he has learned along the way when I visited his Topsail Greens Golf Course in Hampstead, N.C., last year.

DeMatteo says the key to any successful business deal is to find suitable financial partners. Superintendent/owners will contribute sweat equity and the agronomic expertise to do the right thing for that site. Lenders look more favorably on loans for teams with a specialist on board, so having a good resume is a plus.

DeMatteo, in partnership with his brother, purchased the course in 2001 after he left the Celebration Golf Course and American Golf in Orlando. His resume reads like a coast-to-coast travelogue that includes construction, grow-ins and major tournament preparations. He even did a stint with Loft Seed. At every stop, John paid attention to the operations from top to bottom. He learned the business of golf. Fittingly, today's analysis of what the superintendent of tomorrow will look like is one who is a leader, a communicator and above all, a businessman.

DeMatteo learned to analyze golf courses and find those little low-cost, attention-to-detail improvements that could strengthen customer satisfaction without busting the budget. He says creating customer satisfaction and loyalty on a small budget is more meaningful than having every bell and whistle or deep pockets to bail you out. He wants to hire the guy who can get it done with less. Sound like an owner you know?

As a superintendent/owner, DeMatteo

## Dare to Dream and Execute, Too

BY JOEL JACKSON



JOHN DEMATTEO,  
A SUPERINTENDENT  
AND AN OWNER,  
SHARES TIPS ON HOW  
TO THRIVE IN LOCAL  
BUSINESS

knows full well the relationship of rounds, revenue and the maintenance budget's reality.

"You have to truly love this business to make the leap to ownership," he says. "It's not a cushy job where you just call the shots. Some of those shots are tough calls. You can't get fired, and you don't have to keep looking over your shoulder. But you do have to pay the electric bill, your suppliers and your employees first."

And successful owners must be comfortable being the face of the facility. DeMatteo joined the local chamber of commerce and has served as president. Volunteering is a good way to get known in the community, and rubbing shoulders with local leaders can lead to opportunities.

One such opportunity occurred when a local developer inquired about using the golf course as a spray field for effluent from its treatment plant. DeMatteo was interested but concerned the course couldn't handle the water without upgrades to the course infrastructure, including design changes, irrigation improvements and additional drainage. The developer agreed to invest in the renovation and also pay a monthly fee to the course for using the water.

To reciprocate for the investment, DeMatteo is offering a free one-year membership for residents, and he agreed to a name change from Topsail Greens to St. George's Reach to reflect the development's association with the course. Architect Ed Biedel began moving some greens and changing the green and tee complexes two weeks after my visit.

DeMatteo's dream was to own a profitable business that provides affordable golf. What's your dream?

---

*Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.*



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# before it starts

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**J**anuary. Snow on the ground for Easterners. Plenty of morning frost in the South and West.

Far chillier, however, is that vibe you've detected from the newly crowned green chairman. Maybe it was the suggestion that Times New Roman makes a great resume font or his declaration that this Tillingstein guy didn't get the most out of Winged Foot.

You can smell the trouble a par-5 away. He's fresh off the appointment of a lifetime and for the next year or two or 12, he's your new buddy.

Like hormonally conflicted high-schoolers, you've nervously traded cell phone numbers, mostly so he can call you at bedtime with a reminder that Ed Niblickson would like to see those ball-washer towels bleached, washed and pressed in time for Tuesday's member-guest.

This annual ritual of political sea change at clubs across the land is a tired but inevitable component of country club life. The board reins are routinely handed over to a new chair who appoints a green chairman that, no matter how great things are going, feels the need to right the ship after the last chairman left his mark.

The new green committee head feels he must restore civility because the last one didn't communicate enough with the membership or produce smoother greens. You, having been through this transition, will be tempted to explain to the new chairman that while his intentions may be good, board life doesn't quite work as dreamily as one would hope.

You, having watched grown men and women bicker over the most inane topics, know that the rose will be off the bloom by the Masters, and it'll be full-fledged civil war come U.S. Open time. When the Ryder Cup rolls around, many of the same people currently massaging each other's egos will be locked in a power struggle, with emergency meetings that sound like the Johnsons of "Blazing Saddles" convening in the town church, complete with some drunkard repeatedly yelling "Reverend!"

Complicating your job is the ever-increasing tension between the older and younger members. The Greatest Generation often

## Happy New Year, And Good Luck

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



**MOST CLUBS ARE IN  
A CONSTANT FLUX  
OF POWER AND  
PERSONALITY,  
CHAOS AND  
CRUDENESS. DID I  
MENTION IT'S YOUR  
JOB TO STAY OUT  
OF THIS MESS?**

becomes the Lamest Generation, so intensely self-involved that its members resist any change that might impact their final golfing days. Contrast that with Generation Me wanting to transform their golf courses into polished, high-definition masterpieces, and you have chaos.

Naturally, some middle ground would be ideal, but the Shiites and Sunnis stand a better chance of getting along.

You, being the rational person caught in the middle, would like to convince the Greatest Generation to leave their courses in better condition architecturally and agronomically than they found them. And you'd like to think today's younger set would want to keep up with the Joneses without breaking anyone's bank account or causing such strife.

The only thing you can hope for is that someone with sense and gravitas will come along and manage the various sides, while suggesting that experts be consulted for design matters and other issues outside of the superintendent's area of expertise. Though it rarely happens, these wise and clever souls do come along from time to time, bringing stability and a vision for the future with them.

But typically, other than a few benevolent dictators, most clubs are in a constant flux of power and personality, chaos and crudeness.

Did I mention it's your job to stay out of this mess?

If you aren't sure how to go about it, just remember the words of the wise philosopher Chili Palmer in author Elmore Leonard's "Get Shorty": "Never say anything unless you have to."

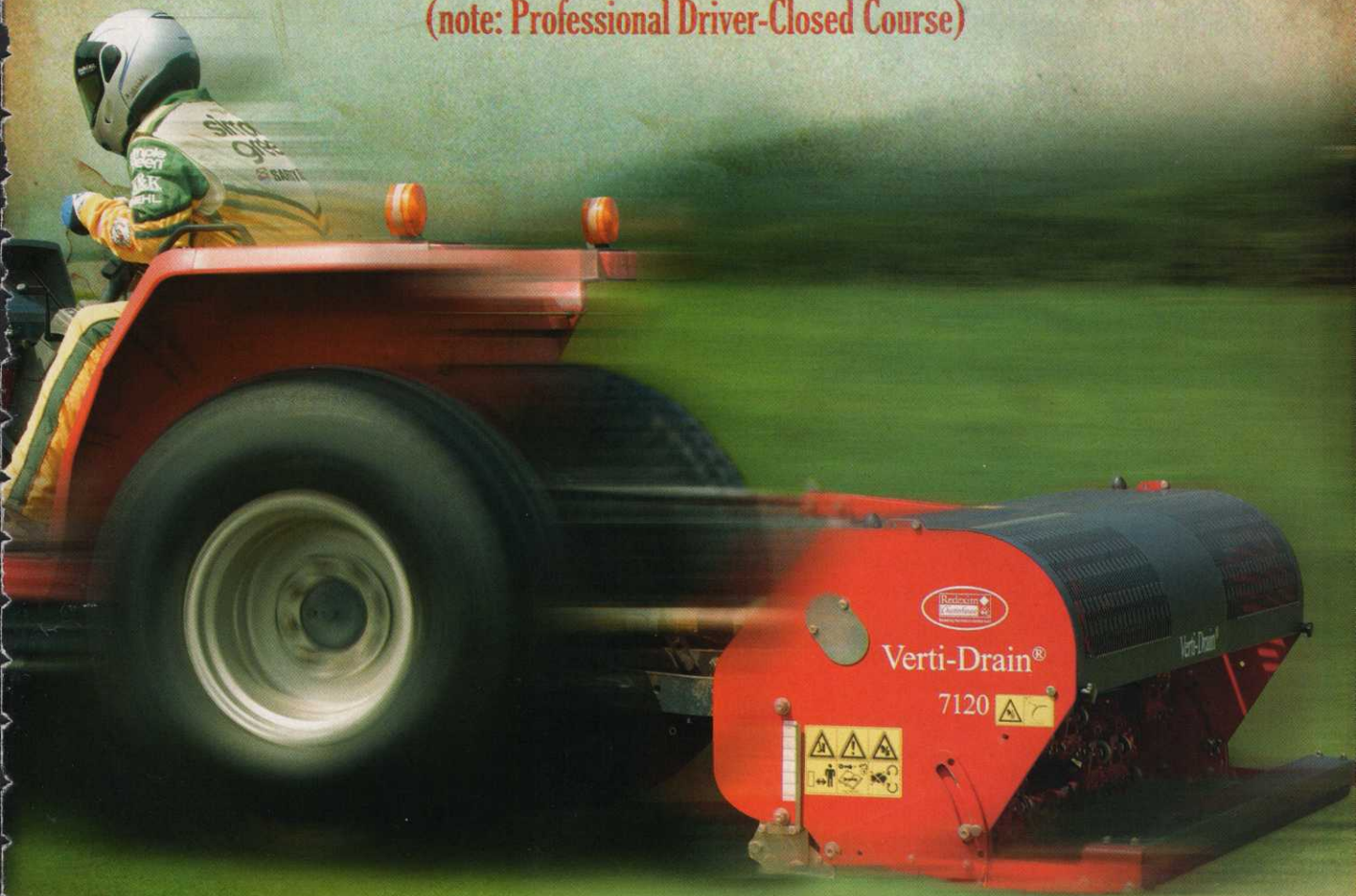
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*Geoff Shackelford can be reached at  
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**T**he winter season is a favorite time of the year for me. Not only do I get to attend and participate in the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation (OTF) Conference and Show,

I am also fortunate enough to be asked to speak at other state and regional conferences. Turfgrass conferences are a time to catch up with people I have not seen for awhile and visit with exhibitors while scavenging through their displays for product materials.

I try attending the educational sessions where my colleagues present their research reports. I especially pay attention, if time on the program has allowed, to attend graduate student presentations on their research efforts. And what would a turf conference be without the obligatory banquet where student scholarships and research grants are announced?

Lately, attendance at many turf conferences have shown little growth and in some cases a decline. For attendees, I know the cost of attending is increasing while budgets are decreasing. Additionally, there are more outlets for attendees to receive information and pesticide points or credits at one-day meetings and seminars. Information in general is also easily accessed from a multitude of sources, including the Internet.

Manufacturers and distributors are more hesitant or analytical in how they use their resources when deciding to exhibit at state or regional turf shows either at tabletop events or full-blown exhibition halls. New marketing tools, means of contacting buyers, and more focused targeted marketing efforts have changed how companies spend marketing money.

Which brings me to the point of my column — to reaffirm the importance and role of state turf conferences and shows to the well-being of our industry. Turfgrass conferences are held where competitors, friends, industry and university personnel interact for the betterment of the turfgrass industry.

Whether you give one scholarship or 20, or \$500 or \$500,000 in grant money, these local conferences and shows were created to support

## Making the Case for Turf Shows

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



LET'S NOT FORGET  
HOW IMPORTANT  
REGIONAL EVENTS  
ARE FOR ALL THOSE  
INVOLVED

university educational, research and outreach efforts for our industry.

What has made the state and regional conferences a success are the loyalty and grassroots efforts of the attendees and exhibitors. When the first OTF Conference and Show was scheduled back in the 1960s, the Ohio Turfgrass Industry didn't know if anyone would attend, let alone exhibit.

Two giants in the Ohio turf industry, Robert O'Brien and James FitzGibbon (now deceased), met and divided the trade-floor space between them. Then they proceeded to sell the floor space by convincing, cajoling and arm-twisting their suppliers and competitors.

In addition, they reminded their customers of the importance of continued education and the need to support this new educational effort. Their efforts contributed to the success of the first OTF Conference and Show, which was the foundation for subsequent successful shows.

What makes this story especially interesting is that it is not unique. In every state and region, a similar story can be told.

The next time you attend a state turfgrass conference, be reminded that your presence not only helps you to grow as a professional but also contributes to the well-being of the industry.

And be reminded that an exhibitor is not only trying to inform you of new products. By its presence, an exhibitor is helping support research and teaching efforts at the local and regional levels.

To all, thank you.

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*Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., Golfdom's science editor and a turfgrass professor from The Ohio State University, can be reached at danneberger.1@osu.*





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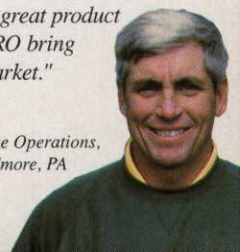
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*Matt Shaffer  
Director of Golf Course Operations,  
Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, PA*



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golf industry show  
Preview

# Is This Show Still For

Golf course  
maintenance  
exhibitors battle  
the GIS dilution  
effect

## ANALYSIS

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

**T**he industry has a soft spot for the Golf Industry Show. Vendors and attendees know it's the best place to build relationships of any venue all year. Not only is it the largest gathering of working superintendents, it also provides the most diverse turf-maintenance vendors of any show.

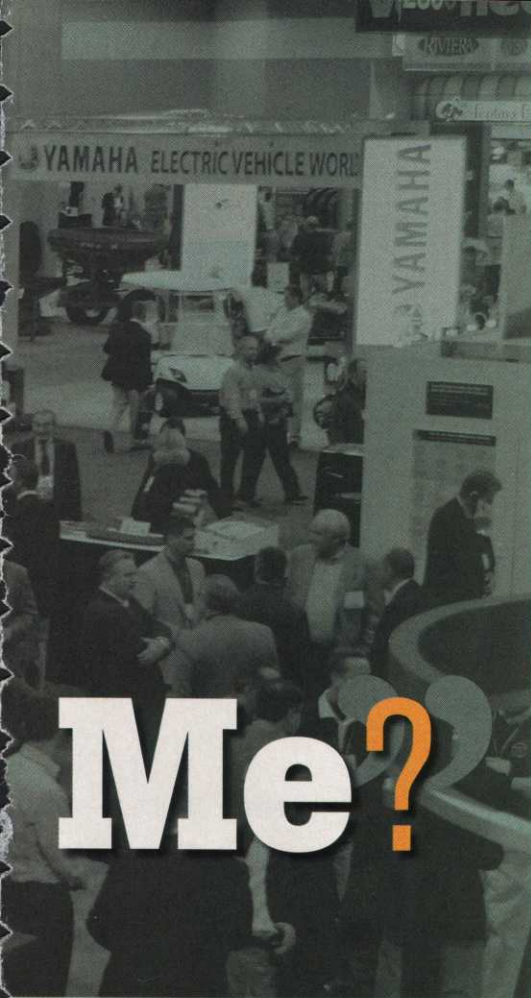
But there's a caveat. With the merger between the National Golf Course Owners' Association in 2005 to form the first GIS and the addition of the Club Managers Association of America last year, superintendents need to navigate a lot more exhibit space to find their target products and services compared to the solitary Golf Course Superintendents Association of America show of years past.

As it turns out, exhibitors must overcome the same phenomenon. With more non-superintendents at the show, vendors must look a little harder for their core customers.

GIS contends that the more managers the better. The show brings in about 33 percent more qualified buyers than previous GCSAA shows, according to GCSAA. That was the goal of the merger in the first place. The GCSAA show was confronted with dwindling attendance each year since its high-water mark in 1999, and qualified buyers fell in conjunction with fewer attendees. GIS appears to have successfully brought out the buyers. The 2005 show in Orlando drew 8,154 qualified buyers, according to GCSAA, and last year's show welcomed 8,833. Organizers expect a record 10,400 qualified buyers this year in Orlando.

But while the three associations also expect record attendance, a record number of exhibitors and the subsequent record revenues, some vendors that sell primarily turf products aren't sold on the quality of attendees compared to past GCSAA shows. Sure, the more managers and owners know about turf-maintenance products, the easier a





“The superintendent show has been diluted with a bunch of people who sell lawn furniture, canopies and pots and pans, and that’s not good expansion,” Zinninger says. “It’s diluted expansion with people who are outside of our industry, and because of that dilution we automatically get set further back on the list for booth space.”

Prizelawn won’t be the only company staying home this year. Markers Inc., makers of golf course signage and other specialty products, began exhibiting in the 1980s. Dave Knoepp, director of sales and marketing for Markers, says he would talk to hundreds of superintendents who were ready to make a deal back in those days. Last year, he says he spoke to fewer than 25 qualified buyers.

“Most significantly, we’re not going because we feel the attendance has been diluted, and we are primarily a provider of products specified by golf course superintendents,” Knoepp says.

Some larger companies have noticed the change in attendance as well. Turfco has been exhibiting at GIS and the predecessor show since 1962. While it is committed to maintaining a significant presence, it’s not as easy to be seen as more vendors from other associations fight for premium exhibit space, says Turfco Vice President Scott Kinkead.

*Continued on page 32*

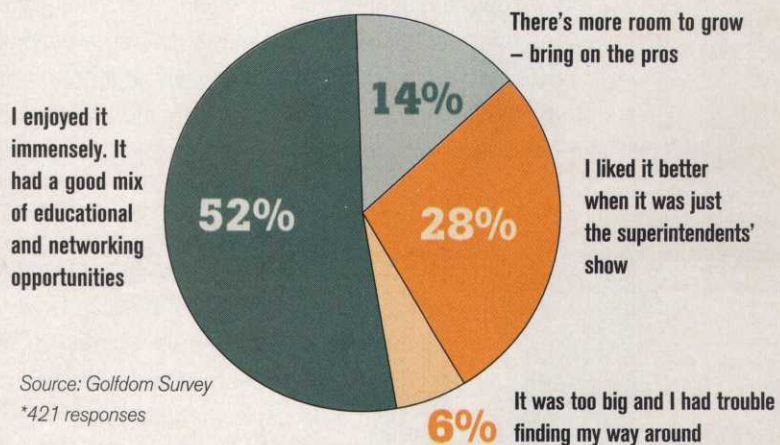
superintendent’s job might be getting acquisitions approved. But when it comes down to selecting specific chemicals, equipment and course-management products, it’s fairly likely that superintendents are making decisions without the rest of their management teams.

So while there are more qualified buyers, there is a weaker concentration of superintendents on the show floor, and some smaller vendors who sell exclusively golf maintenance products are opting out of this year’s big top.

Some have decided not to exhibit this year because they feel drown out by the oftentimes more glamorous furniture and fixture exhibits that cater to owners and managers. Others say they can’t justify the return on investment in a business environment of receding revenue.

“Bigger isn’t always better,” says Tom Zinninger, an independent sales representative for Prizelawn, which makes spreaders for third parties. Prizelawn exhibited at GIS and the previous GCSAA show for about 15 years, but the company didn’t exhibit year.

**THE GOLF INDUSTRY SHOW** got even bigger earlier last year with the addition of the Club Managers Association of America to the event. Now it’s superintendents, owners and managers under one umbrella. If you attended, what did you think of the show last year?\*





7:08 AM...



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