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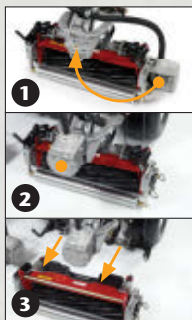


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Golfdom

FEBRUARY 2011 • VOLUME 67 • NO. 2

18 THE BET'S ON Rhett

After a six-month tryout, GCSAA names Evans CEO

BY SETH JONES

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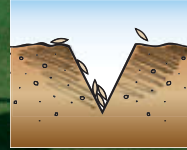
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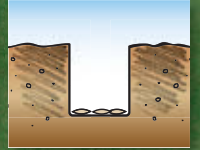
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I wish I had a great Rhett Evans personal anecdote; it would have been great for my cover story this month. But alas, despite working with him for 18 months at GCSAA, I just don't. Well, there is a funny one, but there's no way it could have worked in my feature story. It goes like this:

I was on a conference call with the folks at Mirimichi Golf Course in Millington, Tenn., the same course *Golfdom* coincidentally profiled last month. There were four voices on the other line, and I was conducting an interview... not an easy task to keep four voices straight over a phone.

And then, the next thing I know, it sounded like some wild animal had invaded my office. It was a loud honking noise, like a clown's nose had been caught in a fairway mower. *Wobba-wobba-wobba!*

It turned out that Rhett had just acquired a new turkey call from Cabela's, and he wanted to demonstrate its usefulness to my former neighbor at GCSAA headquarters, Mark Johnson, senior manager of environmental programs.

After my initial freak-out, I shot a terse email to Johnson alerting him that I was conducting a phone interview, and the turkey call quickly went away. Once I was done with the interview, I stormed into Johnson's office to find out what the heck had just happened. "Wasn't me, man!" he told me.

I took a breath and said, "cool." (Mark's a good dude, and always hooked me up with awesome cigars, so I could never be mad at the guy.)

So did I say anything to the Turkey Caller himself? Heck no! Rhett was, after all, the boss, and I was happy to remain as anonymous as possible during the frequent staff cuts we were going through at the time.

But now the kind folks from Mirimichi know why it sounded for a minute like a wild turkey burst into my office that day. That was the new CEO. Apologies.

What else? ... There was another time when Rhett's team beat my team at the company golf scramble. But there's no story there. Ev-

Rhett Evans... he's no turkey

BY SETH JONES



THERE'S A REASON

RHETT EVANS IS

THE NEW CEO

OF GCSAA.

everyone beats me at golf. The day I beat someone, that'll be a story.

So then what is the story on Rhett Evans? I profiled him in this issue for our cover story. He was named GCSAA's CEO shortly before our deadline, and Rhett was kind enough to sit down with me for an interview immediately afterward.

The story on Rhett is, though he may have awful timing with his turkey call, he is no turkey himself. He's driven. He's determined. He's one of those guys who accomplish more by breakfast than many of us do in an entire day.

His tenure at GCSAA has been during a rough patch. There were some tough days and some tough decisions that happened on his watch. I don't agree with all of the decisions that were made. But I know for a fact he didn't make any of those decisions lightly.

"It never gets any easier," Rhett told me of days like the one he experienced last November, when a handful of long-term GCSAA employees suddenly found out that it was their last day. "But you just have to keep telling yourself, 'There's a reason for everything.'"

I agree with him. There is a reason for everything. And there's a reason Rhett Evans is the new CEO of GCSAA.

No, I wouldn't say I know Rhett well. But what I do know of him is that he seems like a sincere, passionate guy. I'm rooting for him to succeed.

I might not have any great stories about Rhett right now, but it is my hope that in a few years, I'll have a great story about him to tell: the story of the guy who took a floundering national golf association and made it vibrant again.

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Off The Fringe

GCSAA director of sales joins First Tee

For almost five years to the day Mark Bisbing was the director of corporate sales and marketing for GCSAA.

That was until a few weeks ago, when he accepted a new job as the director of corporate relations for the First Tee. Located at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Fla., the organization strives to make a positive impact on children's lives through the game of golf. The organization boasts 3.5 million participants and 705 program locations.

In his new position, Bisbing will interact with the First Tee's corporate partners and solicit funds to support the First Tee.

Bisbing says it was with mixed emotions he left the GCSAA. "It's never an easy decision to move your family," he says.

Bisbing says he'll look back at his five years at GCSAA fondly, but also with a feeling that he left behind unfinished business.

"I still see tremendous opportunity and potential for the GCSAA," he says. "I think I left and there were still some opportunities that could be leveraged to elevate

the brand and revenues for the association that weren't getting done."

Bisbing says he enjoyed trying to find

creative new ways to connect superintendents to GCSAA's industry partners.

"The (GCSAA) members are the cornerstone to the success and playability of a course. The main reason you go to a golf course is for the golf course itself, whether the clubhouse is nice or in a trailer," Bisbing says. "I always challenged the term 'unseen heroes.' I always wanted them to be seen heroes. They're definitely under-recognized for the work they perform." ■

Editor's note: A longer version of this story originally appeared on the Golfdom blog, www.golfdom.blogspot.com.



Esoda joins Georgia HOF

awards from multiple industry organizations. He won the GCSAA Distinguished Service Award in 2009. In 2004 he won a GCSAA Excellence in Government Relations Award for his advocacy over golf course water rights. Indicative of how far-reaching the impact of his work on water rights and conservation has been was the fact golf professionals also gave him their highest honor with the Georgia PGA Section's Distinguished Service Award.

Esoda's colleagues — both superintendents and Atlanta CC co-workers — made a strong showing at the event. Included in that group was GCSAA president Robert Randquist, CGCS, who made the trip from south Florida.

"They gave me about three minutes to speak, but I took about 10," Esoda laughs. "I was able to tell the world about some of the good things our organizations do, and I was able to recognize all the good folks, the non-whiners."

Esoda has spent the past 20 years at Atlanta CC, where he has hosted seven PGA Tour events. He is a past president of the Georgia GCSA and serves on or has served the Georgia Allied Golf Council, Georgia Golf Environmental Foundation, Georgia State Golf Association, Georgia State Golf Foundation, Georgia Turfgrass Association and Georgia Turfgrass Foundation Trust. ■

Mark Esoda, certified superintendent at Atlanta Country Club in Marietta, Ga., now has his name forever etched in the membership of the Georgia Golf Hall of Fame.

Esoda was one of four inductees welcomed to the Hall at a ceremony in front of about 400 golf industry representatives. He joins Palmer Maples Jr., a past president of the GCSAA, as the only two superintendents in the Georgia Hall of Fame.

"When the executive director of the Georgia State Golf Association first came to me (with the news), I thought he just wanted to talk about the golf course," Esoda says. "Then he handed me the press release about the announcement. I couldn't believe it."

Esoda is one of the profession's best-known and well-respected superintendents, having been honored at state and national levels with top



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TALKABOUT

Vancouver Island superintendents are as adept on ice as they are on greens.



Superintendents on ice

Charity event raises \$100,000 for M.S. research

The Vancouver Island Golf Superintendents Association doesn't mind a hard check into the boards — because the result ends up being a check for \$100,000 to Multiple Sclerosis research.

The brainchild of VIGA member Greg Kowalski, superintendent at Royal Oak Golf Club, the group has laced up the skates for the last four years and dropped the puck annually to raise money for a good cause. The money has escalated quickly for the group, and in the last two years, the chapter has

raised more than \$100,000 each year.

"We wanted to be more than simply a group that got together six times a year," Kowalski says. "We thought we should give back to the community. We live in such a beautiful community... people work their whole lives to retire here. Victoria is a beautiful community — we thought we should give back to that community."

So the chapter decided to organize an annual superintendent's hockey game.

"When we were deciding what to do, we said 'Why not hockey?' Kowalski says. "We were already doing a regular Friday game — superintendents versus industry. That's all we do up here in Canada anyway, right? Drink

beer and play hockey!"

The game, played in front of about 200 people, ended up being a 7-7 tie. Which was perfect, because the real winner of the event was the cause.

"We were talking about what cause to support, and it turned out that multiple families were affected by MS," Kowalski says. "It turns out, Canada is one of the most afflicted countries of MS."

The group is already planning for next year. The event will include the same silent auction and raffle, but they're also hopeful to add local hockey celebrities to the mix.

"It's a big group. If we all do our part, it all comes together," Kowalski says. "We're lucky we're all such hard workers." ■

Research shows taller *Poa* won't slow your roll

Research at Oregon State University is showing taller height of cuts on annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) greens combined with rolling doesn't slow ball roll.

The study is significant because the grass was mowed at a higher-than-normal height, which kept the grass healthy and vibrant and proves that putting speed can still be fast on taller grass.

Researchers mowed 60 grass plots at a height of 0.15 inches, well over typical greens heights of 0.10 to 0.125 inches, said OSU turfgrass specialist Rob Golembiewski, the study's author. The turf was cut at 8 a.m. with a walk-behind greens mower. Green speed was measured at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day.

"We've been getting a lot of inquiries (about the research); superintendents and golf clubs in general, are interested in what we're doing," Golembiewski says. "It goes against the grain of people



thinking we have to lower height-of-cut. People are looking for ways to reduce inputs, have healthier stands, and still have acceptable surfaces for golfers."

Researchers in OSU's study rolled plots with a 1,140-pound electric roller and an 845-pound gas roller. While both provided about a 1-foot increase in ball roll distance compared to non-rolled plots, there was no difference in ball roll distance between the two rollers. Golembiewski told *Golfdom* that Thom

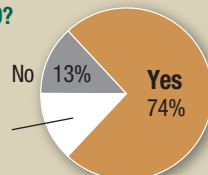
Nikolai, Ph.D., Michigan State University, helped him outline the research before implementing the study.

"Thom said most of the research they've done is on creeping bentgrass, but that some superintendents with more *Poa* or more of a mixed stand, have been seeing mixed results," Golembiewski says. "Out here (in the Pacific Northwest) we have more annual bluegrass greens, so I wanted to look into it." ■

SURVEY SAYS ...

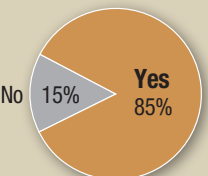
DO YOU CARE WHOM GCSAA HIRES AS ITS NEXT CEO?

GCSAA is hiring a new CEO? 13%



DID GCSAA MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION BY HIRING RHETT EVANS AS ITS NEW CEO?

No 15% Yes 85%



Source: *The Golfdom Daily*, www.golfdom.blogspot.com