

# GCSAA Conference Doesn't Disappoint

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



It is the same emotion every year when the GCSAA conference time rolls around right after the WTA EXPO – total excitement. I have been going for thirty years and the thrill remains. I guess it is sort of like a good marriage – time seems to actually amplify your emotions for your spouse.

I felt the 2002 conference and trade show was well done, despite a dispute I had with an officer over a committee assignment, and an embarrassing opening session speaker. The conference crowd, my instinct tells me, was smaller, no doubt due to the economy and the events of 9/11.

Whenever it is possible, I like to drive. It actually involves fewer hassles than flying, several can travel for the price of one, and it gives a chance to see a few of the sights along the way. Cheryl's folks have lived in Florida for over 25 years now, so it is a drive I have made many times. Regardless, there are still a lot of things worth seeing on the ride to Orlando.

This year the weather for driving was very good. We essentially

haven't had any winter in Wisconsin (or anywhere else in the Midwest, for that matter), so that is no surprise. We had a bit of a slow start – there was a little snow on the day we left but by the time we reached the Illinois border the roads were naked.

We stopped in Indianapolis. I am not a racing fan, no matter how far you stretch the definition, but Chad wanted to check out the Indy 500 track. It was cool; we even took a spin around the 2.5-mile oval. There is a terrific museum at the track with many of the winning cars on display. And I have always wondered about the golf course that occupies some of the infield areas and land adjacent to the track. Pete Dye redesigned it in 1993 or 1994 and it looked very well maintained.

We drove a few miles from there to the home of President Benjamin Harrison. It is a very interesting presidential site, and he is buried in Indianapolis also. The cemetery where he rests – Crown Hill – also is the burial site of three vice presidents. We went to the home of one of my favorite poets – James Whitcomb Riley – because it is also in down-

town Indianapolis.

From there we went to Nashville and stopped at the state capitol building. President James K. Polk is buried in the capitol lawn. Downtown Nashville isn't very big and the drive into town takes you past the new Titans Stadium and within a few blocks of the Ryman Auditorium. If you have never been there, the Hermitage – President Andrew Jackson's home – is also found in Nashville. We drove the interstate to Asheville, North Carolina and its most famous site, the awesome Biltmore mansion of George Vanderbilt. We took the tour and I wish I could go back and see it again.

Finally, shortly after we cruised into Florida we made a stop at the World Golf Village. This is another beautiful place to visit. There are lots of golf courses, the home of the First Tee Program where Joe O'Brien now works, and the World Golf Museum and Hall of Fame. It was the site of the GCSAA tournament although we didn't see anyone we knew while we visited there.

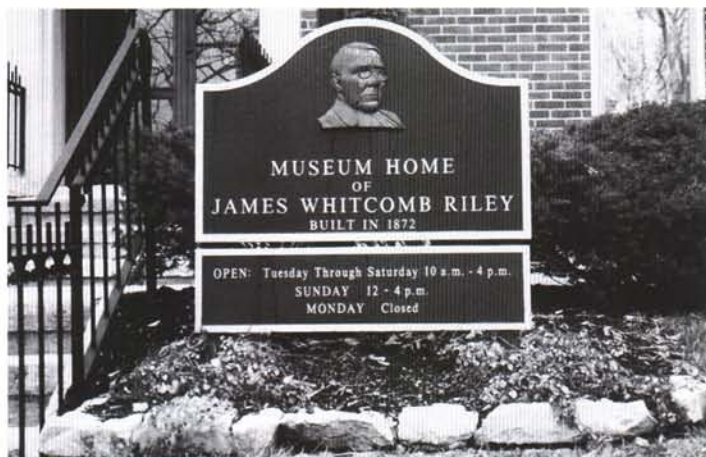
It is an easy time from there (St. Augustine) to Orlando and we landed



The Indy 500 Museum and Hall of Fame is actually located inside the oval.



The Brickyard Crossing is a golf course that has a few holes inside the oval track.



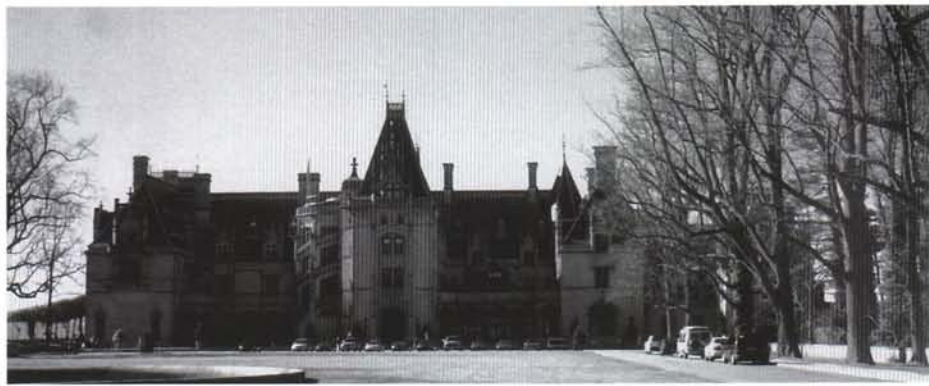
James Whitcomb Riley's home is in downtown Indianapolis.



President Benjamin Harrison's home in downtown Indianapolis is an interesting historic stop.



Nashville is the home of country music and the final resting place of President James K. Polk and...



The mansion of George Vanderbilt—the Biltmore—in Asheville, N.C. is a terrific spot to visit.



...President Andrew Jackson.

at the Howard Johnson's in Hawaiian Village in early afternoon.

I have said it before: how can we bring so many people to a conference and still get ripped off on room rates. There isn't a HoJos anywhere in the world worth \$100 a day, but somehow that was what we paid. It was an okay place but not worth anywhere near the rate we paid. Dr. Chris Williamson came down at the last minute, stayed as close as we did and paid less than half the room rate we did. Next year I am letting my travel agent make all arrangements and save some money.

It was a busy week; by the time the conference is over I am anxious to get home and get some rest.

Here is what one conference goer thought of it all.

**Opening Session/  
Keynote Speaker**

This event has been refined to the point where it isn't excessively

long or as boring as it has been in previous years. The remarks were kept short and the video offerings were acceptable. The chairs were comfortable and I was thrilled to finally see Dr. Houston B. Couch honored (something that should have happened years and years ago).

Then Jimmy Johnson came on. Setting aside my natural prejudice, which arises from a lifetime of support for the great Green Bay Packers, I thought a successful coach might have a good message.

How wrong could one be? The guy was a joke – inarticulate, unprepared and inappropriate. One has to ask if there was any preview of his work done before putting him on the program. No wonder he left quickly; it probably was obvious to him that nobody would want his autograph.



Fabulous hotel at World Golf Village near St. Augustine, Florida.



A ride in an elevator takes you to the top of this observation town and affords views...



...of the retail area, which includes The First Tee headquarters to the right and the huge pro shop in the center, and...



...the fabulous practice area.

I not only wouldn't walk across the street to hear him again, I wouldn't walk across the hall. In fact, if I were in an audience he was addressing, I would leave.

The sponsor got beat on this one, big time.

GRADE: D

### Golf General Session

This general meeting is where environmental leaders awards are made. It is a good thing for us to recognize those who are able to compete successfully for these awards. A known speaker has been a part of the program for a number of years now, and Mike Singletary was featured this year. He put ol' Jimmy Johnson to shame. He had a believable message, good advice and a practiced presentation. I looked around at the crowd a couple of different times while Mike was speak-

ing and he had all of us at attention. He was a good choice.

GRADE: B

### Innovative Superintendent Sessions

Tough to give an overall grade here – some presenters were good and some were just awful. Pull three for four lecturers from these two programs and they'd be excellent. The handouts that followed along with bullet point presentations were appreciated.

Question: Why aren't presenters previewed? It isn't fair to occupy an audience's time where there are so many places to be and so little time. It is aggravating to listen to poor or confusing advice from an uninspiring and unprepared speaker.

GRADE: C+

### Trade Show

I had the distinct impression the

show was smaller than previous years. A number of booth areas were empty. The crowd was smaller. But it seemed a serious group of us working up and down the aisles. It was easy to get help and answers to questions. There were fewer oddball exhibitors, which is a plus in my mind. They only add clutter, not choices.

The aisles were wide, the carpeting was thick and comfortable and the lighting superb. It was actually possible to get a bite to eat quickly and there was never a problem finding a place to sit and rest. Like everyone, I really appreciated the member lounge. Everyone gets tired on the show floor and it is such a relief to know there is a place to sit. The refreshments were great – coffee in the morning, ice tea and lemonade in the afternoon. I hope the same



Inside the museum are several displays that relate to the history of golf course management, like this early mower display.



Josh Lepine with his youngest crew member.



What a treat it was to see Dick Evenson again, shown here with Chad Ball.

amenity is available next year.

There have been many changes of late – mergers, acquisitions and the like. But you can still get a Jake hat from John Oldenburg and a Tuco charm from John Turner, traditions I hope we don't lose. The trade show ranks even with the education program as reasons we attend.

GRADE: A

### Member Merchandise and Bookstore

I don't need anymore golf shirts or hats, but a man never has too many turf books. That makes this service absolutely wonderful for GCSAA members. The selection is awesome, the prices are good (better than good for sale items) and for many books you can get the author to sign your copy. This year I had books signed by Brad Klein, Paul Reike, Don Waddington, Bob Carrow, Gordon Witteveen (two of his three books), Bob Labbanca (two of his books), Dave Mellor, Geoff Shackelford, Karl Danneberger and Houston Couch.

Also, for collectors, there were some nice items available to remember our 75th anniversary.

But...why not use a price label you can remove without a quart of solvent and a putty knife. The ones used are awful; some of us want to remove the price from the book jacket, and some books are purchased as gifts. It is so simple. I can-



Kendall Marquardt with a very tired conventioneer!



Grandpa Wayne Otto with his very well behaved grandson.



Ric and his gals-wife Cheryl and daughter Rachael.

not understand why this hasn't been changed already. It lowers my grade a half point – unfortunate.

GRADE: A

### Seminars

It is impossible to grade all seminars; that is what the evaluation after each is about. I attended two: one was great (Dr. Danneberger) and the other needs some work but has potential to be very valuable. It was a first time offering and I assume the course will improve. For the cost, they should all be tops. Seminars

lacking good evaluations should get the hook.

By the way, why no more exams?

I attended the chapter publications seminar and, as always, came away with some suggestions and ideas for this journal of ours. The judging of the contest is fair and thorough in my view, and gives the WGCSA an impartial and independent assessment. Thanks to Janet Saterlee and her staff for their efforts.

GRADE: A



Katy and Jeff Barlow, and Randy Swonger. Where's Sheri?



The Brynwood boys – Bob, Mike and Gary.



A reunion of two generations at MMSD – Jim Latham, Jim Spindler and Bob Welch!



WGCSA prez Dave Brandenburg welcomed friends to the WGCSA/Milorganite hospitality room.



Undergrads from the UW-Madison left early because of Turf Bowl competition the next day.



Bill Vogel and Tom Schwab at the Wisconsin Room.



Dave Weber, Oscar Peterson and Chad Grimm were among the first to arrive and last to leave!

### 75th Anniversary Display and Recognition

The culmination of our 75th anniversary, on its own as presented at conference, was worth the price of admission by itself. Clearly there is a lot of creativity in the national office and that creativity was on display for us in Orlando. Suzanne Clement put forth the maximum effort for our enjoyment; it is almost a shame all GCSAA members weren't there to see the results. Margo Szabo and Judy Vestrum ably assisted her. For those more closely involved, Joe O'Brien's influence was very evident, also.

An exact replica of the statue of Old Tom Morris that stands in front of the headquarters building was the focal point of the anniversary area. The statue is going from Orlando to the Golf World Village where it will have a permanent home. An overhead photograph was taken of the brick pavers surrounding Old Tom in Lawrence, enlarged and mounted so you could walk and search for your brick – really cool!

We all had heard about the 75th

flag sewn from tourney flags from courses all over the country – it was hanging overhead and is enormous in size. The logo ball collection donated by individual members was on display, too. There was the GCSAA family tree area featuring stories about families with several generations of superintendents. The Schallers provided a Wisconsin connection to the display.

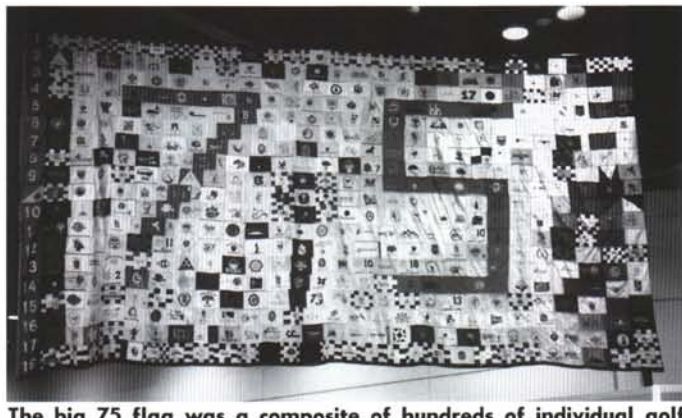
A time line of the profession, with appropriate supporting displays, ringed the perimeter of the historical area. And there were all sorts of interesting historical pieces to look at and study. There was ample seating – smart move – and a staff booth where you could get any help you needed. As conference ended, there were dessert treats and a logo golf ball for everyone.

One ingredient to such a successful display as this one was the ample room dedicated to it. I don't know who deserves credit for that, but it was an important decision.

Finally, the 75th anniversary was neatly tied up with the publication of "Keepers of the Green: A History of



Kris Pinkerton and Bob Lohmann spent some visiting.



The big 75 flag was a composite of hundreds of individual golf course flags. Was yours among them?



There was a lot of interest in the logo golf ball collection. Was your course represented?



The UW-Madison turf program had a booth on the show floor. Nicely done by the Badger Turf and Grounds Club!



This exact replica of the Old Tom Morris statue that stands in front of GCSAA headquarters left for a home at World Golf Village. Did you find your brick?

Golf Course Management.” I bought a copy as soon as the satellite bookstore opened, returned to my room and read it over the next two days. Authors Gordon Witteveen and Bob Labbanca did a superb job of research and writing and gave us a book we can all be proud to have in our libraries. Adding to the magic was the presence of both authors for book signings and good conversation.

In a nutshell, the 75th anniversary couldn't have been any better. It was a beautiful piece of work.

GRADE: A+

### President's Dinner and Show

In more recent years there have been attempts (feeble, mostly) to improve this annual event. I am in a good position to pass judgment because I have only missed one in 30 years. They are too long and too boring. Too often the entertainment is lousy, and usually the food is average. It is always overpriced.

All observations apply this year. It is unreasonable to expect the audience wants to sit for an hour and listen to what the head table wants to hear. They should have a separate event for that, and for the members a dinner and show **only** should be offered at another time and of the quality you should expect for \$75. Remember, Bayer provided the hors d'oeuvres and drinks before hand, and paid for the entertainment, too.

The entertainment this year, in my over 55 opinion, was awful. I'd never heard of the group and hope I never hear them again. All I can say is they were loud – my ears still hurt. I stopped and looked back as I left halfway through and there weren't many people staying.

The crowd diminishes each year, a deafening comment, and it will be smaller next year. This faithful attendee has had enough. The entertainment met right down there with keynoter Jimmy Johnson.

GRADE: D

### Green Section Meeting

This was the wrap up to the conference this year. As always, the turf tips from the agronomists carry the program – down-to-earth and practical advice. I was interested in the presentation on golf for the handicap although I usually hope for more than just interest.

Overall, I thought the program was down a tad from recent years.

GRADE: B

**Orlando Convention Facility**

Pause a moment and think back to the fiasco at the Dallas Convention Center. Then recall where the Dallas facility was located relative to housing. Remind yourself of the risk of taking a family downtown after dark. Given those memories, the softball diamond in Mt. Ida, Wisconsin would be better than Dallas. It serves to emphasize how terrific the Orlando facility is. Orlando has it all. The building is enormous and well laid out, the rooms are sized right, A/V equipment always worked, the place is clean (especially the restrooms), the food was edible (but overpriced) and everywhere was well lit.

The banquet facilities were good, the auditorium comfortable and, if you looked east from the 4th floor out past the entrance, the view was beautiful.

I think, for the most part, people feel safe attending a conference in Orlando and that most definitely is not the case in many other places.

Let's go back soon!

GRADE: A

**Wrap Up**

- Good: Reasonable food prices.
- Bad: Cool weather.
- Plus: Super vacation spot for those who brought kids along.
- Minus: Timing causes me to miss the Verona Farm Toy Show every year.
- Upper: Dr. Couch's receipt of the DSA; it was overdue.

Downer: I missed seeing Joe O'Brien; our paths didn't cross.

Grin: Essays written by colleagues' children about our profession.

Grimace: The scare Steve Mona gave us. I have heard he is fine – hope that's true.

HDDTTWA: I wasn't the only one who wondered if we will see the day when politics aren't on display in the association. During the opening session, the keynote speaker was a long time coach of the Dallas, Texas Cowboys, one of the appointed directors is from Texas, and one of the recipients of the DSA is from Texas. And last year's conference was held in Dallas, Texas. The president is from Texas. Coincidence? I don't know.

I offer my suggestion from many a previous year to give the outgoing GCSAA president his DSA award immediately so the search for future recipients can focus on those out of the loop and limelight and those involved in the science and education of our profession.

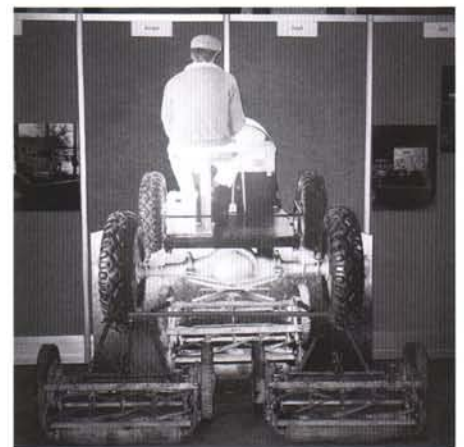
The way these things are handled now looks bad, and raises suspicions of a good old boy network. It can diminish the award itself. It is unfair to some who are likely worthy of the note.

In a period where there is so much

distrust of politicians and corporate people (heard of Enron?), a process that promotes trust and confidence seems critical. Is that asking too much? ♣



Gordon Witteveen, one of the authors of "Keepers of The Green," was generous with his time for book signing.



Other than the bronze Tom Morris, this was my favorite historical display.

Bob Lisi took advantage of the chance to visit with Old Tom Morris.



With some help from Gary Coulson, I found a spot to take a picture of a portion of the very busy trade show.