



Pilgrimages for Golf Course Superintendents: GCSAA HEADQUARTERS

By Monroe S. Miller

I am closing in on a quarter of a century as a member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. It has been an organization I have been proud to have been associated with for all those years.

Not everything GCSAA has done has pleased me or met with my approval. But that's probably true for almost any organization any of us belongs to as a member, whether it's a church or the Boy Scouts or even a college alumni organization.

The GCSAA has been a good professional group to identify with in the world of golf. That identity, for me, goes back to undergraduate years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison when I was a student member of GCSAA and the recipient of a \$300 scholarship. That was a lot of money in the mid-1960s. But of greater value was the attending honor; that scholarship badge is one I still wear with pride.

The scholarship was the reason why, on a trip to the Chicago area for different reasons, I took time to look up the GCSAA headquarters that year nearly 30 years past. It was located in Des Plaines. I recall even some nervous-

ness as I slowly but surely figured out about where the office was and got closer to it. At that time it was my professional "mecca" and logical that enormous anticipation would be the emotion of the day.

What a letdown—headquarters was, at that time, underwhelming. I am being charitable with that. I remember going in, talking to a person or two, and leaving. The employees couldn't quite figure out what I wanted (nothing) or what I was doing there (exercising a pilgrimage). Disappointed, I saddled up and tended to the business I had really intended.

In the intervening years, GCSAA moved from Des Plaines to Lawrence, Kansas. I vaguely recall some spats about moving "to the middle of nowhere" in the early 1970s, but I paid little attention. I was busy with a young family and working furiously getting established at my golf course. My involvement didn't go beyond paying my dues on time and attending the national conference.

Involvement in one's state chapter, I've observed many times, often opens the door to involvement in national

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The sight of GCSAA headquarters at your arrival is impressive and the landscaping is up to par, which wasn't the case at the St. Andrew's Drive building.



The original wing of the building is on the left; the empty addition is on the right.



A look from the back of the building—the original wing is on the right; the new addition is on the left.



A close-up view of the fountain at the main entrance.

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affairs. That happened to me in the early and mid-1980s and on a couple of different occasions I made the trip to Lawrence to attend committee meetings. Both of those trips were pilgrimages, no doubt.

Obviously, the first time out there was the one that filled me with the greatest sense of anticipation. It is an easy trip, contrary to those 1970s fears of "middle of nowhere". Lawrence is a half hour trip or so from the Kansas City airport and the Interstate system takes you there quickly.

Any member making the trip to GCSAA headquarters is treated to an efficient travel office that gets flights, cars, hotel arrangements and colleagues-to-meet all set. They make it as hassle free as possible, recognizing that we are actually there on business and do not have the time for delays. I give staff a lot of credit for that.

I was quite surprised when I saw the first building, located on St. Andrews Drive (the name was obviously not a coincidence). At first I thought it looked more like a home than anything. Granted, it would have been a BIG home, but it didn't look like I thought an office building of ours would look. Wood construction, gray stained cedar siding and a golf course location gave it a very comfortable look. A few of us commented on how lucky employees there were to have such pleasant working circumstances.

A couple of years after that first trip I went again. It was pretty hard to miss the growth of the Association. The headquarters office was bulging at the seams! Honestly, I think they actually had desks in closets they were so short of work space. A few of us were on the deck that faced the golf course—Alvamar C.C.—and concluded there would either have to be an addition soon or an entirely new building. It wasn't prophetic on our part, just a very obvious conclusion by some common sense guys.

Interestingly, each of those meetings was chaired by a man who was to become GCSAA president—Bill Roberts the first time and Joe Baidy the second.

Staff work hard to make these trips by committee members and decision makers memorable. Clay Loyd took the communication committee members to Topeka, short drive west of Lawrence. Topeka is the state capital of Kansas and we toured the capitol building. Of course since I've visited many of the capitols around the country I was more excited than many others. That thrill was amplified when we walked in and saw a capitol building decorated with huge murals that looked very familiar. I'd have bet the farm that John Stewart Curry had painted those walls.

I was right; he had. Curry was the first artist-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. The residence is between the Stock Pavilion and Babcock Hall. A print of



The view of the east (approximately) is a look at KU and most of Lawrence.



A small room just off the lobby area was a perfect spot for our subcommittee to convene.



Amenities in the building include an A/V lecture hall.

Curry's, A Wisconsin Landscape, hangs in my office. It is a small world.

Topeka was (still is, I imagine) where Clay lived, so we received a grand tour. That included the plant where Golf Course Management was printed. We had dinner at the Topeka C.C. with the course superintendent, a fitting ending to an interesting trip.

The second time I visited headquarters the experience was highlighted by a stay at a historic old downtown hotel, the Eldridge as I recall. That, too, was a treat.

It may well be that I've appreciated these pilgrimages to Lawrence because of the similarity between that town and the one I have lived and worked in since 1964. Lawrence is the home of Kansas University. They are both college towns through and through. In Madison, there are times when I think half the people here originally came to attend the UW—Madison, fell in love with the UW and the city, and never left. Cheryl and I are in the 50%!

So it is in Lawrence. Every other person you talk to, or so it seems, is a KU graduate. The line is the same: "I came here to go to college and decided to stay."

Lawrence is much smaller than Madison and there are no lakes. But neither is it flat and treeless like I sort of expected. It is rolling country with lots of trees; it is really in an attractive landscape. The vision I had of a plains area actually begins west of Topeka.

KU isn't as big as the UW, but it has a place that reminded me of Bascom Hill—there is a slope that leads from central campus to the stadium. It's really neat. For some reason the school's atmosphere reminds me more of a private college than a public one.

My most recent pilgrimage to GCSAA HQ was literally only a few weeks ago, in mid-September. It may, in retro-



The view to the west (approximately) from the lobby is anything but flat barren prairie.

spect some time from now, be the best one of the three trips I have made there. I was invited to serve on a technical information services (TIS) committee. GCSAA has done some big thinking on the issue of information in our world of golf turf; they had reached the point in planning where input from member all across the country was needed.

It was the best pilgrimage for several reasons. Because of my own interest in information, the reason for the trip intrigued and excited me. Secondly, I was very nosy about the headquarters building we'd built along with the addition which was sitting empty (according to the rumor mill). Finally, I needed some kind of sense that the new leadership and new staff were headed in what I thought was about the right direction.

The trip out was all the usual—arrive late Friday, work somewhat furiously Saturday and Sunday, and return home late Sunday to be back at work on Monday.

It was usual in another way. The colleagues I got to know will likely remain acquaintances for a long time. They were great guys, very professional and thoughtful about the issues before them.

Unusual were two things: new staff, especially Joe O'Brien, were better and more competent than I had expected. You can read that report elsewhere in this issue. David Bishop impressed me, too. He's a former turfgrass extension staff member from the University of Nebraska. And then there was the new building.

It is huge! If architecture is your bag, you'd like this structure. It is very pleasing to the eye, has an interesting interior,



GCSAA Director Dave Fearis is from Kansas City; he drove a truck to the meeting! Bruce Williams chaired the meeting; Joe O'Brien made our time productive.

and appears to be a great working environment.

The reason it is huge is the addition. The rumors are true—two floors were completely empty and the third floor is at best underutilized. So any beef members have expressed about paying for an addition that wasn't needed are legitimate. But I guess you can say "there's always the future."

By the way, the old headquarters building still wasn't sold at the time I was there.

This 1994 trip to Lawrence had its fun, too. We attended the KU/Michigan State football game. For a guy like me who has (for decades) had season tickets to UW football games and Packer games, it was the ultimate venue for free time. Bruce Williams ran a good committee meeting, but his alma mater embarrassed him and the rest of the Big Ten—KU won the game!

So what is the conclusion from these "jottings"? For me, the pilgrimage out there has always been inspiring. This year it served that and a reaffirmation that calm seas are ahead after the troubled waters of the recent past. The pride is back, overall satisfaction has returned (although I can always find areas to encourage improvement in), and members should feel their interests are being sincerely served to the best of everyone's ability.

I am already hoping I will get to Lawrence again. Real soon. 🍷

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