

GCSAA Conference and Show: Orlando 1999

By Monroe S. Miller, Blackhawk Country Club

For the 27th consecutive time, I saddled up and headed to the annual GCSAA conference and show. This year's destination was the Orange County Civic and Convention Center in Orlando. And, like the 26 previous trips around the country I have been privileged to make, it was time well spent. I wouldn't want to start a golf season having not been in attendance; there are too many things a person could miss.

Orlando is a favored site of GCSAA members; lots of families attend because, relatively speaking, it is safe. That may not be saying a lot when its competition includes dreadful places like Dallas, New Orleans and Atlanta. Anymore, even the fabled Anaheim site is one where you could get mugged pretty easily.

The best way to report on conference, for me at least, is to offer a report card on some of the activities. Here goes.

Opening Session: This event was particularly good, in my view. There are reasons for this judgment:

1. There was, finally, some sensitivity to the notion that brevity is important. Endless talking does little for anyone (other than the same old speakers), and planners at GCSAA seem to have figured this out. Usually there is an inverse relationship between length and attendance. The substantial crowd says it all.

2. Finally, we had some Distinguished Service Award winners who measured up. I know Dan Jones, was invited to speak at the UMass Conference by Tony Caranci a number of years ago, and feel that Palmer Maples is a past president who is really deserving. Maples was given the award for accomplishments, not politics, and I wasn't the only one who noticed. This was a group that could stand shoulder to shoulder with past winners like O.J. Noer, Jim Love, Paul Rieke and Tuck Tate. Some of the more recent DSA winners diminished the value of the honor.

3. Barbara Bush was just great as a keynote speak-



Orlando rolled out the welcome mat for golf course superintendents.

er. It was enough to make a person pine for the days when the Bush family was in the White House, when principle and morality, honesty and integrity and decency reigned. Her wonderful message only emphasized how pathetic the current residents of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. are.

Mrs. Bush was an excellent choice for a group like ours. Golf has been a part of her family for a long time, and her stories about the game were right on the mark.

And how neat - she and George Bush were house guests of Arnie and Winnie Palmer at the Bay Hill Club! Bay Hill is probably only 10 minutes from the convention center. Here is a coincidence: That morning, at about 8:00 a.m., I buzzed over to Bay Hill. I wanted to get a shirt and see if, per chance, Arnie was around and if he would auto-

graph a book for me (it has happened before!). I overheard a player ask the golf pro if Arnie had teed off yet. The pro replied, "he and George teed off at 6:30 this morning." It was only when Mrs. Bush told us they were staying at the Palmers that it dawned on me that "George" was George Bush! How I wish I would have waited at the turn!

On the other hand, the video presentations offered absolutely no new or important or interesting information. In addition, they were of such poor quality - too dark - that it was difficult to see anything on the screen. Shorten them up or lose them entirely.

I still object to the oversized area of privileged seating - the prime seating. I couldn't get any good photos. I can see a few seats being set aside, but not the number that now are. It aggravates people.

I really wish some planning had taken place to allow Mrs. Bush time to give autographs or sign books. It would have been really special.

Career Development Session: Terrific! Larry Helm was invigorating and witty and pounded out good



The entrance to the show floor doesn't give a clue to the enormity of the equipment and products display.

**Bayer Turfgrass Scholarship
1998-99 Recipients**

Matthew R. Boyce	Penn State University
Mark Daniels	Ohio State University
Mieke Damaske	Cornell University
Trygve Ekern	University of Wisconsin-Madison
Jeremy B. Fall	Louisiana State University
Adam Haberkorn	Michigan State University
Cliff Helvie	Purdue University
Eric Hogan	University of Missouri
Kris Kvelland	University of Illinois
	Champaign Urbana
Thomas Marks	Louisiana State University
Ryan Vogler	Penn State University
Eric Watkins	Rutgers University
Dave Weston	Cornell University
Jeffrey N. Urquhart	University of Rhode Island

Bayer 

Trygve Ekern was winner of a Bayer Turfgrass Scholarship. John Turner initiated the scholarship for Bayer.

advice and humor for two solid hours. Too bad the room was too small. Why is the concept of adequate seating so difficult to grasp. The convention center is cavernous; I refuse to believe better accommodations couldn't be made.

I attended the strategies breakout session presented by the 50+ years of age speakers. What a superb job, maybe even more relevant for the younger members. Oscar Miles and Peter Salinetti were outstanding. Too bad, again, the room was too small. Joe O'Brien came to the rescue, halted the proceedings, and moved the whole operation to a room across the hall the 10X capacity. Then all we had to worry about was getting close enough to see and hear!

Merchandise Store: Several orders smaller than last year's; so - so prices for a group that is buying such items in our golf shops for cost. But the selection was pretty good and the quality was definitely pro shop. If you needed GCSAA logo wear, this was worth a stop.

Book Store: Some good bargains; good selection; book signings that featured Geoff Cornish and Bob Graves could only be rewarding. I hope GCSAA keeps this feature each year.

Research Session: There were two aspects to this full morning session that made it excellent:

1. It featured good scientists who clearly were well prepared, not only with their own research but that going on nationally in their area of expertise.

2. Each had 30 minutes to talk; in past years GCSAA planners frustrated many of us, including presenters, when the time allotment for each one was



A bird's eye view of a corner of the show.



Unique products are everywhere, like this clipping spreader mounted on the back of a triplex greensmower.



This Toro walking greensmower is part of the GCSAA historical collection. Sadly for the editor, it is what I learned to mow with in the 1960's!



Chad Grimm was officially welcomed to New Orleans, site of the 2000 Conference, by this member from LA!



Tony Grasso received a recognition at the meeting of the 40th anniversary of the O.J. Noer Foundation.



The Wisconsin Hospitality Room welcomes WGCSA members, Milorganite staff, and friends.



Dr. John Stier holding court with some of the Wisconsin turfgrass management students attending the GCSAA Conference in Orlando.

only 15 or 20 minutes. We are getting somewhere. Next year - 40 minutes?

O.J. Noer Research Foundation: The 40th anniversary of the Foundation was celebrated. I was honored to attend. The Foundation corpus is now over \$500,000; O.J. would have been pleased. It is a good time to remember that the first Foundation grant was to Dr. James R. Love at the UW - Madison. He used it for a classic piece of work: Visual Symptoms of Major and Secondary Nutrient Deficiency in Turfgrass. It was O.J. who wanted the first funding to go to his alma mater and to Jim. It seems like yesterday.

Trade Show: The venue in the OCCC is probably the best of all we visit across the country. I found the show, as I usually do, very exciting. It is the only place in the world to see first hand the options for supplies and equipment we have for our golf courses. I'd hate to ever miss it.

Innovative Superintendent Sessions: Major screw ups on the first day - slide projectors (visual equipment) didn't work, nor did the microphone

(audio). Inconceivable, it seems to me. Coupled with the 30 minute delay and some average presentations, it was kind of a bust. The good news is that the second day was excellent.

Banquet and Show: Finally, we had the chance to pass on awards and adulation and a lot of business irrelevant and uninteresting to most. Instead, those of us who want to have a nice dinner and some entertainment sans the above mentioned can now do it. Past administrations had pushed this event to its

unreasonable limit - 5:30 to 11:30. You saw the result this year - small crowds at all events. People have been grossed out the last couple of years, and a lot of the couples we used to sit with at the banquet refuse to go ever again. This splitting of events was a step, albeit a baby step, in the right direction.

All is not well with the banquet and show, however. I wonder if any GCSAA staff person or elected politician gave a thought to how people would feel when they got in line in the convention center a little after 6:00 a.m. to exchange vouchers for banquet table assignment to find that 62 - SIXTY-TWO - tables were reserved? That is 620 people - the elite, I guess - who didn't have to be troubled or hassled early in the morning to get premier seats. It is arrogant, mean and obnoxious. And it takes enormous gall to pull such a stunt. Are those seated in the best seats better than the rest of us? So, as one gal I was seated next to in the back of the room said, "To hell with it next year and forever."

This selfish policy has to be changed or the attendance will be even lower than it was this year. The only Wisconsin golf course superintendents I noticed there were Mike Handrich and myself. And if it doesn't change, you can count me out next year.

USGA Green Section Conference: This organization does such a super job for us. The information presented at the meeting was all useful and covered the full range of problems we have. I loved having Dr. Noel Jackson lecture on organics, and I applauded long and loud when he was honored with the Green Section Award. Hurrah for Snow, Vavrek, Zontek and the rest of the staff. They are always a class act.

American Society of Golf Course Architects: I was really proud of Bob Lohmann, president of the ASGCA. He is a Wisconsin born, raised and educated guy, a UW - Madison grad, and designer of a lot of golf course features in Wisconsin.

The program was outstanding; it was educational and even entertaining. From permitting (you should have seen Ed Seay's 38' long list of required permits) to pricing, we got a full range of opinions. I was fortunate to be able to attend.

Other than mistakes and poor planning at some turns at conference, there was more concern than usual about hotels and rooms. Some people moved because of dirty rooms. And usually they moved to better hotels with better rooms and a much better price. I will never get that one figured out.

The final judgment has to be based on whether or not each of us learned enough and saw enough and networked enough to make the trip worth its cost. For me, again, this was money well spent. I will be there next year, even if it is in New Orleans. ♣

