

The Orlando Conference: A Report Card

By Monroe S. Miller

Many WGCSA members drove to the 1990 GCSAA Conference and Show hosted by Orlando, Florida. Orlando is a popular destination with lots of tourist attractions, so many families went along this year.

You didn't have to go too far south of the Wisconsin border to get into the mood for warmer weather. We saw our last frozen pond only a few miles south of Rockford. By the time we reached Champaign/Urbana, golfers were very evident on golf courses. And it was downright hot in Nashville.

Few professional groups talk more about the weather than we do, so I won't dwell on the fact that Florida's weather while we were there was superb. They've been extremely dry, so I was happy for my Sunshine State colleagues when two inches of rain fell one of the days of the conference.

This was the 18th consecutive GCSAA conference I've attended; that seems enough experience to offer a "report card" on the 1990 show.

1. **EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM.** The roster of speakers offered was outstanding. Some of the best minds and most experienced people in our industry accepted invitations to participate and share. The focus on our involvement with environmental issues was very good. The format, however, needs changes, I think. Here's why:
 - A. Three concurrent educational sessions is absurd. Many times I wanted to be three places at once. Why not have lectures offered over two days instead of only one?
 - B. Too much emphasis is placed on the seminar format. It comes at the expense of the educational sessions. I suppose part of the reason for 38 (count 'em) seminars is the need to generate "credits" for the certification program. I object on that count and these as well:
 - 1.) They are too costly.
 - 2.) My experience is that there is a 50/50 chance of enrolling in a poor one — poor content, poor

instruction and/or poor presentation. Those are poor odds for the money.

- 3.) The combination of dues, which have gotten quite high, and steep registration fees are sufficient to expand what is available as an open component of the conference.
- C. There isn't enough time given to some speakers. It is impossible to reasonably develop a topic in 20 minutes. More time, please.
- D. I spent the afternoon of the 24th (February) at the top-dressing and cultivation symposia presented by Paul Rieke and Bob Carrow. It was excellent, but far too few knew about it. More PR was needed.
- E. I'd be interested in responses to the major speakers on the 25th. My view is to give that day and its programs over to the concurrent session.

ORLANDO EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM GRADE: B

2. **EQUIPMENT SHOW.** The show gets better every year. Or at least it gets bigger every year. I cannot imagine making really shrewd buying decisions without attending this show. Here are some specific observations:
 - A. The show has gotten so big that it is an exhausting job to see it in its entirety. Once in awhile it would be nice to sit and relax for a few minutes. In Orlando, that meant pulling up the floor and sitting. The simple accommodation of a group of chairs would be nice in the future.
 - B. Lots of room this year; wide aisles are comfortable and make the show experience much better.
 - C. If the Gestapo are going to guard the doors of the show next year, then give advance notice of rules, apply them evenly and enforce them fairly. As *The Grass Roots'* chief photographer, I bopped in with my camera (your camera, actually) swinging from my neck, ready to take pictures you'll see here. I was accosted by a Nazi who was ready to confiscate that camera



Toro's new Hydrojet aerifier — a blockbuster introduction.



Cultivation equipment was everywhere. You'd want to be careful with this on irrigated fairways!

("over my dead body, you are"). Negotiations led to agreement that I'd find Clay Loyd or Chris Caldwell and get an official "photag" ribbon for my name badge. Although it made me feel like an official nerd, it was a satisfactory compromise.

Inquiry as to why this new "no camera" rule was in effect led to this explanation: it was requested by the exhibitors. They are sick and tired of far east visitors (who commonly ignore U.S. patents) coming to our show and taking endless photos of pieces they will probably ultimately copy. Apparently these people are too cheap to simply purchase one of what they want to copy.

The reason for the rule irritates me. You can guess my reaction when the first of three violators of the rule (no green ribbon) I ran into was — you guessed it — Japanese. The other two violators were . . . Japanese.

Next year I expect to either see the rule enforced for all (not just Americans) or abandoned.

ORLANDO EQUIPMENT SHOW GRADE: A

3. **FACILITIES.** Orlando is headed toward the top, or at least near it, of convention cities in the U.S., I believe. Part of the reason has to be the offerings of the convention center itself.

- A. I was assigned the Peabody Hotel and enjoyed the luxury of walking to the convention center.
- B. The convention center itself was plenty large for our group. That hasn't always been the case.
- C. I also liked the meeting rooms, the public address system in each room and the comfortable chairs.
- D. The convention center was clean, something not to be taken for granted.
- E. I didn't hear even one complaint about the shuttle system; couldn't have been too bad.
- F. We were cautioned by several to be careful after dark. However, I saw little riffraff in the area around the convention center, and I felt perfectly safe. You cannot say that in New Orleans, Atlanta, Houston, Phoenix and some other cities we've visited.

Safety should be one of the primary considerations in site selection.

ORLANDO FACILITIES GRADE: A



Headquarters hotel — The Peabody.

4. **USGA GREEN SECTION CONFERENCE.** Another great program by Bengueyfield and Company. Latham and Kienert each did a great job. I was proud of them.

ORLANDO USGA GREEN SECTION CONFERENCE GRADE: A

5. **THE CITY OF ORLANDO.** You cannot call Orlando an up and coming city — its convention center and tourist business already put it in the big leagues. There are reasons for its popularity — DisneyWorld, EPCOT, MGM, NASA, sandy beaches, warm weather. It is a good conference choice in that regard. The PGA and the CMAA held their conventions in Orlando, too. Many families were there, and vacations were held both before and after the conference.

Cheryl's folks have lived in the Orlando area for years and we have been to every tourist trap within a hundred miles. I felt lucky that I wasn't distracted by all the temptations and outside forces on my time; I didn't wait in line even once for anything because I didn't go anywhere.

Not everything in Orlando is peachy, though:

- A. Traffic. I-4 was running full at midnight! I've never seen poorer traffic planning; I was in it at one point and it was like the worst of Chicago, New York City or Boston. Absolutely terrible.
- B. Coffee. It cost \$2.25 a cup at the Peabody. I thought the waiter was kidding and I told him so. Too bad he didn't speak English. Many of the meals I ate were very overpriced. But because the traffic was so bad, I was forced to eat near the convention center and pay the high prices.
- C. There wasn't anything for kids and spouses to do in the immediate convention center area, which is a disadvantage.

ORLANDO'S GRADE: B



Everybody was trying their key in hopes of winning a Ransomes Fairway 5000.



Hi-tech equipment has moved onto the golf course.

RANKING ORLANDO WITH OTHER CITIES WHICH HAVE HOSTED THE GCSAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND SHOW IN THE PAST 18 YEARS:

I tend to group the cities we've visited with our conference. The first group is my favorite; the middle group consists of those that are okay but which don't really spin any magic for me. The final group has those I would just as soon avoid.

Remember, this is only my opinion and is not intended to denigrate anyone or any place. It is about preference. It's also only about the conferences I have attended.

FIRST GROUP. Boston, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Las Vegas and Anaheim.

MIDDLE GROUP. Orlando, Minneapolis, Portland and San Antonio.

LAST GROUP. Houston, Atlanta, New Orleans, St. Louis and Phoenix.



Cushman's fifth wheel aerifier.

Orlando Conference Awards

Best new piece of equipment. Toro's Hydrojet aerifier. Its introduction caught most of us by surprise. It was a pleasant surprise.

Best new line of equipment. Cushman's 5th wheel pieces. Innovative and progressive.

Best lecture: Tie among Dr. Lois Stack, Mark Kinert, Jim Latham and Dr. Milt Engelke.

Biggest surprise. This year's keynote speaker was really good. Ken Blanchard was both informative and entertaining. We're plowing new ground here! They are too often boring.

Best restaurant. The B Line Diner. It was a trip back to the 50s and 60s, my favorite time. A bit pricey, perhaps, but the chow was good and the portions generous.

Best freebie. Those GCSAA members who were able to purchase an LF-100 in 1989 received a beautiful golf shirt from Jacobsen. The rest of us got our Jacobsen cap. It was my 18th (I have them all in my collection) and the most colorful yet.

Funniest moment. For me, it was running into Tom Harrison one evening around the dinner hour at the Mercado shopping mall. He was looking for a Norwegian restaurant! He didn't find one.

Biggest turnaround. Dow/Elanco is starting to sell

Rubigan as a fungicide. Imagine that. After ten years of pushing it as a plant growth regulator/*Poa annua* control product, they are now touting its value as a fungicide.

What gives? Which is it? What if you use it on a predominantly *Poa annua* fairway, which includes a lot of those in Wisconsin and other northern states?

Best show gimmick. Ransomes' "try our key" program. They had more people around their booth than nearly anyone else. Amazing how many people are willing to look foolish! Jim Hofmeister tried my key. I didn't win the Fairway 500.

Most disappointing news. Arnold Palmer sold the Bay Hill Club to the Japanese. Is nothing sacred? This is like losing the Firestone Tire Company and Rockefeller Center to them. What's next — Pine Valley? Merion? Pebble Beach?

Best Orlando area golf course. The Isleworth Golf Club course. Wayne Otto and Rod Johnson managed to muscle their way onto it for a round of golf and thought they were in either paradise or Sheboygan.

Arnie owns this course; maybe that is why he sold Bay Hill. That and a ton of money.

Funny thing — Rod and Wayne were unable to get onto Bay Hill. Hmmmmm.



Toro's entry in the fairway fiveplex market.



Another piece of cultivation equipment.