



San Diego Brings Some Enthusiasm Back to GCSAA Conference

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

The GCSAA conference in San Diego seemed perfectly timed. It generated a lot of enthusiasm after the downturn in golf we have felt for two or three years. And it came after of couple of downer sites - dull Dallas and unsafe Atlanta. Most of those attending were anxious for a better city with better weather.

The wish was granted. I had never been to San Diego before, but I can

hardly wait to go again. It is a beautiful city and I felt perfectly safe walking around the convention center area and the downtown nearest there.

We stayed in the headquarters hotel. The room was nothing special - who really cares, anyway - but the view of San Diego harbor was magnificent. The Coronado Bridge was in full view, as was Coronado Island.

The flag of the Hotel del Coronado was visible, too. Navy ships passed through the harbor all the time; the San Diego Naval Yard is the second largest naval base in the U.S. Nuclear subs, aircraft carriers and cruise missile launchers were part of the scenery all the time we were there.

The weather was excellent and we experienced rain only one of the days we were there. We stayed for a week's vacation after conference and enjoy even more of the warm and pleasant days. California really needs the rain, too. Who could forget the evening news, night after night last summer and fall, with vivid pictures of massive wildfires. We saw the burned hillsides, mile after mile, and scarred trees and shrubs. The modest 0.2" rainfall brought the mud down the hillsides and into roads, closing some of them. Houses were flooded and other buildings were



The headquarters hotel on San Diego's harbor; the convention center is to the left of the hotel.



The famous Hotel del Coronado - The Del - on Coronado Island.



A cruise missile carrier and...



...an aircraft carrier in San Diego harbor.



The father of downtown San Diego, California and downtown Hortonville, Wisconsin — Alfonzo Horton.



The Buick Invitational was in progress during conference only a few miles away at Torrey Pines at La Jolla.



The panda bears are the most popular attraction at the San Diego Zoo

pushed to the edge. I don't know how they handle it.

I like looking for the Wisconsin connections wherever I travel, and I found some in San Diego, especially in the downtown. John Wright, son of Frank Lloyd Wright designed some buildings downtown. Alonzo Horton sketched out downtown lots beside San Diego Bay in 1867. Mr. Horton was also the founder of Hortonville, Wisconsin, the village he left to move to California.

The airport is named Lindbergh Field, obviously after Charles Lindbergh. Lindbergh, of course, attended the University of Wisconsin - Madison. His plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, was built in San Diego.

La Jolla is a well-known tourist destination with lots of pricey shops and a beautiful setting on the ocean. The week of conference was also the week of the Buick tournament at Torrey Pines, just a couple of



The architecture of the Getty Museum is as interesting as the art collection.

miles north of there. I visited the course and was impressed. The day after the tourney it was open for play to the public; it is a municipal golf course.

There are so many things to see in San Diego. There is Balboa Park, left for all to enjoy after the Pan American/California Exposition of 1915. Museums are a big part of that park. Next to it is the world famous San Diego Zoo. It was everything I expected.



Entrance to the Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

The new (as in "never been used") baseball park for the San Diego Padres was literally across the street from the convention center. Nice park (even though it is named after a dog food company, Petco), no parking.

Also, after conference we drove on three of the top 25 worst roads in America - I 405/Ventura Freeway and I 405/I 10 in Los Angeles and another interstate in the San Diego area - and visited the unbelievable



Beautiful and colorful bedding plants greet you at the entrance to PGA West.



Lunch with Arnold Palmer near PGA West?

Getty Museum collection in Richard Meier's fantastic building. From there we drove northwest Simi Valley and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum.

A day later we headed to the golf Mecca of the Palm Springs area. We looked up many courses we'd heard about and seen on TV, especially those in the Bob Hope Desert Classic of years ago. We visited PGA West and discovered it was far more than ever expected. We saw the bronze sculpture of Sonny Bono on the main street through downtown Palm Springs and stopped at Arnold Palmer's Restaurant in La Quinta. Then we drove over the mountains and through the back-country to San Diego.

It was a little unsettling to sit down at breakfast one morning to the headlines in the paper that said, "Earthquake forecast: Hold on tight." And here I had thought about actually finding the San Andreas Fault since it was just north of I 10. The headline cancelled that foolish notion.

The convention center was very neat and clean, the lecture rooms were appropriately sized and the A/V equipment worked in every lecture I attended. The show hall itself wasn't the best - it was far too long and also too narrow. I put on a lot of miles going north and south.

I was extremely aggravated by the location of the turf school booths, which was where the USGA, BIGGA, ASGCA, et. al. were located.



A bronze statue of one of our greatest presidents.

They didn't seem part of the conference and show at that location and if I were any of them and got stuck there again, I would tell GCSAA to forget it. I'll be anxious to hear the excuse for that lousy deal.

If there was a recurring theme I picked up on, it was the same as last year's - water. On Wednesday afternoon Grimm and I each attended a different two-hour session on water supply issues and dealing with drought conditions.



My favorite sports announcer — Jim Nantz.

Both were valuable. There was time after the two water seminars to attend a tree management lecture (two hours) before GCSAA welcoming reception. Question for GCSAA: Why in the world at an international golf course conference would you offer a lecture open to all attendees, north, south, east and west, that only addressed California trees? Somebody had their head wedged in a tree trunk on that, and by the time I finally



David Feherty gave a terrific talk for those lucky enough to be invited to hear him.



Dr. Frank S. Rossi gave a lecture on Saturday, before a well earned vacation in Mexico with his family.



Two stalwarts of the WGCSA – Semler and Schaller.



Ken Blanchard gave a charged-up speech that was well received.

left, 90% of the others in the audience had beat me to it. No excuse.

I enjoyed the reception; the convention center terrace was perfect on a warm and calm evening. The event affords the opportunity to see people not seen since last conference.

For my money, the innovative superintendent session early Thursday and Friday mornings are tops. The subjects are down-to-earth, practical and the result of successful problem solving by superintendents. Jeff Rottier of Whistling Straits gave an excellent presentation on their solutions to communications among their staff members.

The opening session followed and I will always remember it for the chance to hear Jim Nantz, best known for most of us as voice of the Masters broadcasts on CBS. He was one of the best speakers I have ever heard, and the story told by the young intern working at Augusta National last year affected

me like everyone else in the audience. It was a “wow” moment I will not soon forget.

Danny Quast received his DSA and Jake Schneider, a UW-Madison turf student, earned a GCSAA Scholars Award and a nice scholarship check to go with it.

Let's be honest: the trade show is one of the primary reasons golf course superintendents attend the national. Nowhere else in the world will you see the golf course supplies and equipment selection gathered at one place and one time like this. Product comparison, pricing, availability and all the other factors that go into good buying decisions are before your very eyes. It is pure and unadulterated excitement, too. The thrill of seeing it all is still with me after all these years, going back to Boston in 1973.

The equipment show is fun, too. It is wrestling to get Jacobsen hat, bouncing a green basketball and getting a year supply of pens and key rings. It is another venue to see



Three long-time friends — Tom Emmerich, Charlie Shaw and Dave Smith.



Mike Lee, Jeff Spence and Larry Lennert enjoying conversation at the Wisconsin Hospitality Room.



Parents-to-be Sheri and Randy Swonger.



Chad Grimm and Gabe Lopez in our WGCSA Hospitality Room.

people you like but only get to visit with once a year. It is work, too. There aren't enough places to sit and rest, maybe on purpose. Despite fabulous weather, I thought the attendance was very good.

As the GCSAA conference has grown, so have the learning opportunities and the resulting conflicts. Simply put, you cannot be two places at once. I fret over what I was not able to do while at the show. This isn't a complaint, just fussing over reality. I would suggest extending conference a day and keeping the schedule clear during show hours, but it is long enough as it is. Cost has to be factored in, also.

The general session on Friday morning was another winner. GCSAA has had Ken Blanchard on the conference program in the past, so I knew his lecture would be good. And it was, especially his comparison of ducks and eagles. Quack! Quack!

Marc Davison represented

Two of Milorganite's newest employees — Wayne Otto and Tisa Overman.



Wisconsin at the chapter editors' seminar, accepting the GCSAA award for the winning entry in category two.

The USGA Green Section educational program was at its usual excellent level. The speaker roster consisted entirely of Green Section agronomists, which I think is a good way to go since their accumulated experience and observations are unmatched.

The Friday afternoon offerings

were many, but I headed back to the equipment show, hoping to finish so I could listen to the golf course management sessions between 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Saturday.

Frank Rossi gave an excellent lecture, like he always does, and he is willing to tackle tough subjects. By the time these talks were over, the show floor was closed. As it seems to happen each year, I feel sad when the conference is actually over for another year.

I haven't gone to the dinner show for three years now, after 29 years of not missing one. The cost has gotten high, the entertainment at the last few I attended was lousy, and the head table activities had become more than I could handle. I don't know that I will ever attend again.

GCSAA needs to breathe some life into the bookstore. The exciting days of book signings and bargains and authors are apparently over. For heaven's sake, why aren't academics, like Dr. James B. Beard, invited to sign their textbooks? Dr. Beard was in town - I visited with him at the Marriott - and his book was sold out. And the selection of books was so-so; some of us would like choices of golf books other than textbooks. They are missing the boat on this, big time.

The conference was one of the best I have attended and I hope we can get back to San Diego, soon. It was so wonderful to see GCSAA staff friends - Margo Campbell Szabo, for example, and Steve Mona. The opportunities to learn and better oneself are close to overwhelming, just as it should be.

So, we are back to Orlando next year. Orlando has now become my second favorite place for conference. God willing, I will be there. 🌿



From atop the John Deere booth — the 2004 GCSAA Equipment and Product Show.



The UW-Madison Turf Class had a beautiful display, manned by Jake Schneider and Ben La Barre.



A bird's eye view of the show from high atop Toro's display.



Ralph Nicotera, a former Wisconsin kid who has done well in his career — he's VP of sales for Jacobsen.