



Better Than Last Time (But Not Much)

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

One of the worst GCSAA conferences I have attended (and I have attended 29 consecutive) was the last time it was held in Dallas. The hotel GCSAA assigned me that year was awful, the streets we had to walk were mean and unsafe, and the entire hotel/conference center arrangement couldn't have been less conducive to business if it had been designed that way on purpose. Left to me, we would never have returned to Dallas.

But such decisions aren't left to me, so we were back in Dallas again this year. Some things have changed; some haven't. This year we stayed in the Marketplace area. It is safer there, for sure, but the shuttle bus hassle was incredible. From there to the Adam Mark hotel and meeting rooms for two days and then to the convention center after that. The buses were supposed to run every ten minutes; fifty minutes was more near reality. Adding to the misery was rain, basically every day we were there. No fun.

We drove to Dallas from Madison. It was 32.5 degrees F. when we left and pouring rain. We managed to stay ahead of the ice and snow, surviving the violent front as it passed through Bloomington, Illinois and driving in heavy rain clear to St. Louis. However, it seemed better than flying despite the weather. Three travel for the same price as one, and flying is hardly convenient these days. When you arrive at your destination you have wheels – no airport taxis or local cabs to deal with.

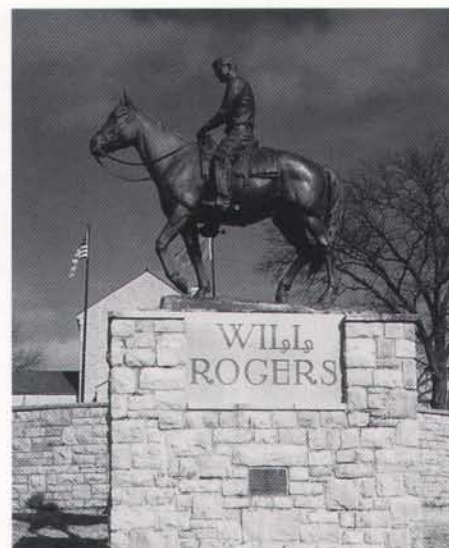
And then there is the excitement of the trip. Our route took us two average days of driving and south of Wisconsin were the Lincoln sites in Springfield, the arch at St. Louis, and the Ozarks. Radio stations along the

way offered heavy doses of country music and Christian broadcasting, evidence of the Bible belt we passed through. Will Rogers is buried in Claremore, Oklahoma and the Murrah Federal Office Building Memorial in Oklahoma City that McVey blew apart was a touching site to see in person. President Bush was at the memorial on February 19 to dedicate the museum – we just missed him. It was a quick stop we won't soon forget. While there we checked out the capitol; an accurate report would say it pales in comparison to Wisconsin's.

There was golf on the way, too. We stopped at the USGA Pro Shop on the edge of Southern Hills CC, site of the 2001 U.S. Open in June. A friendly conversation with the assistant pro there got us through the gate, past the guard house and up to the clubhouse in the middle of the course. It will be a great tournament site, I can tell from personal experience. The A/G series greens looked great.

A trip through areas south of Wisconsin puts winter in perspective. What we considered warm had folks in Tulsa in a panic. It was 15 degrees F. on the morning we went through but warmed to the upper 30s by afternoon. The scary part for them was the temperature falling from 73 degrees F. to 27 degrees F. in 24 hours between the 9th and 10th of February.

We pushed through Dallas for what we thought would be a quick trip to the LBJ Library and Museum in Austin. Texas, however, is a big state and that took more time than



A trip from Wisconsin to Dallas takes you past Will Rogers' museum and grave in Claremore, OK...



Southern Hills CC, site of the 2001 U.S. Open in Tulsa (which is visible from the 1st & 10th tees)...



and the Murrah Federal Office building Memorial site in Oklahoma City.

The road between Dallas and Austin is known as the presidential corridor. It starts with the site of the Kennedy assassination in Dallas...



goes to the Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum in Austin...

estimated. But it was well worth it, as was the stop at George Bush's Library and Museum on the Texas A & M campus. For those in Dallas for the first time, the Kennedy assassination sites are nearly overwhelming. But then, for me it was just as emotional the second time. I recall everything I was doing and where I was when that terrible event took place.

Although the rain made some conference travel activities terrible, I was glad for the rain after the dry weather they suffered through last summer. Remember back to last summer and the record number of 100 + degree days Texas experienced. A 90 degree F. day was considered a break from the heat!

The GCSAA seminar business was brisk although there are still some poor seminars on the docket. When the cost is high I wonder why the weak ones aren't weeded out. It isn't hard to figure which need dismissal. I attended Frank Rossi's seminar series on *Poa annua*, as did a number of other WGCSA members. He presented an incredible amount of information, something you can never overload on when it comes to Wisconsin's primary golf turf.

Conference week flies by, mainly because there is so much to do. There were some comments that went like, "it's simply gotten too big." In some ways I agree, but only because too often there were two places I wanted to be at the same time. You could argue for spreading



the State Capital where President G.W. Bush presided only a few months ago as governor...

it over more days, but that adds to the cost. I find the audio tapes can help fill in for schedule conflicts.

One of the great thrills for me, after having been to conference so many times, is seeing long time colleagues from outside Wisconsin. We talk about kids, grandkids, golf courses, machinery and everything else. I always have an empty feeling when I leave, knowing I won't see most of these folks for another year.

In a nutshell, here is how the Dallas details graded out from my perspective.

- 1 Facilities: F. This is the world's worst convention center. It couldn't be more user-unfriendly. A/V equipment didn't work too often (where was GCSAA?), there weren't enough chairs at times, you couldn't find your way around the place, it was dirty, the restrooms were filthy, etc. etc. "Why in the name of



and includes the George H.W. Bush Museum and Library at Texas A&M. Bogroff and Grimm met President Bush at the U.S. Women's Open last summer at the Merit Club.

God's green grass does the association go to what is known to be a lousy facility?" I asked Suzanne Clement. It was a question I heard asked a hundred times the first couple of days. She explained that San Diego wasn't ready with an enlarged convention center so GCSAA was forced to put Dallas on the schedule. OK, I understand that circumstances sometimes are out of control. But the question needs to be asked of GCSAA officials – "why Dallas? EVERYBODY thinks the place stinks; why not somewhere else? Anywhere else."

- 2 City: D. For our conference, I rate it at the bottom. It is unhandy for visitors, the housing is spread too far (and is too expensive), cab fares get out of hand in a hurry, the central city



The Wisconsin Hospitality Room was packed.



The UW-Madison was well represented by undergrads who participated in the Turf Bowl.



It was a pleasure to see and visit with Lois and Jim Latham again. They reside south of Dallas and are ageless.



Dr. Frank Rossi met up with Emily Erickson and Darrin Litchfeldt, both grad students of his during his time on the Wisconsin faculty.



Gary Huenerburg and Ray Shane were socializing at the Wisconsin Room.

is uninteresting. There is more, but why beat a dead horse? I just don't like it as a conference town.

- 3 75th Anniversary Displays: A+. Congratulations to Suzanne Clement and Margo Szabo – what a job. Their work gave all of us a better sense of where our profession has come in 75 years.
- 4 Educational Opportunities: A+. Everything from sand bunkers to Supina bluegrass (thanks to John Stier) and GPS to bent-grasses, it was at conference to learn about. Conflicts frustrated all of us somewhere along the way, but that is a good frustration to have. I was especially glad to see how the progress on new technologies – biological and physical – are being conveyed to end-users (that's us!). Top notch. Seminars, however, need attention.
- 5 Registration: FF. Again, how after 71 conferences can regis-

tration be worse than it ever has been in my experience? I literally did not talk to anybody who did not have trouble of some sort. Does anyone get reprimanded or released for screw-ups of this magnitude? When GCSAA proves it cannot handle something like registration, can you imagine the mess the PDI will be for them to administer (I heard it passed)? I mean, keeping track of little dabs and bits of petty information will bury them. This is going to be fun to watch!

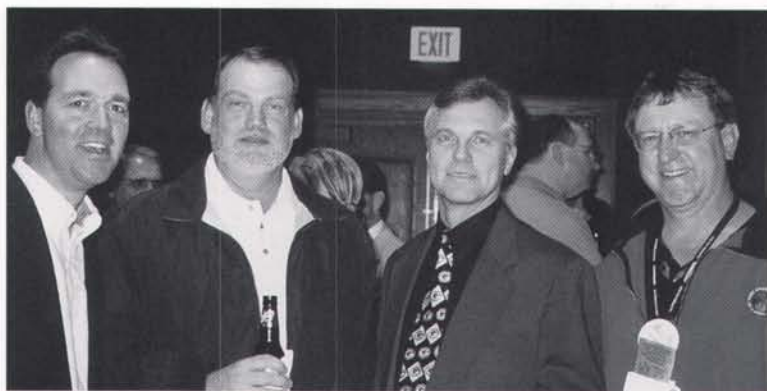
- 6 Opening Session: A. General Norman Schwarzkopf did it for me. Our group muscled front row seats and when the general was finished speaking we wanted to stand ramrod straight and salute him like good soldiers. Fantastic! Also, the presence of Leo Feser's daughter added to the evening. The reception was excellent, also.

- 7 General Session: B+. Too long, although Scott O'Grady gave an interesting account of his experience in Bosnia.

When Tim Finchem was announced as the Old Tom Morris Award winner, I didn't know who he was. I figured, as a result of his position, that he was probably a friend of Steve Mona's and we were due a payback of some sort. However, after hearing him speak I would have to say he likely is a worthy recipient. He's no Arnold Palmer or Bob Hope or Gerald Ford, but his role in golf is significant and he has respect for our profession.

I loved the presence of Old Tom Morris – what a tremendous touch.

- 8 Grand Finale and Closing Reception: A. Video was great. Old Tom Morris returned and helped end the conference on a high note. New event well worth the effort.
- 9 President's Dinner Show: B. Too many head table antics that



How do you spell trouble? Horman, Johnson, Witt and Kienert!



The World Class Rockers provided great entertainment at the dinner show...

bore those out of the loop. Grade was brought up, however, by the great entertainment. Old rockers loved the music, even if it was too loud.

- 10 Show: B+. Super displays. Aisles were too narrow, which was exacerbated by the outstanding attendance that resulted from poor weather.

- 11 Other highlights: The ASGCA had a great session, the Research Session was enlightening, and the USGA Green Section Program was up to its normal outstanding level (featuring Dr. Frank Rossi with a tale only he could pull off – great stuff.).

- 12 Memorable Moments: Seeing Joe O'Brien, hopefully not for the last time but most surely less often than I have in the past. Joe will be remembered by me as one of the best people in golf. His sincere enthusiasm, his obvious intellect, his shrewd problem-solving talents and a thousand other things will be missed by each and every GCSAA member. I wish him the best wherever his career in golf takes him next.

- 13 Biggest Questions Generated By Conference: Two were inspired by Dr. Rossi:

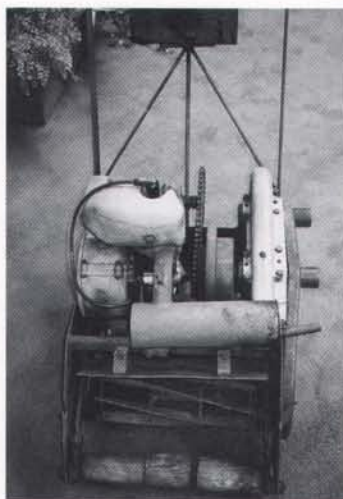
- How is it possible to have grown too many *P. annua* roots?
- Is there a conflict between encouraging golf course superintendents to move more and

more to environmentally friendly management (which includes reasonable heights of cuts and the potentially reduced amounts of fungicides required) and also conducting research on how to manage greens cut below 0.95”?

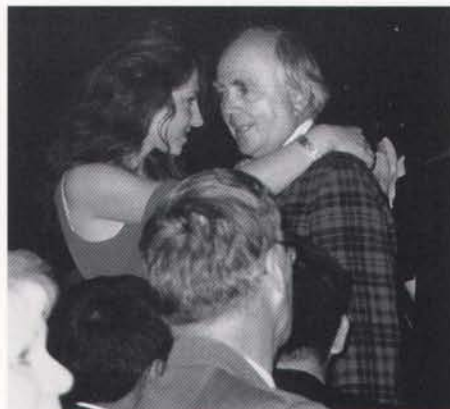
- What happened to conference proceedings? Did I miss something?

In a nutshell, conference this year was the kind of singular educational opportunity I expect. It was held in as poor a site as is possible, inspiring every person I talked with to say, “won’t it feel good to get back to Orlando?”

Yes, it surely will. 🌿



There were acres of new equipment and displays of antiques, part of the 75th Anniversary celebration. Shown here is an old “St. Andrews” mower.



and Robert Trent Jones, Jr. enjoyed dancing to their music!



Bob Erickson rounded up a few former (and current) BCC employees for a photo op!



The WGCSA banner flew proudly as part of the GCSAA 75th celebration.