

## **Meeting the needs of golf course superintendents in Michigan: reviewing the current structures of the chapters**

*submitted by Hannes Combest, CAE to the representatives who attended the March 2003 meeting*

The purpose of this paper is to review the current Michigan chapters of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and explore the feasibility of developing a statewide-unified body that will provide the following:

- 1) more effective services to superintendents residing in Michigan
- 2) more efficient use of funds to deliver enhanced services

Regardless of the model chosen or the final outcome of this discussion, these two goals will be accomplished by enhancing the communication among the Michigan chapters and between GCSAA and the four local Michigan chapters.

### **Background**

For several years, four chapters in Michigan have discussed the feasibility of forming some type of statewide chapter or unified body that would enhance the services provided to their members. However, each of the chapters believed that the strength of its chapter was based on this autonomy provided by each membership.

At the 2003 Michigan Turf Conference, representatives from the four chapters met briefly to set a date to discuss this issue in detail. They requested that GCSAA send a representative to facilitate this meeting. On March 26, 2003, a meeting in Lansing, Michigan was held to discuss forming a statewide, unified body. Attendees at the meeting included:

- Jon D. Maddern, CGCS, GCSAA's President
- Hannes Combest, CAE, GCSAA's Senior Director of Membership and Education (facilitator)
- Shari Koehler, GCSAA's Director of Education Operations
- Janet Satterlee, GCSAA's Senior Manager of Chapter Education and Services
- Western Michigan GCSA (WMGCSA):  
John Fulling, CGCS                      Keith Paterson, CGCS                      Joe Hancock
- Northern Michigan Turf Managers Association (NMTMA):  
Steve Hammon                              Dan Bissonette
- Greater Detroit GCSA (GDGCSA):  
Ron Abbott, CGCS                      Bob King                                      Fritz McMullen
- Mid-Michigan Turf Association (MMTA):  
Rick Hakken                              Bob McNab                                      Jim Naugler

Four main expectations were set for the meeting:

- 1) Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of developing a unified body
- 2) Determine how to maintain the identity of the four chapters involved in this effort through various models
- 3) Determine how GCSAA fits into this picture
- 4) If a state body is recommended, determine how it should be staffed

## **The advantages and disadvantages of a statewide, unified body**

There were several advantages and disadvantages to having some type of statewide, unified body. The group identified four basic advantages:

- 1) Better administration of services provided to members.
  - Scholarships (both turf and non-turf) could be coordinated better thus resulting in increased applications.
  - Representatives felt that a statewide body could assist in building more effective relationships with vendors.
  - Employment referrals would be stronger if offered through a statewide basis.
  - Some financial synergies could exist if publications, including a statewide roster, and web sites merged.
  - Education services could be expanded significantly if speakers who were brought in from out-of-state traveled throughout the state instead of making various trips.
  - Possible state-wide golf tournament to be used for raising funds for research or scholarship but which would also enhance networking relationships between members.
- 2) Better communication within chapters and between other allied associations.

MTF, PGA sections and other allied organizations would only have to focus on one group instead of four. Furthermore, representatives believed that having a more cohesive body would provide MTF better direction in their research efforts. Members also noted that in addition to financial synergies that could result from production of a statewide roster, this type of publication could enhance the communication among the superintendents in Michigan.
- 3) More unified marketing effort for superintendents.

All four chapters want to focus efforts on enhancing the professionalism of their members. By combining efforts, the group felt that the marketing effort would be more cohesive and thus stronger than individual efforts have provided.
- 4) Political advantages

The biggest political advantage is having a stronger legislative voice. Legislators may listen more attentively when constituents representing different regions of their state come to meet with them as a unified body to discuss issues affecting the golf course industry and profession. From a perception standpoint, they are likely to have more clout when it's the Michigan GCSA (or whatever name is selected) that's coming to meet with legislators, instead of a group of superintendents representing four local chapters. In addition, there could be a perception that they have more voting strength in GCSAA's national election as one body.

Although there were several advantages, the group also raised some concerns that need to be addressed.

1. Autonomy. Each of the groups rated this as their primary concern. The four chapters exist primarily due to geographic constraints within Michigan; though other types of membership factors enter into the organizations (i.e., northern Michigan golf courses generally address a different golfer than does the Lansing area). Each chapter has different meeting structures and different needs. None of the representatives believed that one, statewide chapter could meet all of the needs of the chapters.

2. Creation of additional bureaucracy. If in fact, the chapters did not merge into one chapter but created some type of alliance, the concern was that this type of structure would lend itself to another layer of bureaucracy.
3. Cost. The group also expressed concern over the cost involved in such a project. All agreed that if this were to succeed, the state body must be staffed by a professional manager. In addition, there would be some one-time, start-up costs involved with the development of a new body. The group indicated a reluctance to talk about dues increases but realized that this may need further discussion.
4. MTF. There was also a concern expressed that MTF may view the development of a unified body as competition. The group noted that MTF had played an important, positive role in the turf industry and yet there was concern that they may not be filling the needs for golf course superintendents presently.

### Budget analysis

Each of the chapters agreed to send GCSAA a copy of its budget for analysis. Currently each of the four chapters are affiliated with GCSAA and as a result, each pays approximately \$575/year for directors and officers liability insurance and \$500/year for general/property liability insurance, both of which are requirements for GCSAA affiliation for a total of \$4,300 for all four chapters. In addition, each chapter is responsible for sending a delegate to the GCSAA chapter delegates meeting for a total cost (based on \$250/each airline ticket) of \$1,000.

The four chapters are spending approximately \$12,500 on web site development. Two chapters send out print publications, which costs approximately (after advertising revenue is filtered in) \$17,000. The other two chapters do not have a print publication.

### Priorities

The group prioritized the responsibilities for a statewide body into three areas: publications, education and advocacy. These three functions would form the central core of what the body would focus on initially.

### **Exploring models for Michigan**

There are several models that could be used to address the advantages and the disadvantages of having a statewide, unified body. Based on the prioritized responsibilities identified by the chapter representatives and the analysis of the budgets submitted, we will present two models in this paper: a traditional, state chapter and the development of an alliance.

### **Option A: State chapter model**

#### **Governing body**

Traditionally a statewide association consists of a board of directors with representatives from each local chapter or district in the state. Local chapters generally appoint an officer or board member to sit on the board. A statewide organization will also want superintendent representation on other industry boards (i.e. turfgrass foundation).

Under this arrangement, affiliation to GCSAA would be through the state chapter. This would mean that all four local organizations would not need to maintain the affiliation requirements, thus reducing some expense and volunteer time. Communication would be filtered through this organization and spread through the local chapter network.

Local organizations would maintain their autonomy through local meetings, but a statewide meeting would be held at least twice a year, once at the Michigan Turf Foundation conference and the other at alternative times and places.

### **Staff resources**

The state chapters within the GCSAA affiliation employ a statewide coordinator or director to manage the day-to-day operations of the association. Depending on the scope of services provided, the director may need to hire additional administrative staff (i.e., government or media relations activities). Regardless, the staff will report directly with the Board and with the president on a daily operational basis.

### **Start-up costs**

A new state association is likely to incur the following expenses:

- Staff salaries, plus any additional benefits  
According to a recent GCSAA survey, salaries for chapter executives range from \$10/hour to a base salary of \$65,000. The medium salary was approximately \$38,000 + benefits.
- Office space or rental of post office box, equipment, phone/fax lines and Internet access (rent may be optional if staff shares space with another association or works from home)  
Several GCSAA chapters share space with other organizations, including the state golf association, the state turf association or other associations.
- Letterhead and stationery for the association  
Approximate costs = \$1,200
- Membership cards (optional)  
Costs could be minimal if they are printed on paper but could be more expensive if plastic is issued.
- Filing fee for tax-exempt status through the IRS (filing fee ranges from \$150 to \$500)
- Filing fee for incorporation through the secretary of state's office (average of \$25 per year)
- Directors and officers liability insurance – average of \$575 per year (a requirement for affiliation with GCSAA)
- General/property liability insurance – average of \$500 per year (a requirement for affiliation with GCSAA)
- \$500 initiation fee for GCSAA affiliation
- Web site development – estimated cost of \$1,000+ for Web designer to set up the site (can be negotiated at a lower rate) and approximately \$20/month for hosting charges.
- Legal fees – you may want to have a review of the bylaws, once they are developed. There would be fees for an attorney to provide this service, unless you utilize GCSAA's legal counsel.
- Other start-up costs – varies, depending on the scope of activities provided to members at the outset, before revenue is generated (i.e. mailings, first issue of a magazine, directory, etc.)

### Additional things to consider

- How will dues be collected? Will the state collect dues and return a portion to the local chapters or vice versa?
- How will votes be cast in the national election? The state delegate would have greater responsibility in voicing the opinions and concerns of all Michigan members at the Chapter Delegates Meeting.
- What is not discussed here is potential revenue. As services are expanded to a statewide basis, would this provide a more appealing opportunity for vendors?

### Examples of this model

Virginia GCSA: They affiliated with GCSAA in 1999. Because Virginia now has a state body (and stronger voice), they have experienced a number of successes, related to legislative issues and particularly addressing the severe drought conditions in their state. They've been able to bring in their local PGA section, CMAA chapter, turfgrass association, nurserymen and others to form a committee that advocates on behalf of the green industry.

Carolinas GCSA: The Carolinas state organization formed in 1954 and was one of the original chapters to affiliate with GCSAA. However, it wasn't until 1998 that they began to use the state organization in a strong manner. The Carolinas now offers regional education to all of their "local" chapters, has an increased presence in both electronic and print publications and has significantly increased their presence within the state political system.

## **Option 2: Alliance of Michigan Chapters**

### Governing body

The alliance would also consist of a board of directors with representatives from each local chapter or district in the state. Local chapters generally appoint an officer or board member to sit on the board.

Under this arrangement, affiliation to GCSAA would be through the four local organizations. This would mean that all four local organizations must maintain the affiliation requirements. Communication from national would remain through each organization.

Local organizations would maintain their total autonomy, but the alliance would meet to exchange information and organize the staff on a quarterly basis.

### Staff resources

Staff will report directly with the board. The board will need to determine a daily operational procedure prior to hiring any staff resources.

### Start-up costs

There will be several costs to consider in developing an alliance.

- Staff resources: this will depend on the amount of work mandated by the alliance. Could be handled through contract work.

- Letterhead and stationery for the association  
Approximate costs = \$1,200
- Web site development – estimated cost of \$1,000+ for Web designer to set up the site and approximately \$20/month for hosting charges.
- Legal fees – you may want to have a review of the bylaws, once they are developed. There would be fees for an attorney to provide this service.

#### Additional things to consider

If this type of alliance is to be successful, the chapters must agree on their roles in this model. According to ASAE's publication, The National-Chapter Partnership, the greater the level of interdependence, the better the odds that conflict will prevail over cooperation. Because the alliance provides little formal infrastructure, it will be important to continue to reiterate the goal of this alliance.

#### Examples of this model

The California GCSA most closely resembles this model. There are six separate chapters in the state of California and a seventh that is the federation that represents the local superintendents association in California. The state chapter is affiliated with GCSAA so none of the financial synergies exist in this model. It sends a delegate to the Chapter Delegates meeting as do all of the other six chapters. GCSAA staff finds this a complex model through which to work as it does not facilitate the communication of information from GCSAA to the local chapters. Instead it functions as a separate chapter.

If an alliance is formed with the Michigan chapters and not a state chapter, consideration should be given to not affiliating with GCSAA but to clearly define the alliance's roles and functions in order to strengthen the existing four chapters.

#### **Summary**

Regardless of what model is selected, it will be important that the chapters in Michigan begin to develop a meaningful relationship in order to enhance the services provided to golf course superintendents in Michigan. By setting a common agenda, staff and financial resources have a much greater impact.

At the May 28 meeting, it will be important to determine which type of model meets the needs of your chapters. At that time, we should also detail the goals and strategies, define the model's role and function and organizational chart, and develop a formal communication plan.