

## From the desk of GCM

The official blog of GCSAA's Golf Course Management magazine

### Arizona supers turn up the heat on water issues

Shawn Emerson figures that in his 30-plus years in the golf business, he's been personally responsible for the application of more than 18 billion gallons of irrigation water to the golf course surfaces under his charge.

To some, that would make him an extremely unlikely candidate to be a vocal advocate for water conservation and responsible water management. But as many pointed out during a water summit put on by the Cactus and Pine GCSA Tuesday at Desert Mountain in Scottsdale, Ariz. — where Emerson serves as director of agronomy — there is no better person to take up that mantle than Emerson and other golf course superintendents just like him.



"If people would take the time to look deeper, to peel back the onion about what we do on the golf course," Emerson said, "they'd discover that we're really good stewards of this resource. We know what we're doing."

Hunter Moore, the natural resource policy advisor for Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey, backed up that sentiment by telling the group, "Just being in this room and seeing the focus you place on this issue, the commitment you have to working on it, tells me something. Superintendents are a tremendous asset when it comes to this issue."

The summit, which attracted more than 100 attendees, was the brainchild of Emerson and Cactus and Pine GCSA President Rory Van Poucke, the GCSAA Class A superintendent at Apache Sun GC in San Tan Valley, Ariz., who has been a leader on water issues in both the state of Arizona and on the national scene. He says the vital role the game plays in Arizona's economy — a 2004 economic and environmental impact study identified golf as a \$3.4 billion industry that employs over 19,000 in the state — pushed him to pursue the summit as a way to increase the visibility of the issue and the role superintendents play in as problem solvers to the state's water challenges.



Hunter Moore

"It's important to just get the word out, to share what we've learned," Van Poucke says. "We know within the industry what superintendents are doing, but we need to make sure people outside the industry know about the good things golf does in its use of water, and how we're all responsible users of a resource that is vital to an industry that has a great economic impact on our state."

On a day when temperatures in the Valley of the Sun topped 112 degrees, focusing attention on water use and efficiency in golf seemed appropriate. The agenda featured presentations by government officials such as Moore, along with representatives from the Arizona Department of Water Resources. The manufacturing sector was there, with Ian Williams of Rain Bird and Warren Gorowitz from Ewing offering information about new technologies and philosophies guiding the irrigation sector.

Golf course architects such as Andy Staples and Gary Brawley were there. Water resource management agencies, such as the Central Arizona Project and the Salt River Project, were on the docket. The science behind water issues facing golf was represented by Paul Brown, Ph.D., from the University of Arizona, and the USGA Green Section's Brian Whitlark, among others.

But center stage was reserved for superintendents. Dave Nichols and Jonathan Williams shared the ways Troon Golf manages water at its properties. Rob Collins, the superintendent at Paradise Valley (Ariz.) CC, offered lessons learned from a turf and tree reduction program at his facility. Nathen Neumann, the GCSAA Class A superintendent at Amarillo (Texas) CC, talked about how he and his previous course, Wichita Falls (Texas) CC, persevered during times of severe drought. And Jeff Jensen, GCSAA's field staff representative in the Southwest Region, offered up ways the national association supports water conservation and management initiatives.

Emerson left attendees with a single parting thought at the end of the summit. "Just get started," he said. "Talk to your fellow superintendents, folks in industry, at the university level. There are a lot of resources available to you to help.

"But just get started. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. And that's just how we're going to help solve Arizona's water challenges. One gallon at a time."

Posted by [Scott Hollister](#) on June 21, 2016 | [Permalink](#)

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