



SMOKE SCREEN

By Rod Johnson



During recent years, I have been most supportive of GCSAA, our national organization. Numerous times in this publication I have cited the benefits of GCSAA membership. I have praised the direction that the present Board of Directors is leading us. I have defended new programs, dues increases, By-Law changes, and construction of a new headquarters building.

As the President of WGCSA and as an involved member of GCSAA, I feel it is appropriate and necessary to inform you of a recent GCSAA Board of Directors decision that I cannot support. Despite acknowledging its important role in recent success, GCSAA has decided to drop its present committee system.

Until now, the organizational approach of GCSAA has been to name Directors to Committee Chairmanships. Committees were then formed from a cross-section of Superintendents from throughout the country. This approach has served GCSAA well. The organization has prospered from the involvement of its members, an involvement headed by committee participation. Members have given

freely of their time and talents because of their dedication to the profession and the recognition of the long-term benefits of a strong national organization.

To set the record straight, as of this writing I have not, nor has 99% of the general membership, been directly informed of this new organizational approach. At the risk of sounding like having a personal bellyache, I would have thought that as a chapter president, as a voting delegate, or as a recent committee member, I might have received a letter directly from GCSAA. As it stands, I was forwarded a copy of a letter sent to an existing committee member.

To date, I have put complete faith in the decisions made by the present Board of Directors. It would be redundant of me to attempt to list the great strides that GCSAA has made under their leadership. This faith aside, I cannot let the GCSAA letter go unchallenged.

The letter states that the reason for the discontinuation of the present committee system was the Board's perception that committees, which are pres-

ently appointed on an annual basis, are unable to address issues in a timely manner. In that same context, it was concluded that committees meeting once or twice per year were unable to resolve issues.

To the given reasoning, I say, "BULL!" The effectiveness of a GCSAA Committee lies on the shoulders of the Committee Chairman, with the individuals selected to participate, and ultimately, in how the Board of Directors acts or reacts. The very way that the dropping of the current committee system is being communicated shows where part of the problem lies.

Come on GCSAA Board, tell it like it is! The present committee system has become a political nightmare. At issue is the naming of fellow Board members to Chairmanships of high visibility "grave" committees and the list of committee members that reads like a "Who's Who" in delegate voting. That's the smelly truth. If committee status is not politically important, then why were Co-Chairmanships established?

Oftentimes the truth hurts. The truth is that how GCSAA Directors are elected is the hidden issue. The political smell starts at the Voting Delegate level. At the Orlando Conference, a rightfully placed challenge was aimed towards delegate voting. Unfortunately, the challenge fell away. The elimination of delegate voting requires a By-Law change voted by delegates. The By-Law change stood the proverbial snow-

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DAWN

By Monroe S. Miller

If a golf course superintendent should wonder why he ever wanted to manage a golf course, the answer is here at this early hour. The ultimate reward isn't always in a paycheck or even in the appearance of the course at tournament time.

Rather, it is quite often the realization of an opportunity to work in and around and with nature. It is the miracle of buds and blossoms, of the grass plants we culture and of the autumn color I'm beginning to see. Part of the reward that keeps me continually interested in watching the sun rise so many mornings of the year.

Dawn is the very best time of the day. I must have seen two or three thousand sunrises in my life. And no two of them have been exactly alike. The colors always change and you can nearly see it happen. I've also sensed that my golf course always looks ever so close to perfect at dawn; maybe that is another reason why I like this time of each day the best.

This morning, so cool and crisp and so typical of autumn in Wisconsin, I arrived extra early with the sole intention of watching the day dawn over Blackhawk. I carried the bench from the third tee to the backside of the second green. Dawn's arrival on our golf course is seen best from there; it is, as they say, the best seat in the house.

Autumn sunlight is the perfection of the day. Even though it is chilly, the cool air feels good this morning. It makes my cup of fresh coffee taste even better and my sweatshirt espe-

cially comfortable. Only a month ago the days were hot; this morning's coolness is a welcome relief.

The first rays bathe the hilltop where our clubhouse sits and the trees there that are so familiar can be seen. It seems like only yesterday that the leaves on the trees were new and barely large enough to catch a breeze.

From where I am sitting, on a promontory on the west end of the golf course looking east, the early morning light makes the fairways look smooth and bright and anxious for players. The illusion my vantage point presented had all of the fairways that I could see sloping up and toward the clubhouse. They were glittering with morning dew.

One of the great things about this morning, and all other sunrises, is the solitude offered. It's a wonderful time to be alone to think and plan and contemplate. No telephone, no people, no machinery, no traffic. In fact, this morning was so peaceful and tranquil and static I felt like an intruder. Except for the birds, no living or man-made thing intruded motion anywhere I could see. Only at dawn can you experience something like these precious few minutes which show the patience of eternal time.

I suspect the fact that I've gotten up early for most of my life contributes to my love of the early morning. Dairy herds have to be milked and many chores done before rural kids can head off to school. That necessity becomes habit; habit slowly evolves to a love — a love of the time and all it offers. Farm

kids who become golf course superintendents have an advantage in that regard.

I chuckle a bit, however, when I read what an old New Englander, Daniel Webster, had to say about dawn: "The morning itself, few inhabitants of cities know anything about. Among all our good people, not one in a thousand sees the sun rise once a year. They know nothing of the morning. Their idea of it is that it is part of the day which comes along after a cup of coffee and a piece of toast. . . . The first streak of light, the earliest purpling of the east, which the lark springs up to greet, and deeper and deeper coloring into orange and red 'til at length the glorious sun is seen, regent of the day — this they never enjoy for they never see it. . . . We see as fine risings of the sun as ever Adam saw: and its risings are as much a miracle now as they were in his day. . . ."

He assumed only rural folks see the dawn. I forgive him because when he wrote those lines there weren't any golf courses. Now that there are, more of us "city inhabitants" know something of sunrises than apparently did in his day.

I like daybreak in all seasons; the differences among the four are amplified at this hour. Dawn in the summertime is noisy. The birds start singing while it is still dark. On those days when the sun comes up through the trees, looking like a giant orange golf ball in the rough, you immediately know it is going to be a difficult day for grasses that are closely cut. A dawn like this activates your sixth sense; you immediately begin thinking about disease, irrigation system coverage and new trees which might be thirsty. Despite this, there is an interlude of loveliness over the golf course.

Dawns in early summer — June —

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are fresh and bright. They are also the earliest and the most generous. You usually are glad to see the sun in June. The leaves need the sunlight to feed the parent plants, plants that still are strong and vigorous.

Sunrise in mid-summer is the least comfortable. There is a murkiness from the high humidity; it is sultry, usually, despite the departing darkness. These are the days you worry about the most, the days when you really earn your salary. More than at any other time of the year, I can see and feel how the golf course has been renewed by the night. Although it may not always appear completely refreshed, you can sense that at least it appears rested for another hot summer day.

By the time August brings us late summer, the sultry humidity has given way to more misty mornings. Mist settles in over the valley that divides our golf course east and west. Sometimes

it is nearly 8:00 o'clock before we can see our pond, so misty has it been.

I think the course looks almost spooky on some of these mornings. The mist makes the bumps and mounds and moguls in the landscape look like giant animals or something. Morning fog of late summer makes you think you're on unfamiliar ground — many times I've nearly driven through sand bunkers that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. The trees have no tops. The sun, however, only takes a short time to restore everything to its place. The mystery and fantasy disappear quickly.

By this time, I always notice how quiet sunrise has become. There are only a few bird calls now; the noise of three months previous is gone. Dawn tells you the force of the summer has been spent.

If I were to guess, I'd bet that golf course superintendents see more

springtime dawns than any other season's. Spring is when we have an unusual amount of work to do and the fewest number of people to do it. Early to bed and early to rise was the prescription given by *Poor Richard's Almanac* for health and wealth and wisdom, and it's been my observation that most of us follow that advice in spring.

Spring sunshine is the real awakener of golf courses. Starting sometime in mid-February, the dawn of each new day carries with it a sense of change, regardless of the temperature. You can usually tell at daybreak whether or not it will be a day when the sap will flow in the sugar maples, sap that will be the maple syrup you'll buy at your local Farmer's Market before too much longer.

The dawn's arrival moves back quite quickly in spring, or so it seems. It is an hour earlier at the end of March than it was at the month's beginning.

THE GENTLE GIANTS

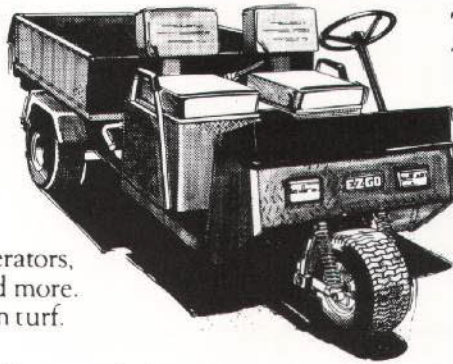
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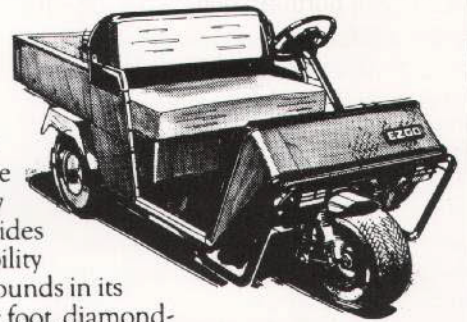
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The sunrise is moving each day, quickly, from the southeast to the northeast. Each morning's progress is almost noticeable — "from Hoyt Park to Lake Mendota in a few short days" is how I describe it.

Henry Thoreau once wrote, "An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day." That is especially true for the wintertime on a golf course in Wisconsin. Usually there isn't much you can do, yet you want to stay in touch with the course. Since sunrise comes so late in the winter, this is an excellent time to watch the stars and moon disappear as the sun lights the eastern sky and then the golf course.

A golf course is surprisingly beautiful on those cold days. If you're lucky and walk it on a morning when the trees and shrubs and every blade of grass are covered with hoarfrost, you'll be overwhelmed at what the first daylight does to them. The fact that the grass is crunchy underfoot will make you choose your path and route carefully. But you'll be rewarded as the sun rises and the entire golf course literally dazzles.

Early winter sunlight is a token of rest, the long sleep that I believe makes our northern golf course so special during the other three seasons.

"When God sends the dawn, he sends it for all," Cervantes said. He was right. All you have to do is be there. And I think most of us who love the work of golf courses are there.

"Just as sure as sunrise."

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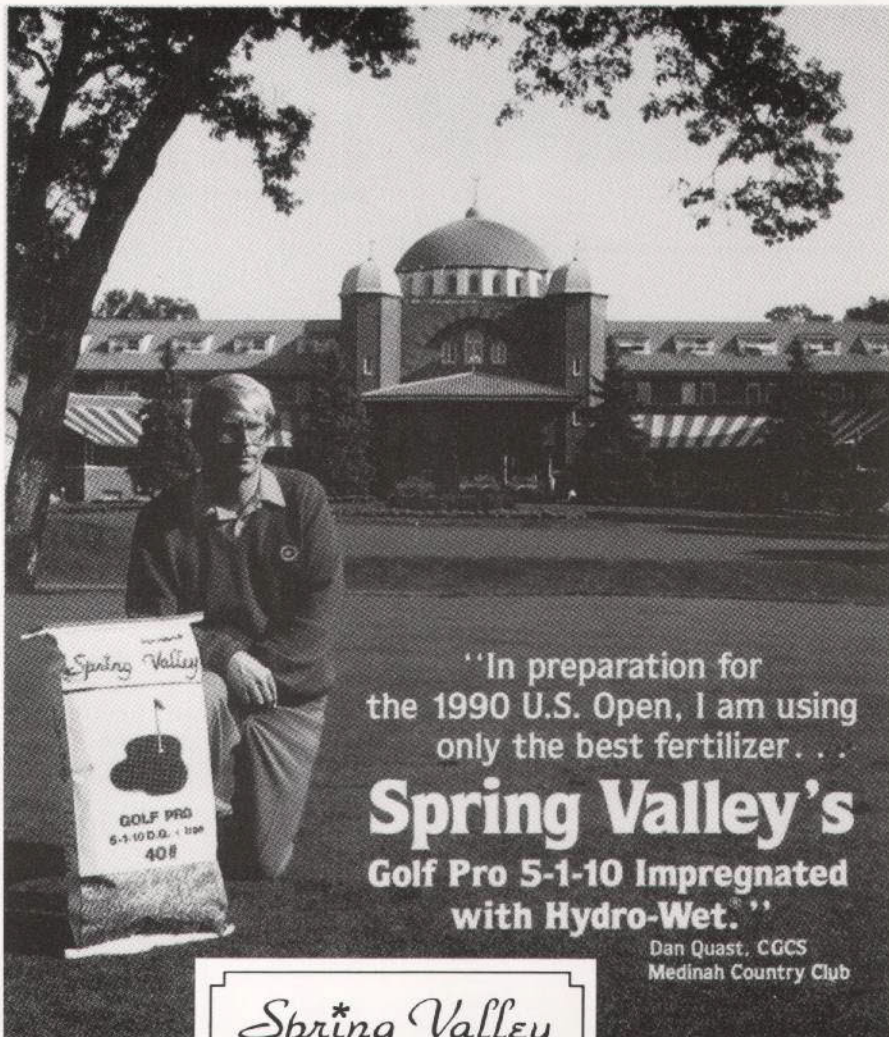
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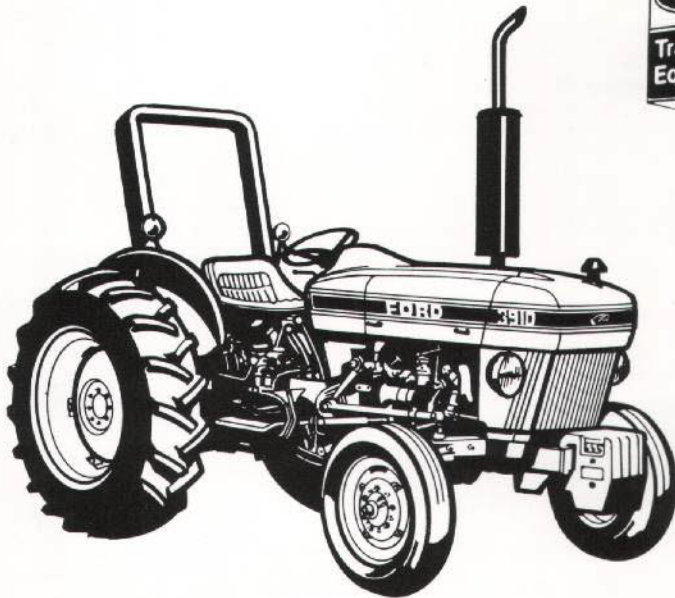
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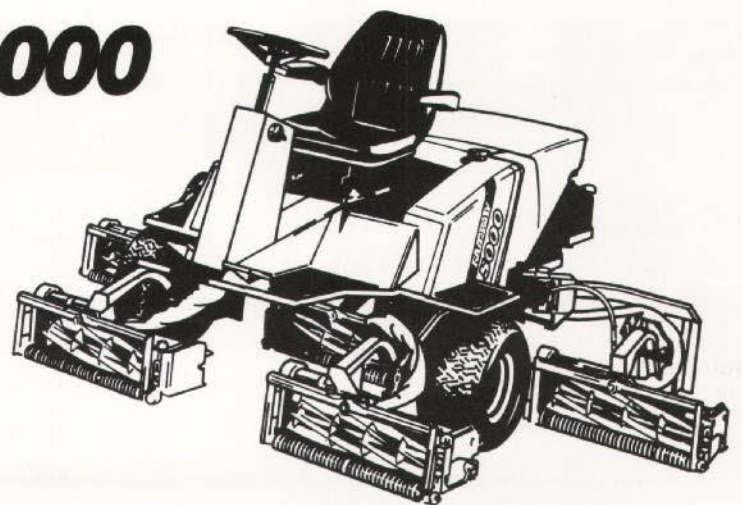
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COMMUNICATION and COURTESY

By Monroe S. Miller

I received a long distance telephone call from one of our club members last winter. He spends his winters in the south and belongs to a golf club there.

He called me to ask a dozen questions about the course he plays in the south.

I offered up some vague speculation, but told him he was crazy to be talking to me.

"Why not," I asked, "go ask the man who is managing the golf course? He's the one who can really answer your questions and address your concerns."

I didn't hear anymore about it and had, in fact, completely forgotten the telephone call.

Until sometime in late June, that is. The member who called me (nice fellow, by the way) in the winter stopped by my office.

He told me he had taken my advice and gone to see the golf course superintendent of his southern golf club. The questions he had for me were all answered to his satisfaction by the person who should have been queried in the first place.

Many were related to weather — heavy winter rains and sub-freezing temperatures. Others dealt with chronic troubles we've all had — triplex rings, traffic pattern wear, shade and soil compaction.

"You really should write an article for the club newsletter and explain these problems to the players. Most will be understanding. As it is now, they are simply upset, like I was, with some marginal conditions," the club member told our colleague.

He was in my office that June morning to show me the May 1990 newsletter from his southern club. The course manager had taken his advice and written an intelligent article that discussed the problems in detail and offered the remedies that were being implemented. It was a good piece, well organized and definitive.

I was asked for my impression and I gave it — "excellent."

"Too bad," the member said, "he waited so long to write it. He was fired before the newsletter was mailed to the membership."

I could have cried. Here was a guy having tough times like we all have had, dealing with them the best he could. Yet his dismissal was due to more than his troubles.

He lost his job, most likely, because of his failure to communicate with the members of his club.

Every once in a while we need a slap like this to remind us of the critical value of communication. Communication will not substitute for competence, but it will almost always win understanding for your problems, even from the most severe critics.

I just hope the lesson wasn't lost on the person who suffered the job loss. He had the most to learn.

It was a rough hour and a half earlier this season. Despite having one of the most friendly and capable crews I've ever had, they about did me in over the course of 90 short minutes.

I watched one of them cross the railroad tracks from the shopyard and proceed across the seventh fairway without a glance — for either trains or players. I was most concerned, though, about the player who was ready to hit but pulled up at the last instant. He promptly slammed his driver into the tee ground.

Another one of the guys was mowing a green surrounds. He clutched, reached down and picked up a golf ball (in play), flipped it over his shoulder and started mowing again. Luckily, for me, he moved the ball of a very pleasant golfer.

And so it went. A fairway mower moving past a player poised to shoot. A utility cart across a full practice range. Loud conversation too close to a putting green.

Each incident was a gross violation of one of the most important precepts in our business of managing golf courses — COURTESY.

A lack of courtesy adds aggravation to a round of golf; the presence of it adds to the players' enjoyment.

You cannot have too many lessons, I learned, in courtesy on the golf course in a busy season. This is especially true when the play is slow or when we are in the midst of a big course project.

Players respond favorably and positively to a friendly wave or a smile of a crew member. They will always appreciate (and really ought to expect) the course employee who yields the right-of-way. The need to rush isn't always that great.

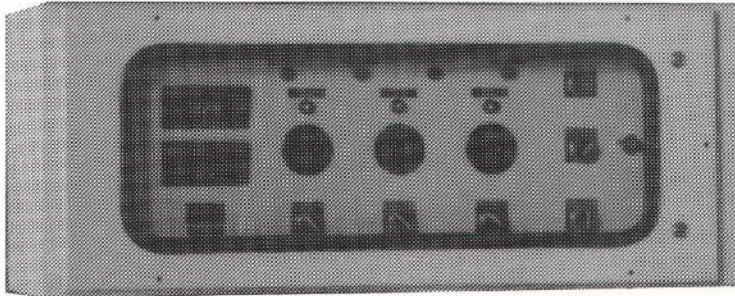
The members of our club seem to genuinely enjoy conversation with golf course staff people. They are curious about specifics of a job and the purpose of specialized machines.

They are interested in why things are done certain ways or at certain times. Often they wonder about the employees themselves, asking things like 'how long have you worked here?' and 'how do you like your job?' Courtesy dictates polite answers.

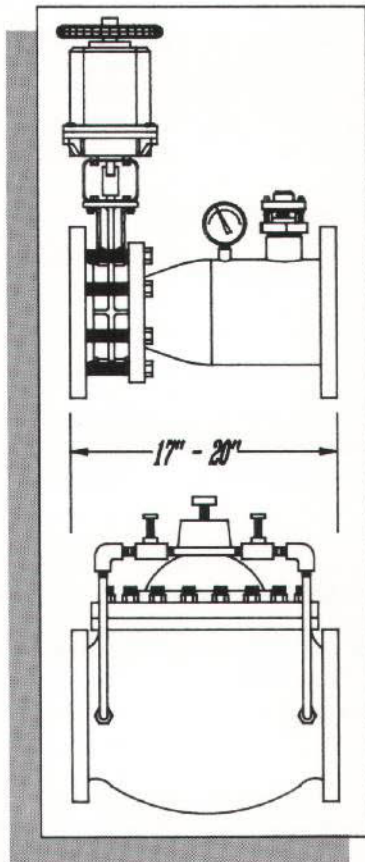
There is an art to golf course courtesy, and it needs to be impressed on staff by example. They must realize the players are on the course for enjoyment of the game and the beauty of the golf course itself. Courtesy from us can only enhance the day's experience.

"Courtesy," wrote E.M. Forster, "is the civil deed that shows a good heart." Mr. Forster has something there, something that seems especially important and particularly apropos to the game of golf itself.

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ROCK RIVER HOSTS JULY MEETING

By Tom Schwab

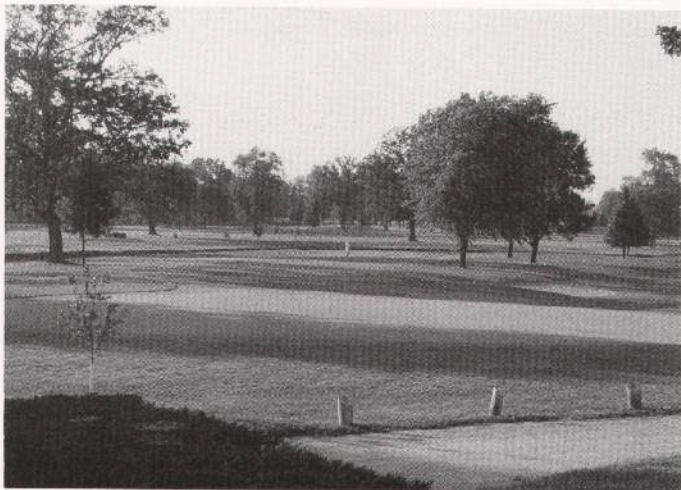
On July 16th, the WGCSA had the privilege of visiting Rock River Country Club in Waupun for its monthly meeting. The meeting was hosted by superintendent Rick Shell who had just accepted the position of superintendent a couple of weeks previously. He must not have rested in those two weeks because the course was in meticulous shape from tee to green. Rick expressed much of the thanks should go to previous superintendent, Kris Pinkerton, for his obvious part in conditioning the course to what it is today. Together these two made our golf experience one to savor.

Rock River was one meeting you should not have missed. The nine-hole layout moved our eighteen foursomes around without any delays. Every hole was of great interest the way it wound through the mature stand of trees. What especially caught my eyes was the well designed bunkering. The members made us feel so welcome also. On

one hole two members drove up to us and told us how best to play our tee shot and also told us some interesting history of Rock River. In the clubhouse some other members greeted us, told us how glad they were to have us there and welcomed us back anytime. You can be sure I'll take them up on that.

The day's four-man best ball event winners were: **first place with a combined score of 55 (each earning \$25):** Doug DeVries, Mat Walker, Gordy Waddington, Dan Williams; **tied for second with a 56 (each earning \$15):** Tom Schwab, Pat Norton, Dennis Robinson, Glenn Gerth, and Jim Wunrow, Dave Murgatroyd, Jeff Ruesch, Dale Marach; **third place with a 57 (each earning \$10):** Rod Johnson, Steve Schmidt, Mark Kienert, Bruce Worzella.

Flag event winners (each winning \$15) were: Lee Merkel, #7 closest to pin; Scott Schaller, #3 longest drive; Al Nees, #5 closest in two; and Steve Schmidt, #9 longest putt.



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WGCSA Director Tom Schwab announces event winners.

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