

Sunny California

By Monroe S. Miller

Most of us from Wisconsin, when we think of California, we think 'sunny California.' It is an impression that is about to disappear for me and some others. Like the last time GCSAA convened in Anaheim, it rained. When we meet in San Francisco, it rains. And this year in Anaheim, it **RAINED**. Buckets. Cats and dogs.

The weather was of disaster proportions. There were mudslides, closed highways, trees down in roads and on houses, flooded neighborhood, eroded beaches that in some cases actually disappeared, and monsoon rains. The wind blew at gale forces. Traffic, normally in gridlock, turned highways into parking lots. And golf courses, many which thousands of us wanted to see or play, were closed and often under water. Local golf course superintendents, from San Francisco to San Diego, had to leave the conference for home to try to salvage their courses. It was, mildly put, a mess.

But many of us weren't surprised. What you hear from the west coast of the country all year long is bad news — a record setting drought last summer, earthquakes, forest fires and polluted air. Crime is in the news always. A visit to California reminded me why I like Wisconsin so much.

Weird as it seems, bad weather can have a positive impact on some attendees at conference. This year the show floor was jammed and educational sessions were well attended.

When the weather wasn't filling the newspapers and TV news programs, Monica Lewinsky (of Slick Willie's Zippergate — or is it Fornigate? — fame) was; she decided to visit her upper crust home in Brentwood while we were there! I wasn't sure if we would know of any attack on Iraq or hear of early Olympic returns; both lack the news appeal of bad weather and corruption.

This is the fourth conference I have attended in Anaheim. The first was the best, the third was the worst, and this was in-between. If the weather was tough, the surrounding area

seemed safer, though it is no Shangri-La. There was little gang graffiti whereas last time (1994) it was everywhere. There were no stark warnings about walking in certain areas, unlike last trip. And Anaheim has embarked on a substantial improvement project in the Disneyland/Convention Center surrounds. It is needed and visitors will appreciate it when it is completed.

Overall, the conference was put together pretty well. There were fewer irritations, some clear improvements

and a great cast of celebrities to hear and meet. I was glad to be there.

It didn't rain constantly, contrary to impressions created by news reports, and in-between storms some guys traveled north to check out some of the many great golf courses up there. Although the ATT Pro-Am was canceled at Pebble Beach, the courses were open for a relaxed "look-see", unfettered by any players. There was a group of Wisconsin GCSA members who played Riviera CC, Bel Air
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A USMC Honor guard stood at attention while the Alley Cats sang the national anthem.



Dan Quayle willingly signed books and gave autographs.



Peter Jacobsen was the star of the opening session.

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CC and LACC. The tournament courses pleased most players although the tourney was shortened by 18 holes.

For anyone attending a conference at the Anaheim Convention Center, a trip (five minutes maximum) to the Crystal Cathedral is a must. It is an architectural wonder one can see every Sunday on Robert Schuler's TV ministry. And about 15 minutes from the ACC is the Nixon Library and Museum. There is no argument that there was a dark side to the man, but I have visited a lot of presidential sites and this one is among the best. His childhood home, built by his father, is part of the museum and is at its original spot. The President and Mrs. Nixon are buried in the backyard, and the museum is extremely well done. It was an interesting side visit.

Anaheim is one of the now handful of places the GCSAA convention uses. Like the others coming up — Orlando, New Orleans and Atlanta — it has its good and bad. The best aspect of Anaheim is that the headquarters hotel is a real advantage; it is across the street from the convention center. In weather like we had this year, I was really grateful to be able to stay at the Hilton, even though I cringed at the obscene cost. Do GCSAA officers and directors pay for their room, or do we? Somebody is insulated from reality when agreeing to such outlandish room rates. Sharing a room, when the cost is that high, is essential.

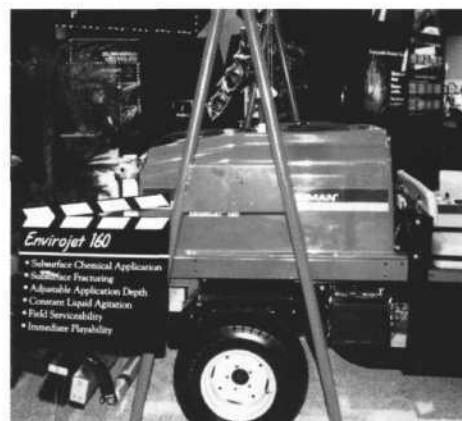
I was also glad that three of the big sessions — opening, environmental and banquet — were right in the building. The proximity to the ACC was a plus, but it is far from my favorite convention building. The downstairs location for some of the exhibitors and the GCSAA booths was unhandy, far worse to me than the split floor at San Francisco that so many griped about.

This was the 26th consecutive GCSAA conference I have attended, and like all the others, parts of it were good and some were average and some were poor. Following are my highlights and lowlights.

Opening Session: "Fantastic!" "Awesome!" "Best ever!" These and other comments like them were what I heard right after the opening session. Me? I loved it! Here's why;



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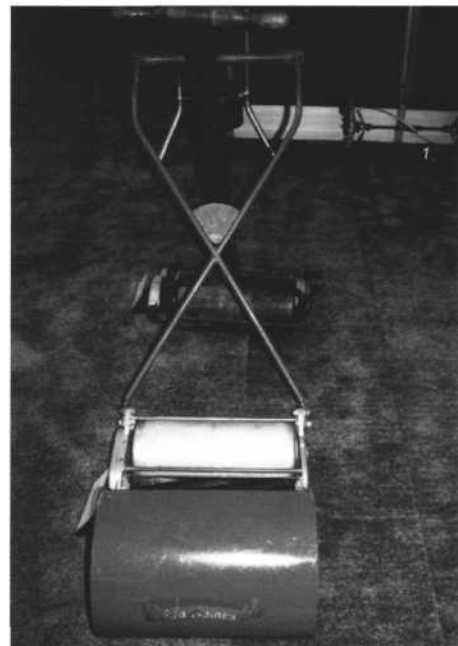
John Deere's presence grows each year.

- The U.S. Marine Corps Honor Guard presented the Colors while the Alley Cats sang the national anthem accapella. It was beautiful and inspiring.

- Peter Jacobsen was the greatest! He entertained us, got on other golf pros and club managers, ridiculed the GCSAA official carpet plaid wardrobe, and flattered golf course superintendents for a job well done. He was right on every time! People were in tears with laughter. He supported soft spikes, donated \$25,000 to the capital campaign and ripped on stimpme-ters. His comments on course condition were right on — three heights of cut, the absurdity of mowing fairways with walkers and other such conditioning crazes. He hopes for new golfers, lower costs to play and a retreat from golf 'in the air.'

"Integrity and honesty are the most important part of golf," Jacobsen said. "Respect of the rules, respect of competition and respect for the golf course must never be lost." Plus, Peter stayed and signed his book and gave autographs.

- Dave Mastroleo accepted the



An antique mower not unlike the one in my antique collection.

GCSAA distinguished service award with a speech that was like most would only dream of giving. The DSA was his "Oscar" — he is at L.A.'s Hillcrest CC — and he proceeded to

thank those influential in his career without putting anybody to sleep. He was super!

The opening session this year was more fun than it has been in my memory. Anyone offended by Peter Jacobsen — I cannot imagine anybody is that thin skinned — needs to get a life. Jacobsen's video *I Love to Play!* was the best, too.

A couple of questions do come to my mind. Why cannot the student scholarship recipients be introduced in person rather than by video? And did we have to have the "rap" music video promoting *Par for the Course*? It was too loud and too fast to follow. Even though Peter Jacobsen thought it was cool, I thought it was obnoxious.

Oh, we all appreciated there was plenty of chow at the reception afterwards!

Governmental and Environmental Session: High marks here again. Former vice president Dan Quayle was an excellent choice as a keynote
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Current ASGCA president Alice Dye and incoming president Bob Lohmann.



Old Tom Morris award recipient, Ken Venturi, answered questions at a press conference.



Tom Schwab and Jim Spindler visited and relaxed in the Wisconsin Hospitality Room.



Dave Brandenburg, Marc Davison and Rod Johnson swap stories at the Wisconsin Hospitality Room.

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speaker for this session, given the pathetic conduct by Clinton these days. Quayle contrasts sharply to the current occupant of the White House. He also loves golf, has played most of his life, and plays well. His first lessons were 'replace divots, repair ballmarks and rake traps!' Quayle told some golf stories, related experiences with golf greats like Sarazan and Snead and Hogan, and spoke of his friendship with Peter Jacobsen.

More serious matters were touched on by Dan Quayle — the moral and spiritual crisis in America, the yearning we have for some positive and creative leadership, the failure of public schools, and our excessive taxes. He concluded "that despite our problems, there is hope. America is great because America is free."

Oh, we all appreciated there was plenty of chow at the reception afterwards!

GCSAA Gala '98: Given the authority, I would rename this event *Snoozefest '98*. The invitation I received said it started at 6:00 p.m. Imagine the Midwesterner who typically arrives ten minutes early. He goes to the table at 6:45 p.m., and waits until 7:20 p.m. before anything happens. The meal was served at somewhere between 8:15 and 8:30. It was so dark on the aisle of tables next to the entertainment stage that one person at our table put his plate up next to the table candle in the middle of the table to see what he was eating. The meal was good, even if eaten in the dark. But between the end of the meal and the start of the entertainment, some guys were literally falling asleep; others were talking and lots were not paying attention. It was BORING, except for the Old Tom Morris Award presentation to Ken Venturi. I sat there in the dark, which encouraged lots of yawning when combined with head table activities, so long that my butt was sore.

Why can't this affair be shortened? Do we need to meet directors again for the upteenth time? Do we have to watch still MORE videos? Or is this the price we pay for "sponsorship?"

I don't care for hillbilly music and thought that was what the entertainment was going to be. It was a pleasant surprise that Trisha Yearwood can actually sing. I enjoyed the show, although the bozos with the TV cameras spoiled the view. The speakers were right in front of our table; I was

a little hard of hearing before the show, and now I'm almost deaf.

The head table crowd should sit with the commoners some day and listen. People think it is too long. Period. And it has gotten expensive. I have never missed a banquet, but one of these years I am going to figure that there is a better way to spend SIX hours.

Concurrent Sessions: 'The Inside Scoop on Bentgrass', deftly chaired by Dr. Frank S. Rossi (who wasn't so deft as chair of the Innovative Superintendent Session Part II on Saturday!) was absolutely outstanding. The substantial room was jammed, guys were lined up against

the walls and in the back of the room, and the crowd even spilled out into the hallway. It received rave reviews from everyone.

Obviously, I didn't attend the bermudagrass meeting. I counted on a colleague to report on the 'Managing Turf to Protect the Environment' and he gave it good marks, although it was poorly attended because we were all at the bentgrass meeting.

The 'Environmental Success Stories' session was rescued from being only average at best by Wisconsin's own Fred Fabian from Teal Wing up in Hayward. His lecture was great!



The largest ball on the show floor!



Frank Rossi chaired the popular bentgrass session.



Oscar Peterson and Gary Coulson visited about red iron in Toro's booth.



The Wollner brothers — Joe, Chuck and Dan.



John Netwall, Sue and Fred Fabian; John and Fred were honored for their ACS efforts.



Wisconsin Hospitality host Kris Pinkerton.

Innovative Superintendent Sessions: Ours may be the only professional conference in the country that has an educational program that starts at 6:00 a.m. On Friday and Saturday mornings, for 3 1/2 hours before the trade show opened, a program of golf course superintendents only as speakers talked about topics ranging from the Internet to green speed. The best among them, and I heard nearly all, was a double lecture by veteran superintendent Tom Mason from Birmingham CC in Troy, Michigan. Too many of the talks aimed too low, were poorly presented or had marginal topics.

Trade Show: "It's too big," is a comment heard frequently. With 700 exhibitors and over five acres of products, it is a daunting task to see it all. The best plan seemed to be to walk the show quickly, make notes of places you want to spend time at, and then go back later. The array is staggering, the scene is colorful and exciting, and it might be the best place in the world for golf course superintendents to chew the fat. It is always a great time when you are kicking tires.

USGA Green Section Conference: This was excellent, as it is most often. We should be flattered that the Green Section continues a part of our conference. The turf tips were great, the lawyers opened a few eyes, and author/broadcaster Jerry Schemmel added to the program. The only question was: why wasn't Stan Zontek on the program? I love that guy!

ASGCA Conference: The architects usually have a cool meeting, and it



Richard M. Nixon's childhood home, located only a few steps from his museum and library, was close to the Anaheim Convention Center.



The writing desk in John Muir's library is where many of his books were written.

was true again this year. They are a little off beat — last year they hosted a design contest for golf course superintendents, and this year they literally held a round table discussion after their lecture. Alice Dye, current president, will be succeeded by UW-Madison grad (and Grass Roots



Dr. Alister MacKenzie's "cabin" is located on another famous course he designed, Pasatiempo. Ken Venturi still holds the record low score, 63.



John Muir's home in Martinez, California. He is buried, with other family members, near here.

advertiser) Bob Lohmann. I am really proud of him.

1998 Conference Awards:

- Winner: Ken Venturi, a great choice for the Old Tom Morris Award. He's a regular guy, a golf guy. I went to the press conference, talked to him, asked a formal question, got the books he wrote that I have autographed, and left inspired by him.

- Losers: Probably half of the speakers are either poorly prepared, have marginal material or are lousy speakers. Why can't we preview them?

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For architecture buffs, the Crystal Cathedral was minutes from the Convention Center.

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- Upper: The thrill of visiting with authors at the book signings. It was and continues to be a great idea — credit GCSAA's Dave Bishop.

- Downer: The sponsor program, which forces us to listen to endless ads and introductions before and during events, to the point where we tune them out. I have, from the beginning, thought the program of selling everything to a sponsor stinks. The smell was worse this year. Plus, I would like to know where the money goes. My registration doesn't go down, it goes up. Cost for events doesn't go down, it goes up. Seminars are not less expensive with sponsors, they cost more. We need to investigate where the money goes.

- Say It Ain't So: Like most all others, I was appalled by the daily room rates for GCSAA hotels. Imagine how some of us felt when we heard a rumor that GCSAA gets a cut from each room it fills. If that is confirmed, I'll lead the revolt. Please, somebody, say the rumor isn't so.

- Best Speech: Joe O'Brien. He told me earlier in the day he had prepared some remarks. Big time under-



Chad Ball and Paul Bastron landed in LA, rented a couple of Harleys, and found some sunshine. Paul captured this photo of Chad.

statement — his speech was even complimented by the former vice president. It was excellent listening to a deserving winner and a thoughtful guy.

- Most fun: Cruising the member merchandise store. Compliments to whoever made such bargains available — it was even more fun for non-shoppers like me.

- Do: Stay from the first event to the very end. It is a rich experience that teaches and inspires.

- Don't: Use GCSAA Travel. We even had a difficult time dealing with them for a rental car. The few bucks you save don't cover the cost of the hassle. You have to call (and call



It's back to Orlando next year.

and call and call) for a written confirmation on anything. Forget it and go it alone or choose a local travel agent you can quickly get your hands on when problems arise.

- Best Freebie: Again, after 26 years, the Jake hat is the best giveaway. My collection includes one for every year I have attended. A close second is the golf art work by David Pursell; this year's sketch of Ken Venturi was superb.

If you missed Disneyland this year, you will have another chance in 1999 when the conference and show moves to Orlando, again. God willing, I'll see you there. ♣

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