

The Environmental Institute For Golf Fosters Golf's Greener Side

Golf courses offer not just a beautiful place to engage in a family friendly sport, but a variety of benefits to almost any community—economically, environmentally and recreationally.

Committed to strengthening the compatibility of the game of golf with the natural environment, The Environmental Institute for Golf (EIFG) is a collaborative effort of the environmental and golf communities and provides programs and services for all who come in contact with the game of golf. The EIFG is the philanthropic organization of GCSAA.

World Golf Hall of Fame Member Greg Norman serves as chairman of The EIFG's Advisory Council. "I think the unsung heroes in all this are the superintendents," Norman said. "They're responsible to the local environment. That's why I became involved in The Environmental Institute for Golf."

The groundwork for the EIFG began more than 50 years ago as GCSAA's Scholarship and Research Fund, but has evolved in both name and purpose to meet the changing demands of the golf course industry. Throughout the decades, the EIFG's accomplishments have included:

- **Funding of applied scientific research projects.**
- **Continuing education curriculum in delivering practical information to advance the knowledge, skills and abilities of golf course superintendents to manage golf facilities in an environmentally-friendly manner.**
- **Information, tools and resources to continuously advance environmental stewardship practices.**
- **Annual scholarships to students to advance their knowledge of golf course management, as well as assist children and grandchildren of GCSAA members who are seeking higher education.**

Although The EIFG has a rich history, it continues to look toward the future. In 2006 and with funding provided by The Toro Giving Program, it launched the Golf Course Environmental Profile. This multi-year project collected information from superintendents about their courses to determine the physical features found on golf courses, practices used by superintendents to maintain golf courses, and inputs and outputs associated with management of golf courses.

This collection of data will serve as the basis for "sustainability" within golf by providing the means to measure continuous improvement and provide data to guide industry environmental efforts. The data will provide the means for individual facilities to identify and make improvements, as well as to communicate golf's values within their communities. GCSAA has and will use the data to define the competencies necessary for a superintendent to be successful and then design education programs to support the competencies.

But what do all this environmental information, research and support mean to the golfer and the communities in which they live?

"There is so much tremendous value in the green space that we deliver with these golf courses," Norman, CEO of Great White Shark Enterprises, said. "So I am saddened in many ways when people don't understand that because, at the end of the day, the impact that we generate for the community is tremendous."

With a focus on continual improvement, The EIFG is leading a program that will provide the golf industry with a sustainable approach to golf facility management—"Golf's Drive Toward Sustainability."

Sustainability in golf is about ensuring profitable operations while making decisions that are in the long-term interest of the environment and communities. The aim is to continue to make improvement through professionally managing and conserving resources and inputs, and reducing waste, while providing playing conditions that satisfy today's golfers and will appeal to tomorrow's golfers. The three most pressing issues facing golf facilities today are water conservation, water quality protection and energy conservation. The program's tools and resources will concentrate on these areas.

Backed by the golf industry through the support of the World Golf Foundation, "Golf's Drive Toward Sustainability" builds upon the success the industry has enjoyed and provides resources to improve performance in the future. The objective is to facilitate collaboration among associations and organizations to build a toolbox of resources that will be available to facilities to strive toward sustainability.

A menu of resources will be developed for the entire golf facility to use to demonstrate continuous improvement. The cornerstone will be a comprehensive list of best management practices (BMPs) that will prompt the creation of new tools and support existing programs.

WGF chief executive officer Steve Mona applauded the direction of the program and congratulated those associations and organizations who have committed to it. "This program and its wide support base are vital to the continued health of the golf industry," Mona said. "Golf is not unlike any other industry in that government, the media, special interest groups and the general public are casting a more critical eye. This program will validate where we are making progress and identify what actions are needed."

GCSAA CEO Mark J. Woodward, CGCS, noted the strength of the program is its systematic approach. "We sought and achieved widespread support to keep this from being seen as a program for only the golf course. Second, the profile project gave us a body of data that was previously non-existent. We then established competencies for superintendents with an environmental focus and have developed education to support them. Next, we will roll out the BMPs later this year that will allow all components of golf facilities to demonstrate and document progress. This all sets the stage for the golf industry to better advocate and position itself as one that is committed to continuous improvement."

For more information about The Environmental Institute for Golf, the Golf Course Environmental Profile, "Golf's Drive Toward Sustainability," or to show your support, visit www.eifg.org.