WT&T OUTLOOK

By Bruce F. Shank, Executive Editor

Leaders must agree on state of golf

Anyone who reads both the GCSAA State of the Association Message and the NGF Annual Report will see there is disagreement about the state of the golf industry. At the same time, the National Golf Foundation is pushing hard to unify industry associations for a national program to stimulate the growth of the game.

NGF Executive Director Don Rossi feels a two to three percent annual growth rate is unhealthy for all who depend on golf for a living. The label "mature" can cause industry suppliers to redirect growth efforts toward markets of greater growth potential. Rossi is very aware of this, since the organization he manages is basically funded by these suppliers. NGF Treasurer Bob MacNally constructed a report in 1981, "Growth of Golf", and NGF responded immediately with new committees, a total reorganization, and invitations to allied golf groups to join in the fight.

The most sensitive part of NGF's plan is funding of more than $3 million per year to promote golf. Much of this will have to come from allied associations and other beneficiaries of the game, such as media, insurance companies, and airlines.

The GCSAA is also taking a hard look at the future of golf to determine location and staffing goals. Long Range Planning sessions were held at the GCSAA Turf Show this month to acquaint the membership with some of the major decisions facing the organization in the next five years. GCSAA's attitude is somewhat more rosy than NGF's.

In its State of the Association Report, the GCSAA Executive Board admits there is pressure on the industry to react to harder economic times. Yet, the report states, "Surprisingly, the golf industry is still very early in its development stage." The report admits current conditions can discourage many who care about the welfare of the game and blames the media for focusing on the negative.

My opinion of the report is that the association is giving the "when the going gets tough, the tough get going" sermon. It suggests that modern pressures will force clubs to be more business-like and maintenance practices to become more efficient. No doubt, this will have to occur and GCSAA is on top of technology.

Both NGF and GCSAA are on the money. It is up to manufacturers to respond to market conditions or suffer the same fate of the automotive industry by resisting change with massive promotion. On the other hand, computerization of golf club management practices and higher education for all superintendents will not improve the growth rate of the game. They will make it more efficient, but you still need growth to keep suppliers in your corner.

I hope GCSAA will support the NGF golf promotion plan, and as a new member on the NGF Board, GCSAA can lobby for more recognition of the superintendent in the future of the game. This is not the time for associations to disagree on philosophy. It is time for them to join together and insure growth of the game and security of persons employed as a result of the game of golf.

Jim Wyllie, incoming president of GCSAA, is very aware of the challenges of the next two to three years. The association will be making decisions on whether to move its headquarters, directing training programs to reach more superintendents, and participation in the NGF promotional campaign. Wyllie seems open-minded and very capable of keeping small issues small so that the spotlight is on major issues. He seems friendly and approachable, which should dispel some of the high brow image GCSAA has developed over the years. What I like the most is he returns phone calls and openly and honestly discusses problems and solutions. Nothing is more irritating to members than an association staff that is too busy or too important to listen and discuss ideas. **WTT**

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