

Evolution of Hole Notes

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We all have memories of how our profession has changed over the years. Some of our young members remember the days without computer-controlled irrigation systems. Others, just a little older, remember when greens were mowed only with power walk-behind mowers and bunkers were "raked by hand". Still older members remember when the night waterman was critically important to the health and playability of our courses.

What started with just a handful of members meeting whenever possible grew slowly as more clubs were formed and "greenskeepers", came to the profession. For some years the "Annual Meeting" consisted of three days then tested them and gave them grades. This took place during the first week of March whenever possible.

If you want to really understand where this began, many can spend some time looking in the archives of their club's memorabilia or look at pictures in the locker rooms or on the walls of the grill at some of the older clubs in the area and see photographs of a time that most of us find difficult to imagine. A time when fairways were mown with cutting equipment pulled by a team of horses. A time when gasoline or diesel engines were not even dreamed of. When a "push mower" was literally just that.

The ingenuity of some of the early members of this profession was incredible, as you see pictures of them designing and building tools to help them do their jobs better. In fact, the initial concepts of both the sod cutter and the aerifier of today are the result of Minnesota "Greenskeepers" and their search for improved turf maintenance tools.

There have been phenomenal changes in our profession, with many of them taking place just within the past few years. Most people "in the business" are aware of these to the extent or another. However, many members of MGCSA are not aware of how the Association has changed and, in particular, how Hole Notes has changed. That is the primary focus of this article, even though some reference is made that is more accurately "MGCSA history". Those two are so intertwined, that to understand one requires some reference to the other.

This is not intended to be a precise accounting of history. It is, however, offered as an approximate chronicle of events that took place and some of the reasons for those events. The author hopes that this article will inspire someone out there to record some form of a history of MGCSA while there are still some of the "oldtimers: around to fill in the voids and record the events that have taken place over the years. I know from researching background for this article that there are a number of members who have rather extensive files. Let's get this information centrally recorded so that files are not purged and all of this is lost.

MGCSA has gone through a number of name changes

since it was organized in 1927. Hole Notes has not, although its form and substance have changed drastically over the years. Back in the early days, Association's written communication was limited to a postcard mailing to the members telling them when and where the next meeting would be held. As the Association grew, so too did the need and desire for more extensive communication.

In 1960, MGCSA's communication vehicle underwent its first official newsletter that would include not only the information that was previously provided via the postcard, but also personal and professional items of interest to the membership

In order to accomplish this, the Association acquired a manual typewriter and a mimeograph machine. The official custodian of this equipment was the elected Secretary of the Association. It then became that person's responsibility {I'm sure this was not without assistance at home many times} to sit down monthly, accumulate this information. "cut a stencil", run of the necessary number of copies using the mimeograph machine, fold the one-page newsletter, stuff it in an envelope, seal and address the envelopes, lick the appropriate number of stamps and take this bundle to the post office.

Now most of you can probably picture this to be an absolute nightmare for the superintendent who was "elected", and thereby inherited this task. Remember, this was over 30 years ago! Most of us in the turf business were not English majors and had enough trouble spelling "typewriter", let alone using one! In addition to this, if you are old enough to remember mimeograph machines and stencils, you know that these were criters that had minds of their own more time than not, even when being used by professional secretaries. But, be that as it may, that was the price of being the Secretary in those days. As you might suspect, that position was not highly campaigned for by those willing to serve on the Board.

However, once the equipment and objectives were in place, the next item to be tackled was finding a name for this new publication. What better way than to have a contest to who could come up with the best name? The winner of that contest, according to Carl Anderson, was Maynard Erickson. And thus, Hole Notes was born.

"What to write about?" became the next issue to be dealt with. Space couldn't be filled using pictures, so words were the only space filler that was available. The objective was to have a publication that would be both interesting and informative. How this was accomplished and what it included also was almost entirely left up to the Secretary.

We must remember that over 30 years ago, word processors and computers were not even dreamed of. We also

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must remember that, even today with these tools at our disposal, it is many times difficult to find the time to sit down, call around collect news and then put it down in written form. You might especially try to picture finding the time to do this from about May through September. But to their credit, these dedicated Secretaries took the time to put together a means of communicating with their fellow members.

This newsletter would include such “folksy” items as “Mrs. John Greenthumb just gave birth to their first son, John Jr., who will undoubtedly flow in John’s footsteps and take over City Country Club, when John retires. Both Mary and John Jr. are doing well. Were happy to report that John Sr. is also coming along fine! Another item might have been, “John Greenthumb reports that he and his wife Mary had a great time on their vacation this winter. One of the highlights of the trip, especially for Mary, was when they got chance to tour the new maintenance building that was just built at Southern City Country Club.

Items similar in flavor to the above were included in nearly every issue. This gave the publication a very personal touch and was anticipated and enjoyed even by the spouses. In addition to the personal touch, business and professional items were included, such as John Greenthumb, City Country Club, reports no breaks coming out of winter on the new irrigation system that he put in last fall. John now feels confident that he will be able to water all nine tees and greens in the same night if his waterman can stay awake that long.

It was also about this time that technological advances and governmental regulations began to appear almost overnight, Hole Notes became a much-needed vehicle for these types of communications to the membership.

It wasn’t too many years, however, before the task of publishing this newsletter was just too overwhelming to expect one person to accomplish it, particularly on a “volunteer basis with little, or no, spare time. The Association was growing rapidly as were the demand placed on the Superintendent by the golfing membership. It became very apparent that a change had to take place to relieve the workload of all Officers and Directors, particularly that of the Secretary.

When the 1971 season was in full swing, this need could not be ignored any longer. The growth was too rapid, the pressures too great, the work load too large. Something had to change.

The need for change had been recognized. This need was brought about by, among other things, the demands being placed on the Golf Course Superintendent, the growth of MGCSA, the desire for increased professionalism, and the subsequent pressures brought on by these factors.

One of the greatest concerns from the professionalism standpoint was that most Superintendents did not have anyone who was always available to answer the telephone.

Consequently, when a member wanted to reach another member, many times it was impossible. In addition, when someone did answer, messages were either not taken or not delivered far too often. Remember, voice messaging, answering machines and electronic mail were not yet invented! It was felt that having an official office that was staffed during normal working hours would not only assist in the improvement of Hole Notes, but also provide assistance with other types of communication between members.

At about this time, the “business” side of MGCSA was expanding dramatically. Many needs and wants were being recognized and discussed. Throughout all of these discussions, it was obvious that even though many of these were worthwhile and/ or needed, each one of them had a price, both in workload and dollars. Since the Officers and Directors were already feeling extreme time pressures due to the demands of their jobs and serving on the board, and the treasury of the Association was essentially operating on a break-even basis at best, everything pointed to the need for fundamental and major change.

Some of the issues that were pending that added to mounting pressures were: the need to fund a research program; the need for incorporating the Association for liability purposes; the stated desire of GCSAA to hold the Annual Conference and Show in Minneapolis, and the desire to function in a more business-like manner. All of these items made it very obvious that, without change, good people would no longer run for office in the Association because the load was just getting excessive, particularly the office of Secretary.

Formal and informal discussions were held at the Board level and between individuals throughout much of 1971, trying to formulate a plan that would define and facilitate taking the next step that seemed essential for the future of the Association. A plan was devised that would utilize a person part-time who had access to office facilities and secretarial staff. Unfortunately, staff additions cost money and we didn’t have any excess funds. Consequently, since upgrading Hole Notes was going to be one of the primary objectives of this person, we had to look at that publication as a possible way of generating the necessary additional funds.

As a result of these discussions, a meeting was held in the Fall of 1971 at the Edina Country Club to explore the feasibility of the plan. Most of the Board along with representatives of MGCSA’s major Associate Member firms attended. [Rather than risk leaving out the names of some attendees, since I haven’t yet found a record of that meeting, no names are mentioned.] The purpose of the meeting was to explain the Board’s objective of hiring an individual who could upgrade Hole Notes as well as take some of the work load off of the Board members. We also were looking for advise on how best to go about this and to see if, in fact, the major Associate members would support this effort. Without their support, this effort could not possibly work.

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It was at this time that Al Wareham, who had been the Executive Director of the MGA for a number of years, had set his retirement date. Someone such as Al could provide closer ties to the MGA, the PGA and so forth. He also had a knowledge of the game of golf, was involved in publishing a newsletter, had an office that was already staffed and equipped and was recognized and respected in this area. He had indicated a willingness to work with us at a cost that was affordable. The timing could have been better! He could “work into” the role of Executive Director for our Association while still in the MGA office. Then if both were satisfied, he could assume additional duties when he retired. He had already cleared this temporary arrangement with the MGA Board.

This information was presented to the Associate members who attended this meeting. As if someone was looking out for all of us, they informed us that they were looking for ways to communicate more effectively with us. The match appeared to be perfect and the timing couldn't be better. The Associate members could have an advertising vehicle, Hole Notes could be improved and enlarged, a well-known person from the golf industry was available to accomplish this and the expense/revenue issue would work without a huge dues increase.

What seemed almost too good to be true soon became a reality, but not without some very interesting discussions. The plan was presented to the membership at the annual meeting in December of 1971. This was to be truly a monumental step in the growth of the Association. The discussion that ensued would probably take up the space of several issues of this newsletter, however, was viewed as much more than change by some of the “old timers.” This involved our first-ever paid employee. It also presented a “threat” that “an outsider would know too much about our business.” We'd lose control of our Association and too much information would be available to “those outsiders.”

To those of us who were presenting this plan, it seemed like hours and hours of debate. Looking back now, it undoubtedly was generated by genuine concern and caring for something that these people had devoted countless hours of their time in past years. After much discussion, this change was approved by membership and a directive was given to pursue implementation. At the January, 1972 Board meeting, [a great deal of information has been gathered from minutes of this and other Board meetings from the files of Gerry Murphy] a report was given on contract negotiations with Al, with the Board giving its approval. Soon after, an agreement was reached and the first issue of the new *Hole Notes* was published in February, 1972.

A copy of this issue was obtained from the files of Gerry Commers. The cover illustration still showed an irate golfer slamming his club down on a green with a distraught Superintendent looking on. This issue was a single sheet of paper folded to make a four-page publication. The first use

of pictures is included in this initial issue. One photo showed damage to a green due to a gasoline spill. The other two photos showed turf damage from snowmobiles. The locations were not identified.

The next issue, dated April, 1972, had several “firsts.” This was the first issue to have a person's photo included, that of Robert V. Mitchell, the newly elected president of the GCSAA. The masthead was brand new and featured a much more tranquil illustration of a green with billowy clouds in the background. It also included our Editor's name with the address and phone number of the new office. Most importantly, however, revenues had begun to be generated. Included in this issue were the first ads ever run in the Hole Notes. Equal space had been purchased by Minnesota Toro, Inc., now MTI Distributing Co., and R.L. Gould & Co., now North Star Turf, Inc.

An invitation was extended to our membership to visit the new MGA, MGCSA, MWGA and MPGA office. The results of a great deal of time and effort were beginning to be realized. MGCSA had a new office. It had a publication, a vehicle for communicating that was not only greatly improved, but was self-supporting. It had a person who would coordinate many of the business activities of the Association. And it had a place to call “home”!

Throughout 1972, Hole Notes was published out of the new office. At the end of 1972, Al officially retired to his home. The official office, however, stayed at 7100 France Avenue South with the new MGA Executive Director Warren Rebholz and his staff. This arrangement continued until Al's health deteriorated, and in 1975 the duties of Editor were consolidated with the other Association activities at the office on France Avenue.

The February, 1973 issue saw the first use of color with masthead printed in green. Advertising continued to increase and the size of the publication grew. The one item that had been the biggest “headache” for the Officers of the Association was now being handled very professionally and was improving with each and every issue.

In March of 1976 the headquarters location changed to the York Avenue South location that most of you are familiar with. The location and staffing remained intact until the most recent move to Turtinen Communications in Wayzata. There *Hole Notes* is published by a team of individuals whose primary expertise is the business of communication. There is no reason to suspect that this will not continue as time goes on.

There are so many noteworthy items that have occurred over the years that it would be a monumental task to chronicle them. They all, however, can be summed up by saying that Hole Notes has improved tremendously over the years due to the efforts of countless individuals who are not only dedicated to maintaining their golf courses in the best possible way, but have a true love of their profession and the Association that binds them together.

Very few individual names have been mentioned in this article because, to do so, would result in many not

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being mentioned that very much deserve recognition. They know who they are and most of you do also. From the Secretaries in the early days who had the unenviable task of working with next to nothing as far as resources are concerned, to the individuals responsible for the modern version which is a credit to our membership and our Association, many have contributed to a great deal of time and talent.

What will the future hold for Hole Notes? Obviously, only time will tell. However, one might speculate that increasing size and improved quality are realistic expectations. "E" mail may eventually be involved as that technology continues to improve and expand. The technology certainly exists already to effectively communicate in this way. If the past few years have taught us anything, it is that change will occur and it may well occur rapidly.

As a closing note, it is impossible for anyone who has been involved with MGCSA for a number of years to do the kind of research that was done for this article and not be more than a little nostalgic. With past issues of Hole Notes scattered about in an attempt to be as accurate as possible with dates and so forth, headlines, pictures and articles

serve as vivid reminders of the past. Friendships, outings, catastrophes and special events all bring back memories of people, places and the ups and downs of being involved in the profession that we all love so much. Some are no longer with us. Some are just beginning to play their role in making a mark on the future.

Possibly, the one quote that sums it up best is taken from the March 1976 issue, which was published immediately after the GCSAA Conference and Show was held here. The quote came from a GCSAA staff member who said, after expressing gratitude for all of the "friendliness, kindness and willing to help," he stated "I will remember Anaheim and New Orleans for their climates, but I will remember Minneapolis for its warm people."

Besides the satisfaction of seeing a beautiful piece of land and being responsible for maintaining that beauty, or working with the one who is, that may well be what it's all about - "the warm people. After all, that is what makes Hole Notes something very special for all of those who have worked so hard to produce and improve it over the years. From an as-needed postcard to the first-class publication that you have in front of you right now, as the ad slogan says, "You've come a long way, Baby"! But this baby didn't get there by itself. It took a great deal of work and caring by some very special people over the last 60+ years.

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