

**GCSAA Chapter Delegates Meeting Outcomes**  
**Oct. 28-29, 2024**  
**Lawrence, Kan.**

**TO:** 2024 Chapter Delegate Meeting Attendees  
**FROM:** T.A. Barker, CGCS

**DATE:** November 14, 2024  
**CC:** GCSAA Board of Directors  
J. Rhett Evans

The GCSAA Board of Directors, 2025 board candidates and 88 delegates representing 90 of GCSAA's 94 affiliated chapters, convened at the Oread Hotel and GCSAA Headquarters for the 2024 Chapter Delegates Meeting.

**T.A. Barker, CGCS – Welcome and Introductions**

T.A. Barker, CGCS, GCSAA vice president, called the Chapter Delegates Meeting to order at 4 p.m. on Oct. 28, 2024. Barker introduced the GCSAA Board of Directors. He welcomed the delegates to the meeting and thanked them for their time and participation. Barker honored Mike Upchurch who passed away following a medical emergency while traveling to Lawrence. Barker addressed the impact of Hurricanes Milton and Helene on GCSAA members in the Southeast. He introduced the GCSAA Board of Directors and thanked Director Douglas D. Dykstra, CGCS, for his commitment and service as he steps down from the board.

**President's Message**

GCSAA President Jeff L. White, CGCS, encouraged delegates to be active participants, share their thoughts and ideas, and ask questions throughout the meeting and breakout sessions. He reminded delegates of their role and responsibilities. White shared his personal journey from being a new delegate to a board member and president, highlighting the importance of being involved and contributing to the association. He recognized the past presidents in the room and emphasized the importance of continuous improvement and growth within the association. White outlined the achievements of the past year, including increased social media reach, a successful show, and the inaugural Women's Leadership Academy. He highlighted the success of Rounds 4 Research and the importance of member participation in funding research. White emphasized the importance of GCSAA Grassroots Ambassadors and the pilot program with the PGA of America in Southern California, focusing on advocacy and protecting the game of golf. He mentioned the launch of the Links to Success program and the involvement of international allies in supporting the association. He outlined the agenda for the next two days, focusing on government affairs, workforce development, member dues strategy and board candidates. He concluded with a call to action for delegates to be engaged, ask questions, and contribute to the success of the association.

**Association Briefing**

GCSAA CEO Rhett Evans discussed the financial health and growth of the association, highlighting a revenue increase from \$12.8 million in 2021 to a projected \$21.2 million in 2025. The GCSAA Foundation's endowment grew to \$13 million, and reserve funds reached \$9.2

million. Key revenue sources include member dues (26%), industry support (47%), and foundation contributions (6%).

Emphasis was placed on the importance of understanding how previous boards managed investments and the association's financial health. He discussed the association's focus on reinvesting revenue into programs and services rather than hoarding money. Evans explained the breakdown of revenue sources, including member dues (26%), industry support (47%), and foundation contributions (6%). He highlighted specific allocations: 32% to education, advocacy, and environmental efforts; 24% to the show; 17% to chapter services; 10% to marketing, branding, and communication. He stressed the importance of maintaining a balanced budget and focusing on professional membership growth.

Evans addressed the challenge of increasing EM (Equipment Manager) membership by 300, with 294 more needed. He discussed the importance of engaging assistants and equipment managers to become GCSAA members.

Evans discussed the importance of the association's brand and its visibility in the golf industry. He gave examples of how the GCSAA logo is being integrated into various materials, including business cards and golf course signage. He provided information on how to get the GCSAA logo on business cards, golf course signage, and apparel. He said that the goal is to increase recognition and visibility for GCSAA members and their contributions.

Evans stressed the importance of branding and recognition efforts, including International Thank A Golf Course Superintendent Day, which garnered significant media and industry support. The focus areas for future growth include career development, advocacy, and brand recognition. He mentioned global recognition effort for superintendents and greenkeepers (as they are called in the UK and Europe), with support from international organizations. In addition, there has been increased media coverage and social media impressions, including spots on the Golf Channel and recognition from the PGA Tour. He cited examples of companies like John Deere creating videos to support the recognition effort.

Evans drew a parallel between the pursuit of excellence in golf and the association's commitment to continuous improvement. He stressed the importance of member engagement and input in decision-making. He discussed the association's focus areas: career and workforce development, advocacy, and brand recognition and encouraged members to think about how they can contribute to the association's goals and make a difference. He concluded with a commitment to strive for excellence and continuous improvement in serving members while acknowledging the challenges faced by members and the association's efforts to address them. He encouraged delegates to engage in the upcoming discussions and provide feedback on how the association can better serve them.

### **First Green and Workforce Development**

Shelia Finney, senior director, member programs, and Leann Cooper, director, First Green and workforce development, discussed strategies for attracting, training, and retaining staff in the golf course industry.

They plan to

- Develop greenkeeper training videos in 2025
- Launch the Greenkeeper Certificate program in 2025.
- Translate at least 2 Equipment Manager Certificate study guides and exams into Spanish by the end of 2025.
- Develop a skills assessment tool and curated learning pathways by the end of 2025.
- Engage with local FFA chapters to recruit teams for the National Turfgrass Science Invitational at the CTS in San Diego in February 2025.

Finney outlined current efforts that include attracting youth, career changers, and veterans to the golf course industry. Future plans include enhancing training programs to bridge the gap.

Cooper discussed the First Green program, which brings students to golf courses for hands-on learning. The program is now active in 41 states, with plans to expand to all 50 states by 2026. Over 6,000 students were impacted in 2024, exceeding the goal to reach 5,000 students and 100 field trips in 2024. High school level activities and teacher grants are being introduced to engage high school students. She discussed the FFA, (Future Farmers of America) which has over a million members aged 13-19. GCSAA is working to raise awareness about golf course careers within the FFA community. JAG (Jobs for America's Graduates) is another program GCSAA is engaging with to provide career pathways for students. A pilot program in Kansas has been successful, leading to potential job opportunities for students.

Finney introduced the concept of training videos and a greenkeeper certificate to help new staff. The Greenkeeper Certificate will include an exam, webinars, and practical skills assessments. Career consulting tools and curated learning pathways are being developed to help staff improve their skills. The assistant certificate series and equipment manager certificates are also being enhanced based on member feedback. Finney highlighted the importance of Spanish translation for training materials. Two study guides and exams will be translated into Spanish by the end of 2025-2026. GCSAA aims to offer comprehensive services from the beginning of a career to retirement. The focus is on continuous improvement and meeting the needs of the industry.

### **Government Affairs Update**

Chave McKeel, director of government affairs, outlined GCSAA's efforts in compliance and advocacy. Key issues discussed included the EPA's proposed chlorothalonil label changes, which have prompted a significant outreach campaign, and the Endangered Species Act's impact on pesticide use. The team is also addressing state legislative threats, such as Colorado's pesticide preemption bill and New Jersey's two-stroke blower ban.

### **Chlorothalonil and EPA Label Changes**

McKeel discussed the impact of proposed EPA label changes to chlorothalonil. She said the EPA received significant backlash from various stakeholders, including municipal courses and the PGA Tour, leading to a reconsideration of the proposal. The EPA is likely to exempt greens from vulnerable soils and may replace the 25-foot untreated buffer with a 10-foot vegetated filter strip.

McKeel reassured attendees that the team will continue to work on this issue and seek the best possible outcome.

### **Endangered Species Act**

McKeel explained the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the need for EPA consultations with fishery agencies for product registrations. She said that environmental activists have sued the EPA over missed consultations, leading to court orders to comply. McKeel explained the concept of Pesticide Use Limitation Areas (PULAs) and the importance of knowing whether a golf course is in one.

### **State Legislative Threats and Power Equipment Bans**

McKeel discussed a bill in Colorado aimed at eliminating pesticide preemption, which was stopped with the help of the Rocky Mountain chapter. A bill in New Jersey seeks to ban two-stroke blowers and restrict four-stroke blowers, with potential future impact on other states. Power equipment threats are a top concern for GCSAA members, with ongoing alerts and efforts to educate lawmakers.

### **Disaster Relief and Tax Code Issues**

McKeel addressed the impact of recent hurricanes and wildfires on golf courses and the need for disaster tax relief. She said golf courses are currently excluded from disaster tax relief due to discriminatory language in the tax code.

## Day 2

### **Opening Remarks Day Two**

T.A. Barker outlined the agenda for day two, emphasizing the importance of participation and input. The meeting will cover insights into a member dues strategy, board policy discussions, a small group breakout session for personalized interaction and a Town Hall session for members to ask the board questions. The day's meeting will conclude with candidate presentations and breakouts to allow members to engage directly with potential board members.

### **Member Dues Strategy**

Kevin Sunderman, CGCS, chief operating officer, emphasized the importance of continuous pursuit of excellence in golf course management. The discussion then covered the proposed dues increase to fund various initiatives, with a focus on maintaining high member satisfaction and addressing the growing needs of the industry.

Sunderman highlighted the importance of communication within chapters and the need for input from all members. He placed emphasis on being good stewards of the environment while managing business operations and ensuring financial efficiency.

Sunderman talked about the amplified efforts in communication, including GCM Online, GCSAA TV, social media, and podcasts. He discussed workforce development, focusing on

attracting, training, and retaining staff, with a mention of the First Green initiative. He emphasized the importance of keeping valuable staff through training and retention programs.

Sunderman discussed GCSAA advocacy and environmental programs. He talked about the challenges faced in advocacy, including the impact of regulations and the importance of grassroots ambassadors. He mentioned the reduction in water usage achieved through best management practices (BMPs). He highlighted the importance of collecting data for advocacy efforts and the role of BMPs in maintaining golf's environmental impact. He stated the need for continuous updates to Golf Course Environmental Profile data and the importance of member participation in surveys.

Sunderman recognized the contributions of field staff and stressed the importance of having staff in local areas to support chapters. He mentioned the Rounds 4 Research program and its impact on local chapters and the need to grow the program to meet future needs.

Sunderman emphasized the importance of professional recognition campaigns, such as Thank a Golf Course Superintendent Day in building awareness and respect for the profession.

Sunderman listed the programs that have been added since 2006

#### Education:

- Melrose Leadership Academy
- Melrose Equipment Management Experience
- Women's Leadership Academy
- Excel
- Links to Success

#### Communication

- GCM Online
- GCSAATV
- GCSAA Podcast

#### Workforce Development

- First Green
- Certified Turf Equipment Manager
- ASCS
- EMCP
- JAG
- FFA

#### Advocacy and Environmental

- Best Management Practices
- Political Action Committee
- Grassroots Ambassadors

## Service to Chapters

- Field Staff
- Rounds 4 Research

## Professional Recognition

- Thank a Golf Course Superintendent Day

Sunderman shared his experience with running lean operations and the impact on quality and time management. He described the need for more resources to accelerate the development of training videos, BMPs, and career pathways. He stressed the importance of leveraging member dues to provide valuable programs and services.

Sunderman said that delegates will discuss the proposed dues increase in small breakout sessions and provide feedback. There will be a vote at the Annual Meeting on the proposed dues increase for Class A/B and Class C members.

Sunderman said that GCSAA must continue to grow. Since 2006, GCSAA has gone from 120 to 85 staff members. If we had more resources, you would have training videos last year, not next year. We think about the educational and career pathways, Greenkeeper Certificate and other programs we could implement with more resources. At the end of the day, we want to raise the bar. We want to have a greater impact.

Paul L. Carter, CGCS, secretary treasurer, discussed the importance of the dues strategy in ensuring a sustainable association and funding programs and services. He mentioned the current dues structure and the proposed increases to fill the current funding gap. Dues account for about 26% of the revenue that GGCSAA brings in. In 2025, Carter stated that the CPI increase is \$40 for Class A and B and C. But, to fill the funding gap an additional increase above the CPI is needed. The proposed increase is \$65 for Class A and B and \$35 for class C. Our current dues are \$465 for Class A/B and \$240 for Class C. The proposed increase would make Class A/B \$530 and Class C \$275. Equipment Manager dues are not voted on but approved by the board. Their proposed increase is \$35. The EM dues would be \$150.

Carter stressed the need for member input and feedback on the proposed dues increases and the importance of engaging with the association and providing input on the proposed changes. He said that during the breakout sessions delegates will discuss the proposed dues increases and gather input. He stressed the importance of engagement and discussion to ensure the proposed changes meet the needs of the members and reiterates the need for member input and the importance of the discussion in making informed decisions.

Carter reminded delegates that CPI dues increases are voted on every two years. This process was started because of the 2006 Chapter Delegates Meeting. It helps GCSAA keep pace with the increasing costs. Over the years, we've seen membership rating approval between 87 and 97%.

The increase is not automatic. He said they want to know what you're thinking for yourself, your facility, for your members in your chapter.

## **Board Policy Oversight Task Group**

Anthony Williams, CGCS, MG, task group chair, discussed the oversight and accountability process for the organization, emphasizing the importance of transparency and proper use of resources. Key points included a detailed audit involving nearly 100 pages of data, recommendations for campaign and election procedures, and the need for virtual options for candidates. Travel expenses were reviewed, suggesting updates to daily per diems and honorariums to reflect the size of facilities. The process involves a task group, board reviews, and member votes to ensure effective use of funds and progressive policies. The three-year review cycle was deemed effective for comprehensive evaluations. Williams said that the Board will review the task group's recommendations and decide which policy changes to implement. Williams emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability, mentioning a long process involving an outside audit group and a task group includes past presidents and superintendents to ensure a diverse perspective on the organization's operations. Its goal is to ensure that the resources raised are used properly and that the organization stays true to its mission and values.

## **Breakout Report Out**

Each board member was assigned to a breakout room, and they reported on the discussions that took place. They focused on the dues increase and its implications. Key points included the need for better communication about the CPI calculation and the impact of the dues increase on local chapters in addition to the importance of retaining members. They also emphasized the need for a clear explanation of the \$25 additional fee and the potential for alternative revenue sources. The reports highlighted the importance of government affairs, environmental programs, and the value of GCSAA membership, with suggestions for improved communication and engagement strategies.

## **Suggested Action Items**

- Provide a short video summary of the meeting events that can be shared with chapters and members
- Explore opportunities to partner with allied organizations and industry vendors to help offset membership costs
- Investigate alternative models to the CPI for determining future dues increases, considering the changing economic landscape
- Develop a more comprehensive slide deck or communication materials that showcase the full breadth of GCSA's programs and services to better educate members

## **Town Hall Session**

Delegates asked questions of the board about a number of topics. Those included staffing needs, continuing to use CPI to determine member dues, development of training videos, and continuing to provide quality programs. Discussions included developing a task group on CPI adjustments. Considering all facilities was important when discussing dues and the proposed increase.

Delegates also asked about membership and training video access. Short videos are seen as beneficial. The information is retained at a higher level for members.

### **Election Overview**

The delegates had the opportunity to hear presentations and participate in breakout rooms to learn more about the candidates. The candidates for office include:

- For President – T.A. Barker, CGCS
- For Vice President – Paul Carter, CGCS
- For Secretary Treasurer – Marc Weston, CGCS, and Steve Hammon, CGCS
- For Director (electing three) – Scott Griffith, CGCS, Greg Jones, CGCS, MG; Renee Geyer, CGCS, Ryan Kraushofer, CGCS, Brandon Razo, and Brian Roth, CGCS

There are three open director positions for two-year terms. The terms of Griffith, Jones and Hammon are expiring. If Hammon is not elected to the Secretary Treasurer position, he will need to run from the floor for an open director position to remain on the board. If Weston is elected to the Secretary Treasurer position, then a fourth person will need to be elected to fulfill the one year remaining in his term.

Douglas D. Dykstra, CGCS, has announced his intention to resign from the board, effective as of the 2025 Annual Meeting. He has served on the board since 2020 and on the Foundation Board of Trustees since 2024. Dykstra is currently in the middle of a two-year director term. GCSAA thanks him for his service. The remaining year of his term will be placed on the ballot resulting in a fifth candidate being elected to a one-year director term.

Jeff L. White, CGCS, will serve on the board for one year as immediate past president. Kevin P. Breen, CGCS, retires from the board after service the last year as immediate past president.

The 2025 GCSAA Annual Meeting will take place 8-10 a.m. Thursday, Feb. 6, at the San Diego Convention Center.