



I'd Rather Be Known As A Conservationist

By Pat Norton

Gentlemen, gentlemen!! Just what in the heck is going on with some of our 'environmentally conscious' brethren in the golf course management world? Is 'the environment' such a popular concept, such a buzz word that we all want and need for it to become the centerpiece of yet another GCSAA sponsored public relations campaign? I for one think that things 'environmentally related' are getting a bit out of hand, as witnessed by GCSAA's newest (and of course...coveted and prestigious) batch of awards...the 'Environmental Steward Awards'!!

Hey, hey!! The environmental bandwagon is moving through town, fellas, so we'd all better scramble quickly to get on...

The news media saturates us with environmental stories...sometimes about those nasty guys who operate the nation's worst hotbeds of pesticidal toxicity...the golf courses!! After a few years of fighting the logical fight against the 'environmental groups', we finally figure it out...it's the environment, stupid!!! So GCSAA decides that joining is smarter than fighting, which is not bad logic.

And I really must commend those who are really into the 'environment', whether it's on a golf course, or in any other form. God knows that there are millions of humans out there who don't give a rip about what happens to this Earth of ours. We need more people to be concerned about the natural world.

But now golf course superintendents want to be recognized as 'environmentalists'? Depending on your definition, possibly we could be considered as such. But don't you think that the 'real environmentalists' from the Sierra Club or the Environmental Decade would chuckle just a little upon realizing that 'greenskeepers' are now handing out "Environmental Steward" awards to each other? To me it's all just a bit of overkill in the quest for positive PR and public image. In this case it's way too transparent...

Still don't get it yet, you slowfoot? Remember that everybody these days is an environmentalist...it's the hot topic, the thing to delve into, it's where the smart money is going...why even WalMart has become stalwartly conscious of our nation's natural resources. Thank God for that!! I'm certainly sleeping better knowing that these folks are so concerned about conserving and preserving the soil, water, land, and forests of this great nation. Maybe that's why they're building smaller parking lots, developing less land, and specifying products that use less paper packaging, less plastic, and generally are stocking their shelves with alot less junk...I wish.

So I guess that I'm just a little bit cynical concerning some aspects of this big push to 'protect the environment' here in Illinois...wealthy golf clubs in Chicagoland make a big show of protecting their natural resources, while the State Department of Natural Resources does way too little to protect the Illinois River and gives industry way too much freedom to operate their businesses with little

regard for the environmental consequences.. until disastrous consequences of such policy occur.

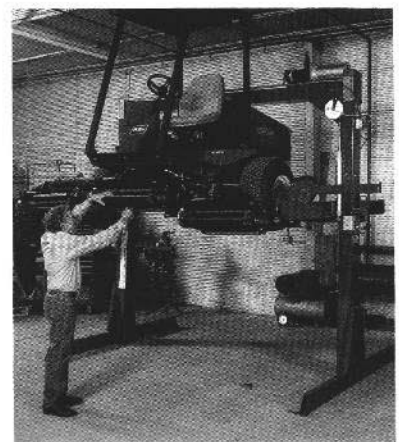
About two weeks ago a hazardous waste recycling plant right here in Grundy County had a huge warehouse fire. They were inspected about six months ago by the state, found to violate quite a few state regulations, and given some time to correct all of their problems. In the meantime, this serious fire broke out. Now they've got a real cleanup problem.

Something tells me that state agencies in Wisconsin would not let this type of sloppy industrial accident happen. The Illinois DNR was only established in June of 1995 and given powers similar to the DNR in other mid-western states at that time.

Before that time it was the State Department of Transportation that had control over the management of the state's waterways. Hence, the Illinois River is in very sad shape, filled with silt and not much more than a bargeway...but it is getting better.

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Environmental Steward Awards? Can anybody take this seriously? We suddenly start passing out environmental awards, totally inbred within our professional association, to those golf courses who certainly have the interest, and as importantly, the maintenance budget necessary in order to devote the staff/time necessary to qualify for such awards!

Be more impressed, gentlemen, with those experienced superintendents who have been ultra concerned with their golf course environments in a quiet, matter of fact sort of way. Their thinking and attitudes toward nature have been shaped over the years to the point that they'd never even think of applying for some trumped up award! They do this 'conservation work' because it's the right thing to do, it's very satisfying, which then means that it becomes fun to do!

It's just the quest for publicity by some, and the awarding of the prizes by others, that makes me gag! Don't misunderstand me...this newfound golf environmental consciousness is great and those who delve into it are to be congratulated wholeheartedly. But why do we pretend to be something that we're not, pass out the awards, and then pretend that it's mainly 'the environment' in which we're interested?

I submit, guys, that we are certainly not 'environmentalists'. That term evokes negative passion within me that brings to mind unreasonable, politically minded environmental radicals who do not listen to reason when it comes to discussions on the benefits/risks of agrichemicals, land management, and wildlife management.

What we do on our golf courses these days is more 'conservation work' than anything else. Webster's defines

'conservation' as "a careful preservation and protection of something" and further defines it as "planned management of a natural resource to prevent exploitation, destruction, or neglect"... sounds like a pretty good definition of our work, eh? A 'conservationist' is defined as 'one who advocates conservation, especially of natural resources'...

So given those definitions, I'd be more than proud to be described as a 'conservationist'. Let the political publicity hounds among us be the 'environmentalists'. The conservationists...solid midwesterners who are actively involved in Ducks Unlimited or Pheasants Forever...are almost all volunteers who donate tons of time, money, and use of land for the benefit of nature. That's what it's supposed to be about...

Maybe GCSAA should take this award a step further and institute a 'Master Golf Course Environmentalist' program. Then we can really let the golf world know just how concerned we are with protecting the entire natural environment!

This 'Environmental Steward Award' in particular makes me laugh. In the first place, I was the 'steward' at the AGR fraternity at UW-Madison...in charge of being environmentally responsible for the kitchen! Next, is the overuse/misuse of the word 'environment'....sort of nauseating after awhile.

Finally though, this award reminds me of the Dr. Pepper theme song with that Pied Piper guy dancing and singing through the streets..."I'm a Pepper, he's a Pepper, she's a Pepper, they're all Peppers, wouldn't you like to be a Pepper too"???

Simply substitute the word 'environmentalist' into the jingle, and I'm sure that you'll get the idea... ♣

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