



# A Good Time in the Big Easy.

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

The biggest show in turf became a little smaller in direct result of the economic challenges many in the golf industry are facing. Numbers from New Orleans show attendance at the Golf Industry Show (GIS) was 17,250. New Orleans was anticipated to draw 21,500 in comparison to 25,500 attendees in Orlando at the 2008 show.

There were 765 exhibitors on the show floor that encompassed just under 6 indoor acres at the New Orleans Morial Convention Center. On the positive side the GCSAA Education Conference drew 5,258 people to the 123 seminars and 69 free sessions held throughout the conference.

The show floor seemed pretty empty to me however a GCSAA key indicator of show success noted 7,000 qualified buyers were able to take the opportunity for more one on one time with industry leaders.

This was my second trip to New Orleans and it is clear the city and its residents have done a great job recovering from Hurricane Katrina. The areas of the city we were in are up and running and it was hard to imagine the damage they faced a short time ago. Unfortunately some areas of the city have a long ways to go on the road to recovery. Many attendees of the GIS took time to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity and worked on home construction crews to help in the local rebuilding efforts.

My time at GIS started on Wednesday with the "Thinking Your Way Through Problem Solving in Turfgrass Management and More" seminar taught by Dr. Al Turgeon (Professor of Turfgrass Management at Pennsylvania State University) and Dr. Joe Vargas (Professor of Turfgrass Pathology at Michigan State University). I knew I could not go

wrong spending 8 hours with two of the most respected leaders in the turf industry and they did not disappoint.

The attendees were broken into groups by table and each group was given 6 different environmental, cultural, pest or people (club politics) problems to solve using systematic analysis and problem solving techniques. We then took turns giving our solution to the entire class while receiving feedback from the other groups and the professors. As expected, no matter how well a group did Dr. Vargas and Dr. Turgeon had another key point or solution to add to our well thought out plan. The day flew by and I would recommend this seminar to anyone looking to improve their problem solving techniques.

Wednesday night brought a large group of Wisconsin Chapter members to the GCSAA Welcoming Reception with a Hors d'oeuvres selection expansive enough to serve as dinner saving a few bucks on the trip. It was a great start to the conference and an excellent time to catch up with friends not seen in some time.

Thursday began with the Innovative Superintendent Session at 6:30 am. It was the first time I could really tell attendance was down at this years GIS. A room set up for over 2,000 attendees may have had 150 in it at most. I am sure it was a combination of lower show attendance and the realization the New Orleans nightlife does not mix with early morning education. For the most part the



A complete golf hole with green, tee, fairway and water features was constructed inside the Morial Convention Center



speakers were good and I picked up at least one tip from all 10 of the presenters. Perhaps this session will be reduced to one day in the future to enhance attendance and ensure valuable topics.

The opening session was the highlight of the week for Wisconsinites as our very own Monroe Miller received the Colonel John Morley Distinguished Service Award. Monroe is very deserving of this award named after the founder of GCSAA for his selfless donation of time and talent to the industry. (For more on Monroe's career see the Personality Profile in this issue.)

The opening session finished with PGA Tour Player Paul Azinger who gave an inside look at the techniques he used to lead the United States to Ryder Cup victory. Azinger spent time analyzing his team-members personalities in order to put similar players together in pods to allow for greater teamwork. Paul also discussed how he was clear to give ownership of the team to the players to bring out their best.

I fought the urge to go to the opening of the trade show and the early gifts (payola) that goes with it to attend the "Changing Face of Golf" session given by

Renee Powell LLD. Renee is one of only three African American women to be on the Ladies Professional Golf Tour. Growing up on a golf course she learned to play the game as she learned to walk. Renee's father Bill Powell had a successful college golf career but was disappointed after college to find he could not get on most golf courses because of his color. Rather than give up, Bill choose to build his own course with help from family and friends. Clearview Golf Course in East Canton, Ohio is the only course in the world built, designed, owned and operated by an African-American. Clearview has been designated a Historical Site by the United States and State of Ohio.

Renee gave an excellent talk not only on her family history and career on tour but also on the need for all golf courses to reach out to welcome newcomers of all races into the game of golf. This was a great session in both education and entertainment. I was disappointed there were not more members in attendance to take advantage of this opportunity. More information about Renee's family can be found at [clearview-gc.com](http://clearview-gc.com).

My head was already full of new information but I had

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two sessions left for the day as I headed to "In The Moment - The State of Public Golf" a session led by Wisconsin's Brian Zimmerman of Milwaukee County Parks and Christopher S Gray the Golf Course Superintendent at Marvel Golf Club of Benton, Kentucky. Brian discussed how Milwaukee County is using partnerships with vendors and media to promote public golf courses in joint cooperation beneficial to both parties. Milwaukee County has expanded its advertising and promotions as well as received equipment in cooperative deals.

Christopher spoke on the ways he has reduced expenses and his dependence on natural resources at Marvel Golf Club. Chris is an experienced speaker on the topic of making bio-diesel and using vegetable oil for fueling turf machines. He also covered topics from sky lighting to solar cells to harvesting rain water. The session ended with a round table discussion on different player promotions that have worked for attendees as well as the revenue reductions caused by the deep discounting of golf fees some courses are trying in a effort to compete.

I finished my days worth of education with a "State of The Industry" session led by Jim Koppenhaver of Pellucid Corp and Stuart Lindsay of Edgehill Golf Advisors. Considering the current economic downturn I was not expecting good news about the business of golf and I did not get any. Rounds are down throughout most of the country and revenue is down because of the rounds reductions and discounting of green fees. The only category where sales were up in 2008 was shoes. I would guess all the rain the past two seasons in different areas of the country has more players buying new shoes to keep their feet dry but you never know why industry blips happen.

The "State of The Industry" continued a point I had heard in the two



**Pedal Power! A hand golf cart designed to be pulled to the course by bicycle.**



**The fanciest item on the trade show floor**

previous sessions. Golf course operators need to attract new players of varied ethnicity to the game of golf and keep them involved by providing great customer service and provide golf courses that do not beat beginners up. This session was excellent and although the statistics and acronyms like RevPAR, GPH and EHE (Revenue per available round, Golf Playable Hour and Eighteen hole equivalent) are not part of our daily conversations as golf course superintendents they are something we need to pay atten-

tion to in order to be part of our clubs overall success.

Following that session I was fully depressed in the state of the industry although more appreciative I still had a job where the checks don't bounce. It was time to unwind and relax, so the WGCSA Hospitality Room at the Café Giovanni was just what I needed. Shelly Biro and the staff at Milorganite did an excellent job finding a spot to host our group. Please see the pictures and listing of vendors who supported the hos-

pitality room that accompany Brett Grams "Wisconsinizing in the Big Easy" article.

I realize that New Orleans had and still has a reputation as a tough or dangerous city. To be fair individuals should not walk alone in any large city in the middle of the night or go off the beaten path. The two times I walked the 15 or so blocks to the French Quarter after dark I felt fairly comfortable as there were plenty of people coming and going. From my experiences and from the conversations I had with show attendees who became all-night patrons of the New Orleans nightlife, the city can be a safe environment with plenty of dining and events to provide fun.

My Friday morning began at 6:00 am with the Prayer Breakfast. A local church music leader led us in song and quickly proved most white people have no rhythm, when we were not able to keep up with his wonderful New Orleans style. Ken Magnum of the Atlanta Athletic Club discussed his life and how Christianity has helped his family grow. The prayer breakfast is early in the morning, hard to find in the conference brochure but always worth the little bit of effort to attend.

After the breakfast, I hustled over to the finish of day two of the Innovative Superintendent speakers before heading to the General Session. Stephen HR Covey gave a keynote entitled "The Speed of Trust". It was a great opportunity to hear a leader in business training and personal growth. Some of his take home points were; trust is financial not just social because without trust we spend too much time and resources checking on and preventing fraud, theft and laziness. Also people generally like to be trusted and relationship built on trust cuts through time wasting "noise and clutter".



**Grass Roots advertiser Peter Meyer in his National Golf Graphics booth.**

**Grass Roots advertiser Milorganite's booth hosted by Jamie Staufenbeil.**



He finished with a story about his son receiving a speeding ticket for going well over the speed limit. As result Stephen lost trust some of the trust he had in his son and his decision making. Covey stated "we cannot talk our way out of a problem we behaved ourselves into".

He went on to explain no matter how much his son said he would not drive that way again, it was not until he showed through his actions he learned his lesson from the speeding ticket and loss of his license the trust from his parents was regained. Trust is slowly earned and quickly lost.

In order to spend some needed time on the trade show floor I skipped the USGA Green Section

session. It is one of my favorite events of the week and I heard from those who attended it was full of valuable information. Fortunately for everyone who was unable to attend the GIS, the topic "It's All About The Economy, Good Ideas to Help You Tighten Your Belt" will be covered in the May issue of The Green Section Record.

I did make it to the certification luncheon, one, to save the cost (and flavor) of the conference center food court but more importantly to hear former Philadelphia Philly's player Mike Schmidt. With spring training starting up it was tough to pass up the opportunity to hear this hall of fame player. Mike discussed his long





**Hospitality Room Hosts Shelly Biro, Milorganite and WGCSPA President Dustin Riley Greet Attendees At The Door.**

successful career and sometimes tumultuous relationship with the Philly's fans before taking questions from the crowd.

Friday night finished with the Presidents Reception which has changed a lot over the years. Gone are the days of major entertainers and multi-course dinners. Looking back, my favorite acts were Kenny Rodgers and Trisha Yearwood. However, I understand with rising costs and reduced income it is more important for the association to focus on the associations benefits to the membership rather than entertainment. The reception was smaller than in past years, but it provided one more opportunity to network with new and old acquaintances from around the country.

Saturday provided a few more hours on the trade show floor where I was hoping to get a few more items researched. It was nice the final day crowd was small and I anticipated some one on one attention, but most of the vendors had things on cruise control. Many staff members were already gone and those that were left seemed pretty tired.

I ended my quest for education by attending the session "Coffee Talk With the Experts - The Latest and Greatest in Turf Management". Dr. Nick Christians covered soil test interpretations and the challenges of getting soil test for turf done at ag labs. One item to watch for are recommendations for Phosphorus and Potassium applications are often backwards, recommending applications of P not K when it usually the opposite for turfgrass health.

Architect Ron Carl spoke on disaster recovery and how golf properties damaged by recent hurricanes have been able to re-open in an organized fashion. He also presented information on a huge project he is involved with in China. The course has 4 golf holes that were constructed out in the ocean after tons of granite was hauled in for a base in addition to a breakwater being built to protect the holes from waves. The economy must be okay for some because the developer is selling house lots for 12 million dollars each without the house!

Dr. Harry Nimczyk covered the control of billbugs, bluegrass weevils and ants along with results he has seen on the systemicity of insecticides once thought to be contact or single use products. The always exciting Dr. Frank Rossi finished off this session with a talk on golf's carbon footprint. Frank is one of the few who can make any topic exciting and he did a good job with this one. Dr. Rossi explained it is clear is we are experiencing global change if not true global warming and carbon production is a suspected to be a major cause of it. We can expect more temperature and moisture extremes even though our averages for rainfall and temperatures may hold steady.

As carbon credits and carbon taxes are discussed by leaders in congress, golf courses are fortunate that we have been shown to be carbon neutral in early studies. However golf as all industries has continued room for improvement in our relationship with the environment.

It was announced at the end of the GIS that the GCSAA would be joining the CMAA, NGCOA, NGF, GCBAA and GCA in 2010 in San Diego. (Yes that is a lot of acronyms) It is only natural the United States Golf Association join the group as they currently have a major presence with the USGA Green Section Session.

It was also announced to the pleasure of the vendors that the trade show will be two weekdays next year and no major education will be planned during the trade show hours to allow buyers plenty of time on the trade show floor. San Diego hopes to be a bigger draw for attendance and with any kind of economic recovery for the golf industry it should be. Many of the power point presentations given at the GIS are available at GCSAA.org if you missed a session or the show. 🌱