



WHAT ABOUT PETER GUNN?

By Monroe S. Miller

You all know Pete. He's been at the Lake Merion Golf Club in Chautauqua, Wisconsin for a couple of years now. He is perfect for the job; he wanted to get back to his hometown right after graduation, but the job at LMCC wasn't open.

I doubt Pete is even thirty, but he is well known to WGCSA members. He was a WGCSA scholarship winner while at the UW-Madison, graduated from Professor Kussow's program and spent several years as the assistant golf course superintendent at a couple of Wisconsin golf courses. You cannot find a better or more well liked guy than Peter Gunn.

Make no mistake—he could have found employment at a dozen different golf courses before he applied for and accepted the Lake Merion job. But he wanted to go home, be around his parents, two sisters and brother in Chautauqua. His wife Patty grew up there, too, and both of them want to raise their kids in that peaceful, beautiful town. They want the kids to be close to cousins and grandparents and aunts and uncles.

I have never once heard Pete grouse about the limited resources of Lake Merion Country Club. Although the budget is relatively small—barely \$100,000—the golf course is a gem. The shop is really good, clean and tidy and big enough for the equipment they have for the golf course. The main thing for Pete, however, is that it is in Chautauqua.

Pete has never said, and I have never asked, what his salary is. But it is not hard to figure out he likely is not making much over \$20,000 a year. It helps that Patty works part-time at the school, and housing is far less expensive than it is in Madison, Milwaukee or the Fox River Valley.

His budget hasn't included any money for professional dues or travel or meeting expense, but the board promised Pete that in a couple of

years they'd include \$500 for educational costs.

Pete was elated. It won't go far, but it will get him back into the WGCSA and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association and give him a little money for some chapter educational meetings and maybe the Field Day or Winter EXPO.

Make that "would have". Now that the GCSAA has launched its chapter affiliation requirements, Pete might be out of luck. It will depend on how the Wisconsin GCSA members feel about affiliation and the unfairness it inflicts on people like Peter Gunn.

So what is Pete supposed to do? If Wisconsin affiliates and Pete wants to join, he will have to pay up \$110 for our dues and \$210 (likely more by then) for GCSAA dues. The WTA dues are \$100, leaving Pete \$80 for meeting attendance. If it happens, it will be a pathetic set of circumstances for Peter and others like him, here in Wisconsin and in other states.

"For me, GCSAA membership will be a very expensive magazine subscription," Pete said. It is hard to argue with him.

"And I'd like to know why it is okay for a guy who joins the WGCSA a year before me to get away without having to join the GCSAA, but it isn't for me. Where's the fairness in that?"

I didn't have an answer for him.

"Even without joining the GCSAA, I am only going to have about \$300 for meetings and seminars for the year. So it is not like I am a fat cat or anything close to it. Our club is small and just doesn't have a very big budget. And my salary is all accounted for even before I get paid each Tuesday."

"But beyond that," Pete continued, "I don't know if I even want to belong to an organization that passes judgment based on what I belong to and how much money I have. I just cannot believe the Wisconsin guys are going to endorse reducing me and superintendents like me to some meaningless membership category so we don't screw up affiliation with the GCSAA."

I felt embarrassed. I could not answer Pete's question, and I felt bad he was even forced to talk about such dreary prospects. He went on, the bitterness in his voice rising and becoming more apparent.

"How can it be that paying \$210 dues to one organization somehow makes me more qualified to vote, serve as an officer or accept a director position in another organization? I do not understand that."

"I have always learned your true worth was measured by the kind of person you are, and by how you conduct your personal and professional life. Money is supposed to matter lit-

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tle, if at all. Apparently that isn't the way GCSAA has it figured."

I avoided establishing eye contact with him. It bothered me, and angered me, that I was unable to give him counsel or answer his questions. Fact is, nobody in Lawrence will give any justification for their plan to squeeze some superintendents out of state chapters.

"Do any decision makers in Lawrence have any idea how many golf course superintendents are at golf courses like mine? Lots and Lots. It isn't that we don't want to join the GCSAA; I'd absolutely love to. I feel left out without belonging. Remember, it wasn't that long ago they thought I was good enough to award me a GCSAA scholarship. But the money

isn't there for me to join. And there are thousands like me."

"But I have always felt good that I could at least find a home in the state chapter, a place to be with colleagues and a group that offers so much education."

"I can't tell you how bad I feel that even the state chapter option may not be there, especially if the GCSAA president and vice president have their way. Some of us aren't going to have anywhere to go..." His voice trailed off and he looked away.

"It might be easier to swallow, easier to accept if I could only understand the 'why' of their proposal. But I cannot."

The frustration Peter feels I feel too. I don't have answers—real, honest,

straight answers—to his questions. Despite asking for them, nobody from OUR national organization will come forth.

The answers need to come soon, before bridges are burned, before relationships are severed, before feelings are hurt beyond repair. The mere fact that these things could happen calls into question the real value of strident affiliation requirements.

Since Lawrence started this, they need to explore and initiate some changes before it is too late. We cannot afford to lose guys like Peter Gunn.

It is a sad state of affairs. Someone ought to be ashamed that it has come to this, and worried that it may get worse. Maybe someone ought to take a minute and listen. ♣

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