

What Some Others Are Saying About PDI

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



One of the advantages of editing a chapter publication is reading what other chapters are thinking about issues of the day. There is some interesting reading about the PDI issue these days. Quickly you discover you don't get a clear picture or the whole story about PDI if all you read is the canned GCSAA line.

So, following are a couple of opinions about PDI from colleagues in other parts of the country.

Mostly, I am not infusing myself into this issue, as difficult as it is not to do that. One reason for resisting the temptation is that PDI won't affect me to any great extent. Those it will affect need to fight the battles to resolve the issue in our best interests as a group.

Another reason I am on the sideline is actually twofold: two of the committee members command as much professional and personal respect as I can give. Both Dr. Paul Reike and Dr. Mike Hurdzan have impeccable credentials and a long record of doing what is best for our profession. They are bright men, well experienced and savvy and possessing absolute integrity. If they believe PDI is good, you have to pause and consider it carefully.

Finally, I believe in education for golf course superintendents. Let's see, I have four years of undergrad education in turfgrass management and two years of graduate study in turfgrass management. I have attended 28 consecutive GCSAA conferences, go to their seminars, never miss WTA fields days or winter conferences and always attend the WGCSA Wisconsin Golf Turf Symposium. I enthusiastically helped form the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association, helped get the

Noer Research Facility to a reality and worked with others to establish undergraduate scholarships. I believe this journal I have edited for 17 years is about education above all else, as is the Wisconsin Turfgrass News which two of us started and I edited for a decade. I think my track record regarding education in our profession is well established. So, if the PDI plan requires legitimate educational accomplishments, then I would have to consider it worthy of support.

On the other hand, how many of us joined GCSAA to have their employees meddling in affairs with our employers? I surely did not. I became a member because of the conference and show, the magazine, the comfort of knowing we had a "lobbyist" behind us on national issues and the possibility of decent seminars. Overall, I have been a satisfied member, although the seminars as a group over the years have been a disappointment. They have developed some useful services, for sure, and the bookstore pleases me. Beyond that, the association has shown a propensity to flub basic and straight forward tasks - two months to get their well promoted video tapes, screwed up travel and housing plans and book orders, missed lobbying opportunities, Golf Asia, etc. We all have our own lists of mistakes - human nature accounts for some of it, no doubt. Can you imagine the potential heartbreak if GCSAA gets between you and your employer? Good grief - this is how we feed our families and make house payments and spend our lives! I prefer NOT to have anyone in Lawrence, Kansas in the middle of superintendents and golf courses.

Last January I attended a GCSAA anniversary committee meeting in Kansas City. By the way, I am so pleased to be on this committee - it is exactly the kind of work GCSAA should be doing and doing well. Joe O'Brien asked me about my take on PDI. My reply was, "What's PDI?" Dave Fearis rolled his eyes!

Obviously the association has done a poor job of communicating this issue, so I (and lots of others) am immediately suspicious that, once again, something is going to get shoved past us that wouldn't stand the close and open scrutiny of the general membership. I feared GCSAA was going to try to "help me" again.

I then started to read the various company lines that usually started out something like this: "In response to member-driven requests for classification standards... " No Einstein is required to tell the difference between a fact sheet and a pitch. In 28 years



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as a regular GCSAA member and another five as a student member, NEVER ONCE have I ever heard any GCSAA member anywhere say we need member standards. And I have spent a lot of time around colleagues and at GCSAA meetings. Not ONE word! Member driven? An insult!

Then I asked, "Who's on this committee, anyway?" Three past presidents, the current prez, the prez-in-waiting. Not counting Mike Hurdzan and Paul Reike, there are 13 members; eleven of them are CGCS. Tell me that this constitutes a committee that reflects the membership. It doesn't, of course, and the sacrifice is credibility. Mostly, they are from big courses with big budgets. Past involvement in GCSAA indicates they enjoy the politics of the association and have time to spend just about any way they want. THAT IS NOT TRUE FOR MOST OF THE REST OF US. And there are burdens PDI will impose that too many may not be able to meet because of the time required. Quite frankly, the superintendents who should be held in our highest regard and accorded our highest classification are those putting out a quality product on a modest or low budget, day after day. They are the talented ones, regardless of how they received their training. Generally, big budgets make any job easier. The point is, if ten percent of our members have gone through the CGCS business, then they should represent ONLY ten percent of a committee

Like many, many other members, I am absolutely astounded that so much money can be spent before we have any idea about what is going on. I am not sure what that means, but the Franklin Covey company has to love it.

Next, Ray Davies came to Fond du Lac to educate us on PDI. Nice guy; I ate lunch with him and enjoyed the conversation at our table. But I didn't learn much from his presentation. He was obviously VERY well rehearsed and he became very defensive when challenged. In fact, as a result of Tom Harrison's calling him on that point, Ray apologized to Tom after the meeting. It was not very informative with regard to PDI.

As I look at the ongoing requirements, I think back to some of the dreadful GCSAA seminars I have sat through over the years. What a way to fill requirements. Are there guarantees we won't experience that when members HAVE to attend? Last year I registered for three seminars at conference (Frank Rossi's three on *Poa annua*) and got into one of them. If PDI were in effect, would I have to enroll in some seminars of no use to me? Or will GCSAA really change its spots and accommodate registrants?

Someone said (during a casual visit at another GCSAA anniversary committee meeting) that there are members who will oppose anything GCSAA pro-

poses. That probably is true to some very small extent. But there are others who are suspicious because of past actions of the association. Remember the cancer study? Phase I was completed and presented in Dallas. We were promised Phase II of the study; suddenly, not a word about Phase II. What happened to Phase II of the cancer study? It was promised by some who are still involved in association affairs. Once you lose trust, it is tough to get it back. A deeper look at whether cancer is a greater risk for us than the population in general is of exponentially greater consequence and importance than something like PDI. Yet have you ever heard an honest answer as to why GCSAA went back on its promised Phase II study? All we got in response was some lame "member safety program" (that no one ever heard about, either).

Asking questions or opposing an issue presented by the association politicians often brings petty and nasty responses, some in the open and some more subtle. Will that happen with PDI? Has it happened already? I hope not, because there are serious and sincere GCSAA members who are as bright and as concerned as those making the PDI proposal who happen to have a different point of view. The intention here is to sim-



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ply let Wisconsin GCSAA members read and consider them. If PDI is of value, it should pass on its merits, not on ugly politics.

The first opinion is a member viewpoint presented by Tom Mason, golf course superintendent in Birmingham Country Club in Michigan. Tom is an active GCSAA member and a leader in Michigan, a frequent speaker and assistant delegate of the Greater Detroit GCSA. His thoughts, titled, "PDI - But Not This PDI", appeared in the mid-summer 2000 issue of A Patch of Green, and are reproduced here with Tom's permission.

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"I am amazed at the number of people who simply assumed that I am an advocate of GCSAA's current Professional Development Initiative. While I am for higher standards and making the profession better, this proposal for changing member classification and for what is expected of a Class A member is simply wrong.

What is PDI?

To me, PDI is three different things. First, there is to be a standard for becoming and maintaining Class A status. Secondly, there has to be some by-law change to accommodate those who comply and those who don't comply. Thirdly, an enhancement of our education programs to accommodate what is expected.

The Education

The effort to improve our education program is really an effort for the staff to understand exactly what a golf course superintendent does now and needs to be able to do in the future to remain an asset to his/her employer. The HR Web seems to be a very effective tool in quantifying the skills needed by a golf course superintendent. Thus, all money spent for instruction, career planning, reference materials, guidance counseling should be on target. To me, this is not a PDI issue. It is an ongoing education improvement and should not even be an issue for consideration.

The Standards

To me, members of GCSAA who are Class A should be working as professional golf course superintendents. They should be actively trying to enhance the image of our profession. They should be working to contribute to the future of our profession. They should be working to enhance their value to their employer. They should not be penalized because of the amount of education they have or don't have. They should not be told by GCSAA that they need to take a seminar or a class. The survival and efficacy of their job should be up to them.

The Committee

I have known many or most of the MSRSG for many years. There is no reason for anyone to accuse this group of anything other than trying to advance the profession for all of GCSAA's members. They are truly dedicated and very capable of keeping their personal motivations out of the way of the finished product. I believe that the product is, as Stephen Covey puts it, "They climbed the ladder of success only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall."

What's Wrong #1

One of the fundamental cornerstones of Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits for Highly Effective People" is what he describes as an "Abundance Mentality." Simply put, "Abundance Mentality" means that one believes that there is enough credit, reward, and success out there for everyone. If one works hard and smart, and works to make everyone else better, then they will be successful. PDI is an example of the antithesis of "Abundance Mentality." One that believes that there is only so much credit, reward and success out there and one should try to get as much out of it



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as possible. Or, one believes that in order to be successful, then it has to come at someone else's expense.

I believe that golf course superintendents are in the service business. Superintendents need other people to be success, so they have to be team players. Superintendents need other superintendents to be successful, so our profession is elevated. So the very nature of our business is to be rooting for others to be successful.

What's Wrong #2

I have been going to chapter meetings, conventions and GCSAA committee meetings for many years. A prevalent topic for discussion among other people is the lack of success associated with GCSAA's certification program. There is general consensus that there are many certified superintendents who are not even very good, let alone our best and brightest. There is a general consensus that employers are not recognizing certification and thus not rewarding certified superintendents. I agree, but since I am not certified one

would think that I'm biased, so I don't respond unless asked. GCSAA continues to pretend that this is not a problem and this is not addressed in PDI.

What's Wrong #3

GCSAA has done a very good job in many areas of supporting the career of the golf course superintendent. They have done a fair job of marketing to the outside world as to the plight of the golf course superintendent. Unfortunately, they have done a dismal job of marketing to their own membership. GCSAA has not taken its message to the membership. They are seemingly waiting for their message to dawn upon the members. Good luck!

Members are too busy to read magazines and newsletters in a timely manner. So many or most opinions are made through the negative or sensational aspects of communication.

As the voting delegate for the Greater Detroit chapter for many years, I have tried to remain silent about my perceptions of this PDI. Hopefully, most members



will make up their own mind about either supporting PDI or not supporting PDI. In the fall of 2000 you will be asked to give guidance to your voting delegate as to your vote (I will remain as assistant delegate). Your vote will be cast exactly as you wish.

GCSAA is made up of members who come from a very diverse variety of golf course situations. Every year that goes by creates more different situations. We can never legislate our way to our mission. We have to create incentives for working toward our mission. We need members to appreciate that there is a mission.”



The following piece, titled “The Professional Development Initiative,” was written by Lee Wagner, golf course superintendent at Emerald Springs GC in El Paso. He makes some excellent points to ponder in a thoughtful, well written commentary. It appears with permission.

“The leadership of GCSAA has determined that there should be minimum standards for membership in the association. These minimum standards would include some combination of formal education and experience. The reasoning behind this is that the level of professionalism in the association will be increased, the golf community will hold all superintendents in higher esteem, and the association will have a higher status among the “big 3” associations of golf management professionals (GCSAA, PGA, CMAA). All of these things should lead to better employment conditions for superintendents in general.

The Professional Development Initiative, as the plan is called, will include new criteria for classification of members. Continuing education will be mandatory for all members aspiring to be a Class A. A self-assessment tool called the HR web will be used to help members objectively rate their job skills, although at this time it appears that the HR Web will be optional for all but those in the Certification program. The maintaining of a valid state pesticide license will also be required for Class A status.

A lot of work has gone into the planning of the proposal for the PDI. The leadership of GCSAA even had a focus group of 40 employers said to be representative of the industry. The members of the various committees came away thinking that this is what employers in general want. The Membership Standards Resource Group (MSRG) has forged ahead with a plan that they feel will allow the association to implement such a program equitably without causing anyone to lose their current status by means of grandfathering current members. At some point in time, however, all members will be responsible for meeting the continuing education requirements.

On the surface PDI seems like a good thing. Who would not want to improve our image as professionals? Who would not want to see a more educated membership? How could anyone possibly be against improving ourselves as individuals? Unfortunately there are problems with this proposal that need to be addressed before the vote is taken in Dallas at next year’s conference.

Before proposing a solution, one should first identify the problem and decide if there actually is a need for a solution. The following are basic facts about professionalism, how our industry operates, and what role our association plays in the whole scenario.

A profession, by definition, must meet certain criteria. There is a small group of sociologists who have studied what makes a profession as opposed to a trade. What really makes a true profession is that there is a body of knowledge involved, which is necessary for the public good yet cannot be learned by the average person. This causes the professional association to be able to regulate entry into that field so that the general public welfare can be satisfied. This one very important criteria excludes what we do from being a true profession. The body of knowledge of golf course maintenance can be readily grasped by the average person. Unfortunately, it is quite true that golf course maintenance is also not

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necessary for the "public welfare". So what does this really mean? From my perspective, it means golf course management is still the blend of art and science that it always has been, and modern golf management requires us to behave in a "professional manner", but golf course management by definition cannot be considered a true profession. With this in mind, we are overstepping the boundaries of the purpose of our association by attempting to control who can and cannot be a golf course superintendent. Golf course owners are an independent bunch and generally will hire whomever they feel comfortable with. GCSAA can help in this area by working to educate the people who make the hiring decisions.

It has been estimated that only about half of all golf course superintendents belong to GCSAA. Why is this? If membership in GCSAA is needed to validate our skills as superintendents, then why are so many superintendents not members? It is possible that a great many superintendents validate their job skills on a daily basis

and do not need an association to determine their skill levels. Many are not members because their employers will not pay their dues, and certainly would not pay to send them to the annual conference. This tells me that all employers do not as yet see the benefits of membership.

I have purposely avoided laying out the specific details of PDI. If the basic premise of a program is flawed then the details most certainly are also flawed. In general, a class A superintendent will have to follow a continuing education program similar to that currently in effect for Certified Superintendents. Someone entering the business without formal schooling in turf will have a very difficult time attaining class A status. Those of us who already have class A status will have a hard time maintaining it. The short version for those of us in this section is that you will have to attend the equivalent of a one day GCSAA seminar per year plus the Southwest Turfgrass Assn. Annual Conference. This sounds easy. What if you have scheduling conflicts with these events?



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What if your employer will not reimburse you for any continuing education? What if your employer doesn't send you to the National? Now it gets a little harder. The local chapters will play a crucial role in setting up pre-approved education and keeping track of points earned. This will mean more work for the chapter leaders and more cost for the chapter members.

The PDI seems to be a noble idea. It does not answer the question of why so many superintendents are not members of this association. It really does not address the realities of the job market, and it is certain to create an upper class of elite superintendents at elite clubs, while maintaining a lower class of superintendent who does not have the time or money to comply with PDI. Essentially, the leadership of this organization has gone beyond what the rank and file members demand from their professional association and the split in members that this proposal is causing is only going to make the association weaker in the long run. The current Certification program allows a superintendent to demonstrate his skill level to the industry. It is a voluntary program and should remain that way.

This proposal will be brought before the membership for a vote at the annual conference in Dallas, in

February 2001. The future of the association is at stake. The leadership has proposed that GCSAA make a change for the alleged betterment of the association (remember Golf Asia). It will be up to the members to decide if it is the right way to proceed."



PDI Perspective

This follow-up article was written by Al Jansen, golf course superintendent at Baraboo CC. Al probably has put more thought into the PDI issue than anyone else in GCSAA, including MSRГ Committee members. He wrote this summary for The Grass Roots.

"The Professional Development Initiative (PDI), once again, has been drafted to improve the image, retainability and net worth of today's superintendent. The GCSAA feels that by providing marketable superintendents to owners and employers, more GCSAA member superintendents will gain and hold better jobs in the industry. The non-participatory members and non-association members will, undoubtedly, under this new plan, have a much tougher time obtaining and maintaining these jobs, according to the MSRГ and the GCSAA.

Once the PDI becomes effective, the MSRГ believes that they will have a better ability to impress upon employers the importance and worth of a GCSAA Class A superintendent. What the MSRГ has failed to understand is that participation in a membership association like the GCSAA has had little impact on the employability of superintendents, in general. Men and women wishing to make superintending a career have developed their own career paths and have discovered their own ways to succeed. Some have used many of the GCSAA services like educational programming or attending the National conference and trade show, but statistically, **most** have not.

The overwhelming majority of superintendents, worldwide, do not attend monthly Chapter meetings, have never requested CEUs or PDUs for their attendance of trade related, non-GCSAA source education, and do not have at least a two-year Turfgrass Management degree. Yet, the GCSAA believes that by requiring this kind of participation, the association's core member will be better equipped to handle the difficult requirements of today's market. And all those (again, the majority) who do not fit the profile the GCSAA developed to impress employers, will be less able to acquire employment, so the GCSAA believes.

What the GCSAA chooses not to believe is the resourcefulness of individuals wanting to become superintendents. The GCSAA also cannot understand why employers have hired nonmembers or members who, on

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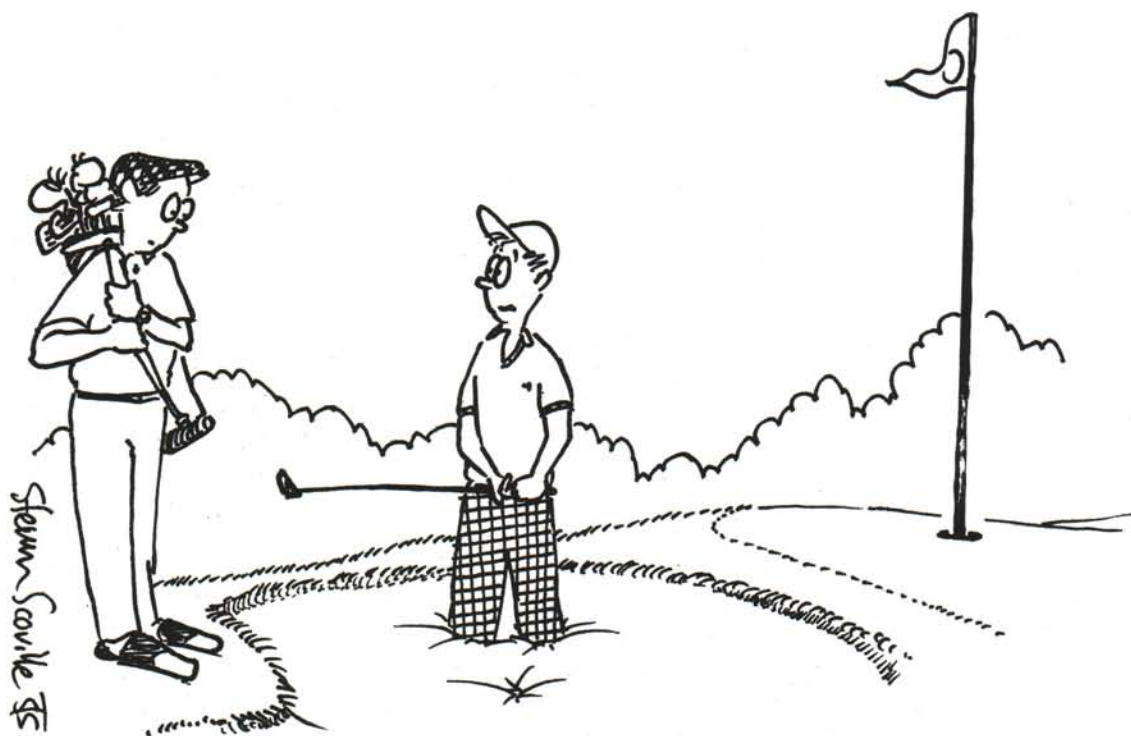
paper, are not as association-active as others. The GCSAA, in principle, feels that the PDI will level the playing field for their superintendents where one who wishes to get ahead in the crowded superintendent market will undertake the required program due to the sheer nature of our competitive job market. In other words, the GCSAA feels that their superintendents have not had a "leg up" in this market and only PDI will give this position to them.

By somehow proving to the golfing public that their Class A members are better equipped to handle the responsibility of overseeing golf course assets, the GCSAA believes more Class A members will obtain the best jobs at the better facilities. What the GCSAA will never realize is that they have had little impact on who gets hired and who stays hired at a given facility. Performance is the sole equalizer. On the job performance can only be improved upon by increasing one's knowledge base and superintendents have been providing this to their respective employers since greenkeeping became a term for what we do.

So what's the point of this? The GCSAA feels that as an association, they have not gotten enough of the credit for providing their service to their members.

Superintendents, on their own, have established this new and increased awareness of the importance the role of superintendent has on golf and the surfaces upon which golf is played. But, by being able to advertise the impact the GCSAA has on their Class A members, the association leadership feels that they, themselves, will gain more recognition in the industry as an important aspect of the golf business. So, in theory, the PDI is an attempt to prove association worth in the lives of the superintendent, more so than the worth of the individual superintendent. It all boils down to what I have been hearing since becoming a member of this association, "The GCSAA, in order to gain the respect of golfers, needs (or wants) to have the same recognition as has the PGA and the USGA. The GCSAA, without that recognition, is just another benefit to the superintendent. The GCSAA, without that recognition, even though they control their own destiny as an association, cannot control the destiny of the golf business or control the impact superintendents will have on golf in the future." But with their PDI, they believe they can.

As much as the GCSAA wants you to believe the PDI will help you, they will never tell you how much they think it will help them." ❧



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