

Wow!

We had such a fantastic educational opportunity at the Peaks & Prairies GCSA “Almost” Spring Meeting, the high attendance was our proof of success! Early March, just under 75 of the attendees who gathered were from golf courses in the region. Four courses traveled almost 450 miles each way, with one traveling 500 miles.

It was a who’s who of researchers/presenters in the turf world. The two-day event offered topics of interest in areas including: “Traffic Jams: How to use Golf Course Traffic to Your Advantage,” “Drought Stress Tolerance as Impacted by the Use of Biological Products — Year two of never-ending testing,” and “Winterkill: Lessons Learned for Mitigating Damage, Reestablish-ing Greens, and Current Winter Turf Research Efforts.”

The Billings location was a little unusual being a roll over from COVID, when chosen specifically as a central location to help draw more Wyoming attendance in the spring. The downtown conference property really did offer a different experience and we are already hearing from those who didn’t attend — they know they missed out!

2024 Golf Community Meeting

Peaks & Prairies GCSA members are invited to attend the 2024 Montana Golf Community Meeting at Green Meadow Country Club in Helena on Thursday, April 18. This meeting brings together allied association representatives and golf facility operators from the region to share ideas, provide updates and promote a spirit of cooperation and camaraderie to promote the game. The meeting will run from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m., with a hosted lunch starting at noon. If you would like to attend, and did not receive the online invite, just reach out to Lori by April 12.

PPGCSA Upcoming Events:

PPGCSA Mont. and Wyo. Scholarship/Education Golf Events TBA

Fall Meeting & Trade Show - October 29 - 31, 2024

Billings Hotel & Convention Center, Billings, Mont.

Private Webcast, PPGCSA - January 2025 (TBA)

Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room - San Diego, Calif., Blind Burro, Feb. 5, 2025

PPGCSA “Almost” Spring Meeting - March 3-4, 2025,

GranTree Bozeman, Mont.



“We Made it Through 2023”

We received a resounding thumbs-up at the last spring meeting when we offered short bites of our own members’ experiences. It was such a success, we had to do it again at the 2024 “Almost” Spring Meeting, where four superintendents from across the region thoughtfully said yes when invited to share 10+ minutes on a subject of their choice, under the umbrella of “We Made it Through 2023.”

Thanks to Jason Lamb, Sidney Country Club, Sidney, Mont.; Dustin Nelson, Buffalo Hill Golf Club, Kalispell, Mont.; Cole Clark, Pryor Creek Golf Course, Huntley, Mont.; Bob Popp, Laurel Golf Club, Laurel, Mont. (*shown from left to right*)

The short amount of time doesn’t require a memorized speech or a lot of preparation. Toss up a few slides and chat with the group. It is that easy to participate and beneficial to all in the audience. So, when we ask for volunteers, always be the first to say yes!



“Peaks & Prairies GCSA is dedicated to furthering the education of our members for the betterment of golf and its environment.”

March 2024
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Number 1



*“Peaks & Prairies Golf Course
Superintendents Association is
dedicated to furthering the education
of our members for the betterment of
golf and its environment.”*

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President's Message

Inspiration

Garrett Turner, The Reserve at Moonlight Basin Big Sky, Mont.

Even though as I write this article, our opening day here at Moonlight Basin is around three months away, but the work related to getting the course ready for the season is already underway. Our team has started clearing the snow from the cart paths to gain access to the greens and tees in order to remove snow in the next couple of weeks. Clearing the cart paths alone can take up to two weeks on an average snow year. This spring was completed in a few days. It's going to be interesting to see what type of a spring we get with the lack of snow we received this winter. As excited as I am to start working on the course earlier than expected, I'm trying not to be too optimistic. March and April can easily make up for any lack of snow in a hurry at 7,200 feet of elevation.


A few of our staff members and I recently returned from the GCSAA CTS in Phoenix, where we discovered some new products at the trade show we're excited to try. Additionally, the education seminars inspired us to review our maintenance practices and leadership methods to reevaluate how we can improve as a group to become more efficient. One of my favorite seminars I attended was titled, "Mastering the Art of Delegation" presented by Jodie Cunningham. Jodie did a fantastic job presenting the material which covered the importance of delegating tasks efficiently, knowing your team, and time management. In the past few years, I've found myself registering for more of these types of classes which focus more on growing your team and leadership, compared to the agronomy and technology seminars I leaned towards ten years ago. As superintendents, we move into a role where it's now more important how we educate and train others to do the work than our ability to complete it ourselves.

The ability to train associates in the execution of daily tasks related to preparing the golf course and inspiring them to perform at their best is an art form in its own right. I've found that taking the extra time while training staff to explain not only how to do the task at hand, but also why it's important and how it affects the golfer, can go a long way in creating more pride in their work. One of my favorite memories I recall related to this strategy was from a few years ago when I had a group of crew members out working in the bunkers one afternoon. The group of guys were in one of our greenside bunkers pulling weeds, recapturing native edges, and checking sand depths. As I approached the guys to say hi and check in on how things were going, I emphasized the importance of raking the floor of the bunker more aggressively to soften the lie for the golfer. This bunker was well known for draining slowly and tended to firm up after rain events. I'm acutely aware bunker work isn't a favorite task among the crew, but the response I received from the guys after my comment was less than enthusiastic, which gave me an idea. I headed to the pro shop to borrow a wedge and grabbed a bucket of balls from the range. I returned to my bunker crew and made an offer to buy anyone a six pack who could hit and hold the green from the bunker they were working in. At a minimum, I lifted spirits by providing a break from the work and creating a competition to participate in, but after each employee had a couple swings with most of the balls bladed fifty yards over the green and not one successful shot, I could see my raking comment started to

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Inspiration continued resonate with the crew. They got to experience firsthand how their work can change the way the course plays and impacts the player.

Every year we seem to get fewer applicants who have ever played the game of golf, so if putting a club in their hands can highlight the importance of a task, it only makes us better teachers.

As superintendents, we dedicate considerable time to communicating our goals and visions, training new staff, and

collaborating with other departments to ensure the success of our operation. Investing in our leadership and communication skills through educational opportunities when we have the time to do so is a worthwhile investment for yourself and your team.

It was great catching up with you at our spring meeting in Billings for those who could attend. I wish you well with your upcoming golf season and hope you get a chance to play a few rounds yourself.



Chapter Leadership Symposium

GCSAA hosts a Chapter Leaders/Executives Symposium in the spring at GCSAA Headquarters in Lawrence, Kan. The symposium provides leadership training, development and support to chapters. It also highlights the programs and services available to chapters through GCSAA, and provides an opportunity for chapter leaders and executives to network with their peers from around the country. The program is limited to 25 chapters.

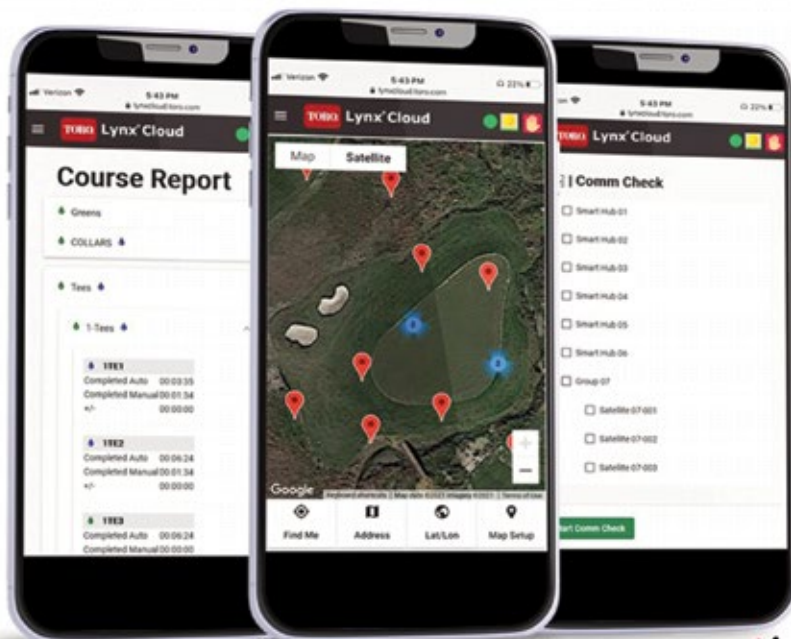
Attending the March 2024 event was Pat Nowlen, Director of Parks & Recreation, Polson Bay Golf Club, along with Idaho

GCSA board president, Brandon Crim, Centennial Golf Course; Lori Russell, Executive Director; and Inland Empire GCSA vice president, Ivan Gibbs, Leavenworth Golf Course;



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The Show

Russ Grover, Buffalo Hill Golf Club, Kalispell, Mont.

Recently I returned from the 2024 GCSAA Conference & Trade Show, “The Show,” in Phoenix, Ariz. Although, looking outside my office at the snow right now, I am beginning to second guess that return. What a fun time it was and such an incredible opportunity to explore all the innovative technologies on the mar-

ket, gain new insight, and catch up with old and new friends, alike. Oh, and let’s not forget about taking in some much-needed sunshine!

The attendance was amazing. I was pleasantly surprised to see so many fellow chapter members. It seemed like every time I turned around, I was running into someone from Peaks & Prairies. It was a good thing to see, and I am glad so many of you were able to take advantage of the occasion to get away and support this year’s event.

While there are many reasons to attend this yearly gathering, I thought I would touch on three common topics that I believe add significant value to the conference and give you my insight from this year’s show.

Continuing Education:

I cannot even begin to explain the wide variety of classes and presentations offered. The GCSAA has done an amazing job preparing an education platform that is diverse, informative, relevant to today’s challenges, and most importantly, interactive and engaging for the audience. There were so many topics available — almost too many — that it made it hard to choose which ones to attend in the short time we had.

I personally took advantage of the management topics, the superintendent certification preparation course, and enjoyed a couple of facility tours. I would highly recommend the tours. Walking the grounds at TPC and watching everyone eagerly preparing brought back memories of walk mowing, hand watering, and even bunker raking. Seeing the sustainability features researched and developed at Paradise Valley Country Club was impressive. I know often we may not worry about water as much here in Montana, but as stewards of the environment and representatives of the GCSAA, we should be doing our best to help conserve.

The classroom lectures were highly informative and had good positive engagement from the attendees. It was encouraging to hear
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other people ask questions and discuss topics that I often deal with, as well. Hearing their different approaches and solutions to situations helped give me a better understanding of how to better manage similar issues. For anyone who may be planning to get their superintendent certification, I would highly recommend attending the “Preparing to Become a Certified Golf Course Superintendent” course. It was full of practical information designed to help you navigate the new certification process successfully.

I took away something new and useful from each of the educational events I attended this year.

Trade Show:

Wow, so many companies are involved in supporting our industry and the products they provide are mind blowing. It is no wonder that golf has a worldwide economic impact of over one hundred billion dollars.

I spent both days on the trade show floor and I visited nearly every booth. And yes, I really may have visited all of them. I participated in the interactive, “Scan to Win” challenge offered through the GCSAA conference app, and I was looking to visit and collect as many scans as possible. In the end, I fell just short of winning, but I still had a fun time participating and experiencing the entire trade show floor. I enjoyed getting to speak with multiple vendors and discovering several beneficial products, especially ones that can help me at my club. That is what the trade show is all about — helping us find products and technologies that will benefit us at our courses and hopefully make our lives a little easier —

which, I think we all would agree is a good thing.

A couple of the things that stood out to me were all the autonomous machines, the GPS spraying advances, and all the drone technology that is happening. It amazes me how far we have come even over the last 10-15 years. Drones that go out on their own, gather turf health information, and then return without any operational skill involved. Mowers that drive themselves or are remotely operated from anywhere, and sprayers that do practically everything but load the product in the tank for you. I know that would have saved me a ton of stress as an assistant.

I watched an autonomous mower setup that had a PlayStation controlled steering wheel with cameras all around the mower. The system is designed with the ability to remotely take over control when needed. What??? My high schoolers would love that. I can just see them all now mowing tees and fairways from their bed with their headsets on and a bowl of cereal on the nightstand. They would still have to wake up early, which could pose a problem. However, add the ability to shoot each other and earn points and they would probably stay up all night mowing the entire course. Call of Duty “Mowing Ops”?

Networking and Comradery:

One of the most beneficial things about attending the show is the opportunity to interact, support, and network with our friends and colleagues. With around 11,000 people attending this year’s conference, it was impossible not to meet someone new. I am still amazed at how small the world is when I randomly meet people

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from across the country and we know the same people. It is always fun to discuss the interesting connections we have through our mutual friendships. I enjoy the sporadic conversations that come up traveling to and from the hotel, waiting for a table at dinner, or sitting next to someone in a lecture.

Catching up with old friends is a great bonus. Throughout my career I have made friends from all around the country, and even around the world. While technology has made it easier for all of us to keep in touch with each other, time zones, busy work schedules, and other family obligations can still make it difficult. The show provides us an avenue to get together in person and reconnect. We can catch up on our personal lives, reminisce about old times, and really check in with each other. It gives us the chance to strengthen our friendships and create new memories to talk about in years to come. I always look forward to seeing friends.

While the GCSAA Conference & Trade Show has something unique to offer each of us, I do believe it collectively provides us with an opportunity to continue our growth as professionals and a chance to relax our mental state. After 2023 I am all about

improving my mental health.

So, I would encourage each of you to do what you can to attend. If it is not something your club offers, show them the value your attendance has for the club. It is a benefit to them, as well. This includes equipment techs, assistants in training, interns, and other staff who may benefit from the experience. I spoke with several young people and their enthusiasm reminded me of my own at that stage in my career. All of them mentioned their gratitude for being able to attend. I know courses may say it is not something they can afford. To that I would simply ask, "Can you afford not to?" Labor is a hot topic right now and everyone is competing for the best of it. If we want the right candidates, we must be willing to invest in those people, and that is never a bad investment. Young professionals are making career choices that offer them the development they need to succeed. So, let us help them be successful with us.

Thank you for taking a moment to listen to my thoughts. I hope all of you have a great season, and I look forward to seeing you at our Peaks & Prairies events, as well as next year at "The Show" in San Diego.



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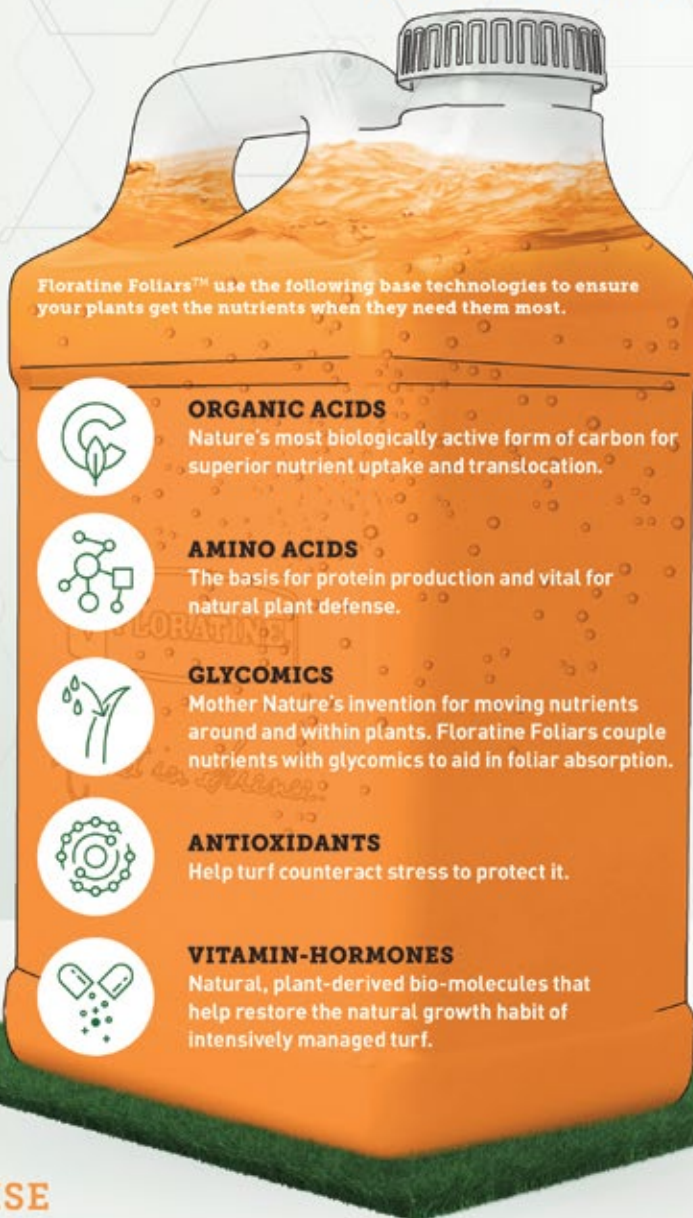
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Embracing New Technology

Garrett Turner, The Reserve at Moonlight Basin Big Sky, Mont

There have been several pieces of equipment and technologies that have changed the game in terms of how we manage turf over my career span. The cup cutter in the back of my cart

looks quite a bit different compared to the one I first used over twenty years ago, and I remember being impressed with the ability to turn on irrigation heads via radio at the very first course I worked at. Now we can adjust the entire irrigation system from our cell phones from the comfort of home. Another that comes to mind, was the year we obtained our first soil moisture meter. After a few weeks of taking measurements, I quickly realized how much more efficient I was to not only address areas that needed attention, but forecast and correct moisture deficiencies days ahead of time before they became problematic. Our TDR has become an important enough tool in the cart that I don't think I could go back to the original methods I was taught to check greens for moisture, and if I did, I wouldn't be nearly as successful at it. It may have been around 14 years ago in one of my first PPGCSA meetings I attended that I remember one of our speakers asking the

question to the group, "How many of you are using soil moisture meters?" I think I may have been one of a handful that raised their hands, as I believe they were still new to the turf industry at the time. After a few put their hands down he said something to the extent of, "Wait five years, and if asked this question again, I bet the majority of this room will raise their hands."

When I look back and think about the changes and advancements during my time in the turf industry, there are a few that stand out in my mind as significant and made my job a little easier by simplifying one of my responsibilities and allowing me to spend more time on other tasks. The addition of a weather station at our course and utilizing evapotranspiration data to calculate daily irrigation was one of those significant changes and continues to be a technology that improved our course conditions and made one aspect of the job less time consuming.

I had always considered myself adept at determining the amount of water I wanted to apply on the course. A good portion of my afternoons were spent probing fairways and looking for new or growing dry spots while hand-watering to make this

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Embracing New Technology

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determination. Depending on the weather that day, the forecast for the next, and how we wanted the course to play, I felt I had a good grasp on water requirements and would set the irrigation accordingly based on my interpretation of the course each day. The initial reason I proposed the purchase of a weather station was to obtain a device that could automatically shut our system off, if we received enough rainfall to conserve water. The ability of the station to calculate ET was going to be a bonus, and I didn't think it would have much of an effect on our irrigation amounts. I was wrong, and just like going back to checking greens without a moisture sensor, I can easily say I'd have a tough time going back to managing turf without using daily ET measurements.

Using temperature, humidity, wind speed, and solar radiation, the weather station provides a measurement of moisture lost in inches, which we can then use for setting up nightly watering. It

was eye opening the first few months of using this number with calculations both higher and lower than I would have guessed on numerous days. The station did a much better job than I ever could at factoring in higher-than-average wind speeds, a few hours of cloud cover mid-day, or a .02" rain event first thing in the morning. The results spoke for themselves in the first summer, with some of the most consistent playing conditions we've ever had and fewer swings in terms of too wet or dry. Another benefit was the consistency among my staff when they were responsible for setting up irrigation on days I wasn't on the course. Using the calculation, we determined what worked for us; the percentage adjustments are a simple math formula and less of a personal interpretation of the amount of water to apply at the end of the day. Weather information is downloaded directly to our central irrigation computer, and, if desired, can be configured to automatically adjust daily percentages. But, even in the absence of a central computer, one would still be able to use the data to



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adjust runtimes. This daily information, coupled with a few in-ground sensors we installed, provides us with more confidence we're applying the correct amount of irrigation, and gives us the ability to track where the course is trending in terms of soil moisture. Single head adjustments are still being made daily and this number isn't necessarily used as a golden rule. We'll go up or down, depending on what the goals are for the week whether it be a tournament on the horizon or cool and wet weather in the forecast.

I'm not exactly sure how many others in our organization haven't utilized this technology yet, but my experience with it after a few years has been extremely positive and I would highly recommend looking into it if you're not using it on your course already.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

DryJect Turf Services

Doug Roberts
2031 S. Elkhound
Meridian, ID 83642
(208) 890-9535
flyidaho@yahoo.com
and
Jerry Fleming
16739 Bluejay Loop
Nampa, ID 83687
208-906-6725
jerry@dryjectwest.com

Earth Medicine

Leia Vaihere
110 S 450 E
Burley, ID 83318
(208) 431-8245
leia@earthmedicineusa.com

ENVU

Zac Reicher
2483 County Rd A
Denton, NE 68339
(402) 309-5007
zac.reicher@envu.com
and
Tom Steigauf
11455 20th St. N
Lake Elmo, MN 55042
(651) 202-5312
tom.steigauf@envu.com

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Brian McGiff

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(208) 569-8756

Jason Aerni

jason.aerni@simplot.com
(970) 231-5623



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Bronze
Ag Enterprise & Supply/ Raven
Magic Valley Turfgrass
Columbia Seed
Washington Rock
The Andersons/ Wilbur-Ellis
Sustainable Turfgrass Management



Strategic Planning Meeting

Ryan Knapp, Stock Farm

Hamilton, Mont.

On March 4, 2024, members of the Peaks & Prairies GCSA Board of Directors met at the Double Tree Hotel in Billings, ahead of the fall meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to take stock of where we are as an association, define our successes and challenges as an association, and ensure that we are working towards our stated goals and mission.

We were fortunate to have David Phipps and Steve Randall with the GCSAA facilitate our meeting and assist us with the process of the strategic planning meeting. David and Steve were instrumental in this undertaking as they have both assisted with several other associations and have a deep understanding of this process.

Our first task was to define the expectations of our meeting and look for areas where we can improve. Those expectations are listed as:

- ~ Growing our membership
- ~ Engaging with non-members
- ~ Improving participation
- ~ Long term financial plan
- ~ 2026 50th anniversary
- ~ Broader awareness of our chapter

Next, we executed a SCOR analysis, discussing the chapter's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, opportunities and threats. There were several in each category that were identified but for our purposes I'll list the top two in each category.

Strengths

- ~ Providing value in member events
- ~ Providing an exceptional educational experience at our meetings

Challenges

- ~ Geography

- ~ Weather (2)
- ~ Attracting new members (2)

Opportunities

- ~ Superintendent Mentorship program for new members
- ~ First Green field trips

Risks

- ~ Geography/weather impacts attendance at events
- ~ Labor

After we identified areas that the association was doing well and identifying areas of improvement for our association, we developed a list of goals and action items in order to improve us as an association and assist with outreach throughout our diverse region.

The idea of regional "socials" led by a board member or another member outside of our traditional meeting times. I think it is great that a lot of our membership enjoy getting together through the course of the season either formally or informally. I encourage everyone to seek out these opportunities for networking as well as getting to know newer members in our respective regions. Whether a roundtable discussion followed by a round of golf, a group lunch where everyone can get together and compare notes, or a bowling night to blow off some steam from a hectic season. I believe these "socials" could be a good way to get to know each other and if they're not already happening, consider putting one together in your neck of the woods.

The board set a goal of 40 rounds donated to "Rounds 4 Research" and raising \$7,000 for our chapter. Although a lofty goal, the board felt that 40 rounds is attainable for 2024 and if

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Strategic Planning

continued from page 20

you haven't already donated, please consider doing so. The money raised through this program directly benefits our association as well as supporting important research relevant to our region. The PGA of America has recently partnered with the GCSAA in support of this program and all of the benefits that it provides. For more information or to donate please go to the website at <https://www.gcsaa.org/foundation/rounds-4-research/donate-a-round>

~ Host the 2nd First Green field trip within our chapter by the end of 2024. The First Green field trips provide an opportunity for us to help educate our local students and communities about what we do and the impact we can have on the environment. This program gives us a chance to tell our story and has the side benefit of potentially recruiting the next generation of golf course superintendents. If you would like more information or are interested in hosting a First Green event, please contact David Phipps at dphipps@gcsaa.org.

~ Another item that may help with recruiting the next generation of golf course superintendents is reaching out to local and state FFA organizations. Although not traditionally thought of as an avenue for potential employees and future golf course superintendents, FFA does offer educational opportunities for their members in the field of turfgrass management and sports field management. This may be a great option for those looking to get into the field of golf course management and those of us looking to widen our labor pool. If you are involved or know someone who is involved in FFA, please consider reaching out to them.

I want to thank all of the members of the board who participated in this strategic planning meeting. Being an active part of our association is the best way to help steer us in the right direction going forward. I also want to thank David Phipps, Steve Randall and Lori Russell whose expertise in this process made it an enjoyable experience.

New members *continued*

Bryce Jerome
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Whitefish Lake Golf Club
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Whitefish, MT 59937
(574) 252-6178
mmcnarney@outlook.com

Mountain West Turf Technologies

Benton Hodges
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Jackson, WY 83002
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bphodges@gmail.com

James Prusa
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jimprusa@hotmail.com

Redox Bio-Nutrients

Trey Whitaker
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Rupert, ID 83318
(208) 260-1878
trey.whitaker@redoxgrows.com

Adam Snively
Casper Country Club
4149 Country Club Rd
Casper, WY 82609
(307) 321-4655
adam@caspercountryclub.com

We Can Listen

Pete Grass, CGCS
Hilands Golf Club, Billings, Mont.

Every job has stress, no matter your position, from superintendent to the high school student on their first day of work at a golf facility. As the expectations of course conditions rise each season, labor is harder to find. Expenses are rising while budgets are not. And as other pressures outside of work build up, keeping some sense of sanity to it all is at times very difficult.

At our recent fall meeting, it was discussed at the board level that there is a need to provide a “support system” for our members who may be struggling in some way with the pressures of our profession. I was asked to lead this effort and I am happy to announce that we are organized and ready help. We have three “seasoned” superintendents who have volunteered their time and experience to be available for anyone to reach for advice, support, or just an ear to vent to. Our intent is to be a safe, confidential resource to anyone who may want to talk. We are not experts in mental health treatment, but fellow members who have dealt with many different “experiences” in our careers. We will also have information about connections to medical and clinical professionals, should that be a need.

Besides myself, Rick Hathaway from Rock Creek Cattle

Company, and Mike Valiant from the Yellowstone Club are the initial volunteers on the “Support Committee.” If someone else would like to join the group, please contact Lori or me.

During discussion, I think Mike Valiant summed up our mission very well. He said, “I’m here to listen and calm the nerves of fellow superintendents/assistants in need.

Sometimes the stress of our job can manifest its way into our personal lives, creating a snowball that leads to an avalanche.”

If you feel the snow starting to fall in your life, we are here to listen and assure you that you are not alone. We also have resources we can suggest. Do not hesitate to reach out!

“Support Committee”

Peter Grass
406-855-6440 Text/Call
(24/7 OK)

Rick Hathaway
406-560-8371
Text/Call

Mike Valiant
406-539-8337
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