

OUTLOOK

By Bruce F. Shank, Executive Editor

Superintendents Aren't Pushovers: Concerned Members Have Power

The news from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) about Executive Director Jim McLoughlin's resignation was not unexpected. It was the result of membership speaking up for a cause they believed in strongly.

After ten years covering industry associations and one year as president of one, The American Society of Business Press Editors, I am extremely impressed with the way GCSAA and its membership handled a sticky situation.

Before the conference in February in Atlanta, a Coalition of Concerned Members was formed to independently study both sides of the relocation issue. The group hired a public accounting firm to pinpoint the real benefits and costs of moving the headquarters to Orlando, Florida. Their findings were published and distributed prior to the conference, at the coalition's expense.

We planned to make the issue a major part of our Show Dailies, but held off when members of the Coalition said they preferred to handle the issue within the association first.

Working from within, the Coalition was able to delay any relocation plans. They made it clear to the association directors and staff that the reasoning for the move was not strong enough to risk the expense and possible harm to other ongoing programs. The membership was not satisfied with the explanation given to them by McLoughlin.

Association direction and management is extremely complicated. Basically, a staff is paid to do what volunteers can't. They try to work from guidelines set by boards or volunteers who have their own responsibilities and worries. The board members often hear better prepared arguments from staff than they do members.

Association managers tend to be very good salesmen. Many times they carry an association through times when direction is lacking. When impatient, they can push an association beyond its means before the membership knows what happened.

The members of GCSAA reacted quickly, spoke up, and therefore retained control. Furthermore, the board members acted to represent the membership. The Coalition built such an impressive case the Board had to listen. Few associations operate so well.

It may seem like GCSAA should be embarrassed. On the contrary, GCSAA is an example for other associations to follow.

Future executive directors of GCSAA will know its members speak up when new programs are not clearly justified. Superintendents are no pushovers.

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