



L-R: GOLF CLUB STAR RANCH OWNER TIM TIMMERMAN
GCSAA PRESIDENT RICKY HEINE

Growing Transition In Golf Requires Creativity, Communication

An exclusive interview featuring GCSAA President Ricky Heine

The challenges sometimes never seem to go away, and so it is with the game of golf early in a new century. One particular year it might be Mother Nature who has turned a nasty deed... another time a sagging economy. Still there's an incredible demand for that wonderful game of golf... *continued on page 22*

COVER AND COVER STORY PHOTOS BY

CARLTON WADE/COURTESY OF GCSAA

Coping with an industry, with so many interconnected stakeholders, and the growing transition from “build it and they will come” to where the focus now is on a radically changing customer base with many different demands is one of the many demands for Ricky Heine, CGCS, the 71st president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Heine takes reins of the association from Sean Hoolehan, and as president he also holds a board of trustee position for the Environmental Institute for Golf (the philanthropic organization of the GCSAA).

Heine, as president, heads an organization boasting more than 21,000 members in 72 countries, with the mission to serve its members, advance the profession and enhance the enjoyment, growth and vitality of the game of golf.

GCSAA headquarters are in Lawrence, Kan.

The EIG works to strengthen the compatibility of golf with the natural environment through research grants, support for education programs and outreach efforts.

in agronomy. A native of Austin, Texas, Heine is a member of the Central Texas GCSA and the Lone Star GCSA, and also a past president of both groups. Heine is also a member of the Texas Turfgrass Association and serves on Williamson County Professional Grounds Conference planning board.

Heine and his wife, Jana, have three children: Jared, Ryan and Jordan.

In this exclusive interview with *BoardRoom magazine*, Heine comments on the game in transition, a changing customer base and how golf organizations must look at the future.

BoardRoom magazine: How does the industry, with so many interconnected stakeholders, cope with the growing transition from “build it and they will come” to where the focus now is on a radically-changing customer base with many different demands?

Ricky Heine: The build and come days are probably over. Today, the golfer is in the driver’s seat and golf facilities must react appropriately. Facilities with an educated team of professionals that is creative, adaptive, and will-

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Heine, general manager and director of grounds at The Golf Club Star Ranch, Austin, Texas, since 2000, was first elected to the GCSAA board in 2001.

The Golf Club Star Ranch opened in May 2001 and Heine had previously served as superintendent for River Place Country Club, Austin and Elkins Lake Country Club in Huntsville, Texas.

A 25-year member of GCSAA, Heine graduated from Texas A&M, College Station, Texas with a bachelors degree

ing to learn new ways of doing business will still succeed. The courses that do not take this perspective probably will not. I’ve seen it over and over, if you say “I can’t” then you surely will not.

BR: The Golf Industry Show, in 2007, brought together many of the game’s largest organizations for combined conferences and exposition. Has the Golf Industry Show contributed to greater communication

among the various stakeholders, i.e. General managers, boards, superintendents, golf pros?

RH: Yes, I'm seeing it and the feedback supports that. It's only the beginning though. There is so much that can evolve from this team concept. The Golf Industry Show has brought key groups together under one roof. The addition of the owners, and the managers this past year has increased the value of this show tremendously.

BR: Do you see where this might enable the industry to "do things" better?

RH: I believe we are seeing what is learned and experienced at the show being applied at the facility level. The combination of the enhanced communication plus the education that's available at the Golf Industry Show is and will pay dividends. The "team concept" and "facility at the center" models both will flourish with the integration of these stakeholders. Each professional will be able to learn about their specific areas of expertise, but will also be able to better understand other aspects of the business. This all contributes to a better decision-making process at the facility level.

BR: Will these changes (a combined GIS and industry in transition) continue to bring the various areas of management groups at private golf clubs into closer contact, creating the need for greater communication and cooperation?

RH: That's the desired outcome. The days of living on an island should be over, and if you are on an island start looking around because the ship might be leaving without you. The team concept is vital to success. The management groups



THE DRIVING RANGE AT GOLF CLUB STAR RANCH

that have lived this philosophy in the past are many steps ahead of the others. Golfers want more, they want it their way, and it is up to us as professionals to deliver the best product possible and communicate the "whys" of our actions.

BR: How do you view the state of the golf industry today and how does this dovetail with the goals of the GCSAA?

RH: The golf industry is competitive; therefore education and knowledge help to fuel success. GCSAA has recognized this and created new standards for membership. The Professional Development Initiative (PDI) is a master planned program that requires prescribed levels of education, service and environmental stewardship. GCSAA members have embraced these standards and have shown the ability to deliver high value to facilities. It's about more than turf. It's about a successful facility.

BR: Expectations of what golfers want their courses to be are very demanding. Can superintendents cope with these demands today?

RH: Superintendents who listen, learn and communicate will succeed. There's no room for egos and defensiveness in this business. Those golf course superintendents that stay focused on the customer and communicating with them will be more effective.

BR: Are there restraints that prevent them from meeting golfers' expectations?

RH: There can be. I think one of the greatest misconceptions in the industry by golfers is that most golf course budgets and resources are relatively the

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same. The labor, tools, climate, and capital improvement plan all play huge factors in determining golf course conditions.

Yes, golf course superintendents are different too, and one may have strengths that the next one does not. Available resources play an integral part in course condition, and if the golfer's expectations match that level of resources, then usually everyone is happy. The problems arise when expectations exceed the budgeted dollars applied to reach that level of conditioning.

BR: Do superintendents have the autonomy they need and require to do the jobs for which they were hired?

RH: Again, each situation and golf facility is different. I know superintendents that have been micromanaged to near insanity and I also know many that have the freedom to do their jobs very effectively. The communication factor comes in here and plays a key role in developing great working relationships between superintendents and the management that they respond to. I believe that great communication coupled with respect and trust for each other will always prevail in providing quality conditions.

BR: What's your vision for the role of the superintendent of the future?

RH: The superintendent of the future's role will still be to provide consistently great conditions for the golfers of the world. What's going to continue to change will be the superintendent and GCSAA's focus on the environment and our natural resources. The Environmental

Institute for Golf (EIFG), GCSAA's philanthropic arm, is focused on all our resources, water most importantly, in a long-range plan to sustain golf's compatibility with our environment.

BR: What type of value does having a GCSAA member superintendent provide to a private club?

RH: It provides a huge library of education and fosters relationships with the 20,000 plus other GCSAA members that share best management practices with each other on a daily basis. The opportunity to bring

help and improvements to the facility is there, it is up to the individual member to use that wealth of information as they see fit. Value in education, products, government relations, environmental stewardship, and a GCSAA staff ready to serve are all there for our membership to take advantage of.

The things that are good for the facility should be good for the superintendent as well, and when one succeeds, the other should as well too. **BR**

