

From Start to Finish, 2000 GCSAA Conference Was Tops!

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club



It could have been predicted: we didn't have any snow events to speak of in Wisconsin UNTIL the very day we were to start the drive to New Orleans and the 2000 GCSAA Conference and Show. That day - Sunday, February 13th - presented nearly blizzard conditions. I couldn't complain too much, however. We needed the moisture after an extremely dry fall and a winter nearly bereft of snow.

So, a day later, Steve Millett and I headed south for The Big Easy. We had an appointment at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, Mississippi on the way down. We missed our appointment because of the snow, but thought someone in that facility would be willing to answer questions about zebra mussels. Wrong. They were all in Ontario, Canada attending a zebra mussel convention! Since we were in Vicksburg, we did a driving tour of the famous Civil War battlefield where Wisconsin soldiers played an important role. Many of our Badger boys died there; a memorial to them is in the park, topped with Old Abe, their Civil War eagle mascot.

The weather in New Orleans on Tuesday, the 15th, was warm to the tune of almost 20 degrees F above normal. It felt good. Our room at the Marriott was in order, parking was available for the truck, and we didn't have to worry if our luggage would arrive.

This was the fourth GCSAA conference I have attended in New Orleans. We've stayed at the Hilton, the DoubleTree, the Sheraton and now the Marriott. They are all convenient to the enormous convention center and

close to the French Quarter. Steve was all eyes as we explored that old part of town on Tuesday afternoon.

New Orleans isn't a pretty city. It is dirty, it smells funny, and there are a lot of weirdoes on the loose. Although the food is supposed to be good (if you like seafood), the milk was terrible. But what the downtown area may lack in beauty is made up with its history.

We walked Decatur Street into the French Quarter, nosing around the shops full of beads, hot sauce and chicory coffee. We saw the Washington Artillery Park. The Cafe du Monde was a must stop - strong, black coffee and rich beignets smothered in powdered sugar. Jackson Square, with carriages on the street side, is a show in itself. Mimes are part of the street culture there. St. Ann's side of the Square offers tarot readers and portrait painters and balloon peddlers.

We ate supper at the French

Market. Millett had to eat the crawfish, disgusting little creatures that have to be broken and pinched before you can eat the meager meat. He must have had a



A monument to honor the Wisconsin men who died at Vicksburg during the Civil War. Old Abe is on top.



A plaque tells of the founding of New Orleans. The Café du Morde is in the background.



Jackson Square in New Orleans.

bushel of them. I went for more traditional fare.

We took St. Phillip Street to Bourbon and walked down Bourbon Street. The sights ranged from tap dancers on the streets to Dixieland jazz from the bars. And, of course, on a warm night near Mardi Gras, there is the bead throwing as a reward for... well, you have to see it to believe it.

At a break later in the week, I walked to Dauphine Street, which is parallel to Bourbon and a block north of it. I was thrilled to find the cottage where John James Audubon lived and the one where he painted southern birds as part of his Birds of America epic. It was the last of the Audubon sites I desperately wanted to see.

The other streets of the French Quarter - Royal and Chartres, Burgandy and Rampart, Iberville and Bienville and Conti, Toulouse, St. Peter, Orleans and the rest down to Esplanade Avenue - are all curious and interesting with something for everybody, even hicks from the Midwest.

It was a good omen for us, I guess: we were there at the same time Pat Sajak and Vanna White and the Wheel of Fortune were in town! The week was one of the best GCSAA conferences I have attended. I am a decent judge, based on experience. This was my 28th consecutive conference and show.

What did I like about it? Here goes.

1. I attended a seminar that was

Carriages line the Decatur Street side of Jackson Square.



Bourbon Street held lots of surprises for those who walked there.



John James Audubon lived here (on Dauphine Street) and...



... painted here, also on Dauphine Street..



Randy Swonger & Steve Schmidt visiting in New Orleans, as if they don't see enough of each other at Butte Des Morts CC.



Dr. Frank Rossi, here with Randy Witt, stopped by the Wisconsin Room to renew old friendships.

excellent. Randy Witt was there, too, and I think he would agree. Dr. Frank Rossi would be the one person in the country with the courage to offer a seminar series that looked at *Poa annua* from a view other than eradication. In fact, his survey of the class revealed that 90% or more of us were working hard at its culture. It was a brilliant effort by Rossi. GCSAA now has to offer it as a regional seminar (providing Frank has the time). It will fill a gaping hole in the educational offerings of the association.

2. Convention Center Facilities. The building is big, reasonably arranged and very clean. With only a couple of exceptions (most notably, the research session) there was adequate seating and room in the halls. The auditorium was the first I have seen in such facilities, and it was excellent. Shortcomings were food service stands - most of us resented having to wait so long for mediocre chow. And the people working the stands - well, let's say they weren't exactly service oriented.

Audio-visual equipment that I witnessed all worked. Three cheers!

3. Opening Session. The start of the first conference in the new century was pleasant and informative. The Zion Harmonizers entertained those of us who like to arrive early for a good seat. A New Orleans four trombone band led the big shots in and onto the stage. Only a reason-



Peter Ueberroth stayed to sign autographs until everyone who wanted one was satisfied.

able number of seats were reserved, a distinct improvement over the selfish roped area of some recent years. The auditorium was a terrific venue - comfortable seats, good views of stage and screen, and a good sound system.

I was pleased that the superintendent/pastor remembered Winnie Palmer and Payne Stewart in his invocation. The session was an appropriate place to honor a GCSAA employee who had worked 25 years on the conference and show. And, as is becoming habit, the GCSAA board gave two of the distinguished service awards to former GCSAA presidents. I think they ought to line them all up at once, give them the DSA, and be done with it. From that point forward, search the association for the hun-

dreds of non-politicians worthy of the honor and pick a couple of them each year for the award. The conversation in the crowd indicates I am not far from the mark.

As much as anyone in recent memory, I enjoyed Peter Ueberroth as the keynote. He is a man of great accomplishment - chairman of the 1984 Olympics, Time magazine Man of the Year that year, the sixth commissioner of baseball and now a co-owner of Pebble Beach. He focused on two messages: change and success. It was an excellent take-home speech. Plus, he was willing to sign autographs for all who wanted one. First class.

4. Golf General Session. This was another really good presentation. It moved along nicely with minimal commentary from the prez

Bayer 1999-2000 Undergraduate Scholarship Recipients

Matthew Boyce, Penn State University
 Chad Casey, Mississippi State University
 Mieke Damskie, Cornell University
 Mark Daniels, The Ohio State University
 Joseph R. DiIrenzo, Penn State University
 Douglas J. Drugo, Penn State University
 Trygve Eken, University of Wisconsin-Madison
 Jeremy Falt, Louisiana State University
 Adam Haberkorn, Michigan State University
 Cliff Helvie, Purdue University
 Eric Hogan, University of Missouri-Columbia
 Kris Kvelland, University of Illinois-Champaign
 Thomas Marks, Louisiana State University
 John H. McCalla, Jr., University of Arkansas-Fayetteville
 John Miederhoff, University of Missouri-Columbia
 Seth Petersen, University of Wisconsin-Madison
 Tim Quigley, University of Illinois-Champaign
 James C. Ransom III, Louisiana State University
 David Roush, University of Maryland-College Park
 Jeff Sexton, Purdue University
 David Solivetti, Michigan State University
 Kevin Sunderman, The Ohio State University
 Jeffrey Urquhart, University of Rhode Island-Providence
 Ryan Vogler, Penn State University
 Eric Watkins, Rutgers University
 Jarrett Watson, Louisiana State University
 Eric Weibel, Rutgers University
 Dave Weston, Cornell University

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Two of the students who received Bayer scholarships were UW-Madison grads.



Dr. Jung and President Pinkerton at the Wisconsin hospitality room.

(a strength of Dave Fearis). Watschke replied appropriately for his environmental leadership award. And Nancy Lopez, the 2000 Old Tom Morris Award winner, couldn't have demonstrated what a perfect choice she was any better in person that she did from the satellite hookup. There wasn't a dry eye in the crowd; her father is gravely ill and she needed to be with him. Despite that stress, she showed the traits we all love in any person in her rather short acceptance. Credit

Three giants in golf course irrigation in Wisconsin - Gordy, Tom & Ken.



Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Christopherson of Wisconsin Turf Equipment Corp.

must be bestowed on GCSAA staff for organizing this alternative.

Henry March was good as a featured speaker - good message with clear lessons. It was a little overdone and hyper for my taste, but I still applaud him and his success.

5. *Research Session.* Not what I expected; in past conferences this was a chance for research scientists to present their work and summarize what was being done in labs around the country on various subjects important to us. The actual title under the research session was 'Science for the Golf Course.' Most were pertinent topics; one in particular was an insult it was so simple. And as usual, some have awful slides, a sin in this day of technology. Gail Schumann and Michael Farrar were the best.

6. *Greens/Between Roughs.* I moved back and forth between these two; nothing really new but nevertheless it was a productive afternoon.

7. *Innovative Superintendent I and II:* I enjoy these - breakfast at

6:00 a.m. and lecture at 7:00 a.m. Just like home! Not all were good; not all were relevant. But I respect colleagues who prepare to share their successes with their colleagues. The best of the bunch was Michael Lee's presentation about his phantom crew. The talk was great, he seemed well practiced, and his slides and power points took the day. In second place was Merrill Frank, a veteran of *Poa annua* management for 38 years.

8. *Green Section Program.* I missed this for the first time ever. It conflicted with the chapter editor's seminar. All reports gave it high marks.

9. *Equipment Show.* I have never left a conference with a better feeling about the equipment show than I did about this New Orleans effort. Troubling to me is that I cannot put my finger on the reasons why. Here are my suspicions; maybe some of you can help figure why:

a. The show floor was big. This allowed for wide aisles and plenty



Dr. Steve Millet held court with both current and former UW-Madison turf students.



A couple of old GCSAA vets – Tom Harrison and Jerry Kershasky.

of room to move.

b. The hall was rectangular, making it easy to find vendors in the first place and to return for more information. The space was well allocated.

c. The hours were generous.

d. It was easy to leave and find a place to sit. Plus, the member lounge was a good idea for weary showgoers.

Another point on the plus side was the fun of getting another Jacobsen hat for my collection. But on the negative end was the lack of tables and chairs at the food stands. I like to sit at lunch time.

10. *Bookstore.* For bibliomaniacs like me, this was a great stop. There were some outstanding bargains. And I had a truck to haul home some treasure for the university interns I'll have on our staff this summer. Although there were no formal book signings, a few authors were in the store and happy to autograph their books. I believe this is one of the best benefits of a GCSAA membership - good books at a fair price.

The soft goods selection was down from previous years, and the bargains were not anything special. We can all do better in our golf shops. But, on the other hand, the logo is offered nowhere else, so the complaint isn't exactly fair.

11. *Wisconsin Room.* What a night! Everybody was there; spirits were high. There seemed to be enough room to sit, if you wanted to.



Mike and Majorie Kilpatrick enjoyed the Dinner Show as much as the rest of us.

Friends and colleagues, UW faculty, Dean Carl O'Connor and his wife and daughter, USGA guys (including retired Jim Latham) and many, many more enjoyed the hospitality room for conversation, snacks and plain old socializing.

12. *The Dinner Show.* GCSAA has FINALLY got it right. The head table preening is over; Old Tom Morris Award is presented elsewhere; and, apparently once again, we are all welcome. Last year, 62 tables of 10 people each were reserved. We peons were relegated to the cheap seats regardless of how early we arrived and what arrangements had been made for a good seat. That was wrong and it must have been realized as wrong. And this year, the entertainment was great; from old rockers like me to kids like my assistant, the Four Tops



Mike Lee spoke at conference and proved he is an innovative superintendent.

had enormous appeal. The show during the head table seating on through the salad serving was fun, fun fun! Phil Tralies should feel really good about this party. Jacobsen got its money's worth and then some. It was enough to make you want to run out and purchase a LF! Thanks.

13. *Other Pluses.*

a. The weather was as good this year as it has been bad other years. Warm with no rain.

b. Shuttle service ran on time and ran frequently. The buses were clean, the drivers were polite, and the routes were idiot proof.

c. No severe hotel problems that I heard of.



The entertainment before dinner was colorful and exciting.



Mardi Gras costumes can be very elaborate.

d. More educational offerings than one person could attend. Serious courses should send two if they can afford it.

14. *Some minuses.* Not everything was perfect, leaving room for improvement for next year.

a. PLEASE. PLEASE. PLEASE. Find somebody to design a conference and show directory that has a little usefulness. Just a little. They almost always are poor; this year set the all-time worthlessness record. This was a bad directory. I am going to look up all advertisers in it and write a note to them asking them not to advertise in it next year until they see it and only if it



The Four Tops still have it - there wasn't a somber face in the hall! They were accompanied by a 14-piece orchestra.

has value to conference goers. The conference and show is a cash cow; GCSAA should take a teeny little bit of money from the member registration fees and give us a directory we can actually use. Size it right, keep it small (i.e. NO ADS), organize the information in a useful and accessible fashion. Make it understandable to an average adult like me. The one offered this year was worse than useless; it was an aggravation.

b. I'll say it again, as I do every year: preview speakers and their visuals and only invite them if they have an interesting message that is somewhat relevant and well presented.

c. Figure out a way so that access to seminars is equally available to all. Same with hotels. Those not on the Internet or who choose not to use that system are screwed. And they are angry.

d. Lose the GCSAA travel service. Or hire another one. I don't think GCSAA should be in the travel business. The all too frequent mistakes reflect badly on the association.

e. Have someone who works with the books at GCSAA headquarters try to neatly remove the price tag on the back of a book that might be intended as a gift. It will take ten minutes, a chisel and hammer, and more patience than normal people have. Go to Borders or to a Barnes

and Noble bookstore and see how their price tags come off without ruining the jacket. Then use them and throw away whatever you now have. They are terrible.

f. Why take a fun program (18-hole challenge) and change it into a pain in the neck (27-hole challenge)? Leave a good thing alone.

Notice, I have not said anything about PDI, the issue that could have made this a controversial and divisive conference. However, GCSAA has done such a lousy job of informing us about it and explaining its ramifications that most members were (and still are) clueless. The war over PDI (which is NOT member driven, by the way) will be fought in the next couple of years. I am glad it was not an issue; it could have spoiled what otherwise was a great conference.

I have liked all the GCSAA conferences I have attended, some more than others. One I liked the least was the last trip to Dallas. It was a city that made me feel unsafe, with inconvenient housing arrangements and a poor convention center. Let's hope that all has changed by next year. ♣

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