
CHAPTER DELEGATES REPORT

Chapter Relations Meeting

September 9 & 10, 1995

By Mark A. Kienert

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you were prepared to voice your opinions, but felt it would very wise just to keep your opinions to yourself? Or maybe you thought it would be better to just sit quietly on your hands and bite your tongue due to the fact that you were completely in a minority? So you just sat there on the sidelines waiting for an opportunity to possibly voice to your ideals, but when the time came, the game's outcome had already been realized? It would be about as useful as kicking a field goal in the closing seconds of a 52-0 rout when your team is on the short end of the scoreboard.

I found myself in such a meeting when I represented you on behalf of the Wisconsin GCSA at the third annual GCSAA chapter relations meeting in Lawrence, Kansas. Ninety-five of the 114 GCSAA chapters were represented at this meeting. It was during this meeting that discussions and final revisions would be made to the proposed chapter affiliation agreement. (For those of you that are still in the dark and do not know what I'm writing about, go back to the September/October issue of the TJE GRASS ROOTS and read Monroe Miller's "MYOB" editorial. Then reread my chapter delegate articles that I have prepared for you over the past two years. Those articles will explain the concept as it was being created and will further detail the progress of this new "old" proposal. The chapter affiliation agreement was also reported to the membership in attendance at the WGCSA business meeting last spring.

In a nutshell, it is similar to a married couple who wishes to renew their commitment to each other by renewing their wedding vows. This proposed affiliation agreement has some bonds, however, that will dramatically change the makeup of our chapter. From a historical perspective, the affiliation agreement has been around since 1935 back when the "National" was called the National Association of Greenkeepers of America. In the charter agreement, it stated that all chapter members were required to be members of the "National" and members of the "National" also had to be supporting members of the chapter. As a charter member of NAGA, the Wisconsin GCSA agreed to abide by the affiliation agreement between the two parties that was in place at that time. Over the course of years, the percentages were reduced to the point that they were completely ignored or just simply slipped through the cracks and were never really enforced.

"Why the sudden emphasis on affiliation?" you might ask. Blame the lawyers and their lawsuits. The bottom line is that out of this agreement the chapters would serve as a defensive shield to protect GCSAA from any lawsuit that could start on the local level and work its way through the system. The potential of an Exxon Valdez-like environmental lawsuit and judgment has the capacity of sending shock waves through the profession. The affiliation agreement basically is

a "good business practice" for GCSAA and the chapters as it protects GCSAA from potential liability that may be brought on by one of its members. The affiliation agreement contains annual requirements which members are required to meet. For the record, there are very few differences between the original 1935 document and that which is being proposed today.

The new affiliation agreement, if ratified by the membership of the Wisconsin GCSA, states that by July 1, 1997 all new class A, B, and C members who join an affiliated chapter must join GCSAA, and all class A, B, and C GCSAA members must be a member of an affiliated chapter. All members who join from now until July 1, 1997 will be grandfathered into the chapter or GCSAA. Assistant superintendents/Class C membership privileges would change with the new agreement. There will be a bylaws change voted on in Orlando, that by all indications so noted by the delegates present, will pass by a landslide margin.

Now reread what you have just read and let it sink in for a moment. If the Wisconsin GCSA signs the new affiliate agreement with GCSAA, ALL new members that we accept



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into our roster MUST also join the GCSAA after July 1, 1997. The goal is an obvious, 100 % of our Class A, B and C members would also have to be a member of GCSAA. Other existing classifications would not change. This sounds very similar to taking a job in a paper mill or someplace else that says, if you want to keep the job, you must join the "Union" and pay the dues.

This issue really pulls me apart. On one hand I have to agree with Monroe and his stance that this is a free country and we don't force anyone to join anything against his or her wishes. On the other hand, I'm sick and tired of the welfare system. As it was stated over and over again in the meeting, there is a distinct difference between a chapter member who is a member of GCSAA and those who are not GCSAA members. I don't have to go into any detail if you think about it.

The question should be asked, "why would you be affiliated with a chapter and not the GCSAA or for that matter with GCSAA and not your local chapter?" If only 70 people in the chapter are members of GCSAA, those other 30 members are still represented by GCSAA. Do we now conduct two different meetings? Do we need two separate organizations now to comply? The ability of an individual to pay is a question that is raised most often. Could it be sticker shock for those who pay for both chapter dues and GCSAA dues from their own pockets. Two hundred and ten dollars for dues (\$320 if you now lump chapter dues onto that total) at one chunk when you are first getting started is a lot of money—almost one-half a monthly rent payment and for sure a total that is close to a car payment. The mat-

ter boils down to choices we must make in our every day living. I so valued my GCSAA membership that I paid for both chapter and GCSAA dues out of my pocket for the first five years that I toiled as a superintendent at a smaller rural country club. However, chapter members should not be left out or discredited because they are a superintendent, and are not members of GCSAA. Under the new affiliation agreement, we will have to either create of loophole (a classification for non-GCSAA superintendent chapter members) or deny them access to our group after July 1997. I can tell you that I dislike loopholes with a passion. The delegates present agreed that they wished to avoid all loopholes as loopholes would undermine the cooperative intent and commitment of the agreement.

Honorary Wisconsin GCSAA member Jim Latham, at last year's Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium, told us that any potentially damaging lawsuit would start at the local level and would come from a golf course whose superintendent was not a member of either the local chapter or GCSAA. For what ever the reason for the lawsuit, it would serve as a basis for upon which all future court opinions and decisions would be based. One mistake, like poisoning wildlife on a course, and a criminal charge could potentially affect us all through the subsequent lawsuits. The news media would have a field day with all of us.

For this agreement to be totally effective must be a two-way street. I want to tell you that I never thought I would see the day that one of our GCSAA board members would inform all the delegates present that they would send back
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the dues money of all individuals making applications to the GCSAA if they were not also a member of a local chapter. Of course there must be an equal commitment on behalf of the WGCSA to reject the membership dues from any new member who is not willing to join GCSAA. That's going to be tough! How can we deny membership to someone into our chapter whose primary purpose for existence, mind you, is education and fellowship, especially an association made up of volunteers?

Before you scoff at this statement, did you know that there are 63 members of the GCSAA who are not members of either chapter within the State of Wisconsin. Why would anyone not want to join the Wisconsin or Northern Great Lakes Chapters? Sixty-three people. Wouldn't it be nice to realize a portion of that dues money going into the O.J. Noer Facility to fund additional research studies?

If the Wisconsin chapter of the GCSAA chooses to affiliate, one of the first things that you will more likely notice is a dues increase to pay for the liability insurance that will be mandated by the new agreement. The cost of the dues increase would have to cover the cost of an insurance premium that runs in the neighborhood of \$750 dollars per year, approximately \$4 per member per year. This insurance would protect members while they travel to and from meetings, and it would guard it against lawsuits brought on by third parties that a chapter could face. Also, if someone were to take chapter funds and use them for his or her own personal use, the liability insurance would provide coverage for that loss. Some homeowners insurance programs already provide limited coverages for volunteers, but they do not offer much, if any protection against an environmental lawsuit brought against the board and membership of the WGCSA by a third party. It is a good idea for each chapter to carry insurance coverage for its operations, activities and conduct and it would provide insurance for premises, operations, property, personal injury, special events and directors and officers liability.

In cooperating with the new agreement, some of our bylaws would have to be amended to conform with the standard bylaws set by GCSAA. Changes to our bylaws have always been made to reflect changes made on the national level and business has been done that way for as long as I have been a member of your board. However, some of the changes could take away the vote from some of our newer members, most notably a new assistant golf

course superintendent member of our organization. This will happen after the bylaws changes are approved in Orlando. Assistants who declare that they are "career" assistants would have to have a separate level of classification so that they can retain their vote.

GCSAA's goal is to work with the chapters to serve its members, to strengthen the affiliation between GCSAA and its members, to increase communication among the chapters and communication between GCSAA and the chapters, and to develop chapter programs and services to benefit the members. I am aware of leadership development programs that are already in the "draft" stage for the purpose of training chapter officers and directors. GCSAA has identified individuals who volunteer to serve their local chapter as key members whom might be effective leaders to enhance the image of the golf course superintendent on the national level. The overall system could be developed into an "airport-like" hub system linking all chapters together through GCSAA. Successful programs found in sister chapters would be shared by others seeking similar information. And the program wouldn't stop there. There is a strong push to develop better communications among chapters, I suppose very similar to the joint meeting between our chapter and the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents chapter that was held in July of this year. Some of the programs being offered are of little or no use to the WGCSA, but like being in an all you can eat buffet line, you can take and eat what you like. GCSAA has worked very hard to identify and communicate with the leadership on the local chapter level. It has a charged mandate to improve the image of the golf course superintendent in the eyes of the golfing public everywhere and to send a positive message to the public at large about the favorable impact that golf courses have on the environment.

So where do we go from here? I sat next to a delegate from another chapter who informed me that his chapter, in principle, was against some of the restrictions found in the affiliation agreement, but he was told to vote for it anyhow as they felt that the measure would pass. I also sat behind a former president of GCSAA, whom I personally have never seen agree with anything, that once he understood the ideals of the agreement stated that he was all for the affiliation agreement. And at that meeting, the vote for passage of the proposed chapter affiliation agreement was more than a landslide, it was a slam dunk! Maybe when you find yourself in the company of a gracious host, as GCSAA is, people find

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that it is difficult to disagree and to debate the issue to support the opposite viewpoint. Most just nod their heads in agreement and are willing participants in the governing process like those with more articulate talent to express themselves.

However, do not misunderstand me. All issues were fairly discussed, concerns were voiced, understood and mediated in a fashion that favorable solutions were achieved. Everyone had a chance to voice their concerns and were given the opportunity to do so freely. But I can tell you this: the GCSAA board of directors and the chapter relations committee worked very long and hard in preparing and debating the issues and working out the bugs before presenting them to the delegates present. All the cards were laid out on the table before us for our inspection and review. These were very open and honest discussions that led to the final details of the chapter affiliation agreement. They were no smoke and mirrors, no scheming or backroom deals. All items were negotiable and were placed on the table to be refined during the debate. You can really tell that the board wants to hear and expects to hear our input and the input of all members on the issues.

The choices for the Wisconsin GCSA, a charter chapter of the GCSAA, are simple. We can join GCSAA and other chapters from across the country and abroad by renewing the affiliation agreement. Or we could allow our affiliation with GCSAA to lapse and simply become a chapter that chose not to follow affiliate. Remember that GCSAA is still made up of individual memberships. The individual members does not lose any rights or entitlements that are due him. Should we choose not to affiliate with GCSAA as a chapter, we would lose the ability to vote using a delegate. We could create a new set of bylaws with loopholes present to circumvent the process. We could form a new chapter made up of GCSAA members only and call ourselves the elite ones. But we would have to pay the new chapter registration fee of \$500 and other costs associated with the start up of a new chapter. Or we could hop on the bandwagon and influence the direction of future GCSAA directions. Is there a compromise that will allow both parties a "Win-Win" situation? The more I study the proposed changes, the more potential I see in making both the Wisconsin GCSA and GCSAA stronger entities. Although chapter dues are not being sought at present, the new affiliation agreement will call for a dues structure sometime in the future and will come as soon as the initial affiliation agreement is subject for review in the year 2000. Chapter dues will be justified by future GCSAA Boards as a means of supporting the numerous chapter programs that are to be developed. Maybe the price will be small in comparison to the benefits accrued.

Now if I could only get over my feelings of segregation, discrimination, and the ensuing fear of being sued as an officer of your chapter after I have just told someone we have to deny their application into our chapter because they do not meet the ability to pay for memberships into both organizations. It will be a difficult decision for all of us. ♣

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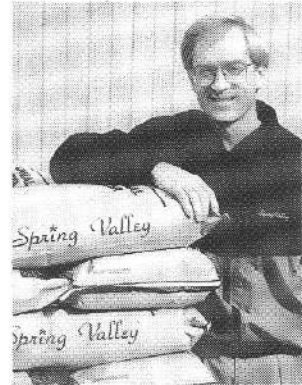
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