

## Environmentalism incorporated: professionalization and post-politics in the time of responsible golf

A key theme of our analysis so far is that managing a golf course is a difficult job, and became ever more so as golf adopted its 'modern' sensibilities. At present, the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA) describes the duties of the golf superintendent as follows:

The Superintendent must know and understand the complexities and interrelationships of soils, irrigation, plant pathology, entomology, plant fertility and drainage hydrology. Superintendents must have a thorough understanding of the safe use of agricultural pharmaceuticals such as insecticides, herbicides and fungicides – plus a general understanding of various tools and equipment ranging from hand tools to complex, hydraulically operated machinery. The Superintendent must also have the knowledge required to deal with problems related to roadways, trees, flowers, buildings, tennis courts, skeet ranges, swimming pools, golf car fleets and other facilities related to golf. (CGSA, n.d.a)

All of this comes in addition to the skills required for personnel management, communications, and financial management. A sound understanding of the game of golf itself is said to be important too. Altogether: a complicated profession indeed.

It is noteworthy that the above passage falls under the heading 'Education Required' on the CGSA's website. Whereas in Chapter 5 we examined the evolution of course management systems in the golf profession (e.g. IPM and BMPs) in this chapter we turn our focus to a related matter: professionalization, and in particular education and impression management. As described below, our reason for selecting these two specific realms, and for connecting them to the broader idea of 'professionalization', stems from the fact that, over time, individuals within the golf industry themselves deemed improvements in education and external communication (i.e. impression management) as central to the goal of becoming recognized and respected professionals. To advocate for golf's 'responsible', 'light-green' disposition in the time of

‘responsible golf’ requires systems for both training golf superintendents (among others) and for outwardly professing that superintendents possess the above-described skills.

In other words, our main contention in this chapter is that educational and impression management mechanisms were formalized over time within organizations like the GCSAA with the goal of professionalization in mind. The upshot of this was that golf superintendents could deliver, and could be seen to deliver, a more responsible ‘product’ – meaning a safe but still picturesque and enticing golf course environment.

We pursue this argument by exploring the evolution of environment-related professionalization practices from the late 1960s onwards. The urge to professionalize, we suggest, surely stems in part from a sincere desire to ensure that members of the golf industry are doing their jobs in a proper and compliant way. In the final section of this chapter, however, we also provide a more critical assessment of the professionalization strategies described herein. We reflect especially on professionalization’s *ideological* function at this time: in positioning golf industry representatives as leaders in the environmental movement, professionalization tactics have served to elevate golf’s *version* of environmentalism to a ‘leading’ (i.e. hegemonic) position as well. We employ the aforementioned notion of ‘post-politics’ to help make sense of this development. Furthermore, we ‘trouble’ professionalization by noting the disjuncture that has arisen at times between the golf industry’s external and internal communication tactics. For example, golf’s outward messaging on the readiness of superintendents to tackle environmental issues has not always aligned with internal communication on the pressing need for environmental education. The urge to professionalize, therefore, may indeed be genuine, but professionalization is a matter of politics and power as well.

## Stepping stone or stumbling block? Education and the golf course superintendent

That professionalization in general and education in particular were matters of concern in the golf industry in the time of ‘pro-golf’ is best evidenced in a 1969 submission to *Golf Course Management* entitled ‘How professional are we ...?’ Therein, Colorado golf course superintendent Stanley E. Metsker outlined steps that his colleagues might take towards professionalization. Included in these

steps was “prolonged political agitation” (Metsker, 1969: 34) – a point we return to in discussing impression management below. What Metsker appeared most concerned with, however, was the dearth of opportunities for superintendent training at the time:

There is a wide knowledge of specialized technique that should be known by each golf superintendent. However, there is no way at the present time to tell who knows what. Because there is no formal recruiting program, no schools or curriculum required, and no registration, certification, or license, there is no way to judge this criterion in a man, except perhaps by past performance. (Metsker, 1969: 32)

Metsker was envisioning a scenario whereby the means of proffering idyllic golf course conditions could better be explained. Until it was known ‘who knows what’ in the golf industry, the answer to the question ‘How professional are we?’ was evidently ‘not very’.

Metsker’s was not the only contribution of this kind in the pages of *GCM*. Norman W. Kramer’s President’s Message from June 1970 in the same publication was given the title ‘Certification – stepping stone or stumbling block?’ (Kramer, 1970a). Kramer was himself a proponent of the GCSAA’s emerging certification programme, but the title of his essay, and specifically the notion that certification might cause superintendents to ‘stumble’, is suggestive of the uncertainty that surrounded this form of professionalization in the early 1970s. Indeed, Kramer wrote in the style of a Q&A, responding to some of the questions he was frequently asked on this topic. Among them: “Isn’t Certification really just a ‘club’ for college type superintendents?” (Kramer’s answer: “No”); and, “If I choose not to apply for Certification, will I be branded as a ‘second-class’ superintendent?” (“No” again) (Kramer, 1970a: 9). A follow-up article from a year later noted that recent writing on certification had inspired a heavy response from GCSAA members. In one pro-certification letter, Michigan superintendent Roger O’Connell (1971) likened certification to a ‘yardstick’ for measuring professional capability.

Despite its apparent contentiousness, the GCSAA indeed unveiled a certification programme in the early 1970s. But what did certification comprise? GCSAA Secretary-Treasurer Clifford A. Wagoner (1971), writing in the USGA’s *Green Section* publication, explained that the Association’s certification programme was in fact nearly three years in the making, and was urgently needed at a time when golf superintendents had to stay abreast of developments in various

realms: turfgrass science, new equipment, and the business side of golf course management especially. The process of obtaining certification would evidently test the breadth of knowledge of the GCSAA's membership:

The written examination is divided into six major categories. Each segment covers important points of knowledge and skills needed by top superintendents. Among them are turf culture procedures, plant protectant chemicals, business administration, management, rules and game of golf, and understanding of the GCSAA. (Wagoner, 1971: 6)

Moreover, certification was tied together with education in the sense that: (a) re-examination was required five years after becoming certified; and (b) superintendents needed to complete one GCSAA-approved workshop or correspondence course per year.

Wagoner (1974) returned to the same publication three years later to say that 157 golf superintendents had, by that time, earned the title 'certified golf course superintendent'. By 1976, the number had reached 245 (Olivar, 1976). Carol Olivar (1976), under the title of 'Advertising Manager', described in *Golf Course Management* the point system that would be used for future processes of re-certification. Two points were given, for example, for GCSAA seminar attendance, while a half point was awarded for attending the Association's annual conference (Olivar, 1976: 41). The latter event was of particular importance for many golf superintendents, whether certified or not – something evidenced by the fact that discussion of the conference occupied substantial space in the *Golf Course Management* publication each year. Palmer Maples Jr. was both a certified golf course superintendent and GCSAA President in 1976. His presidential message from January of that year depicted the Association's annual International Turfgrass Conference and Show as an event not to be missed:

The individual who participates in the conference has much to benefit from the program, industry exhibits, association meetings and the opportunity to confer with people from around the world who share a common interest. (Maples, 1976: 7)

Like Olivar, Maples noted too that the number of certified golf superintendents was growing rapidly. He highlighted that the GCSAA's general membership (different from certification) was also expanding, and by 1976 had surpassed 4,000 members. GCSAA members receiving their regular copy of *Golf Course*

*Management* likely considered this publication an educational device in itself. Features such as ‘Questions from the floor’, for example, offered expert guidance on key issues related to course management.

## Towards environmental education

As seen in the preceding chapter, the 1980s brought responsible golf to the forefront as a reformative, ‘alter-golf’ response in the golf industry. Responsible golf was and remains both a sensibility and an articulated set of best practices (e.g. IPM). What can now be added to our discussion is that new educational initiatives – including environmentally focused ones – eventually became an important part of this mix. That is to say, as new, purportedly environmentally friendly construction and management tactics were emerging, so too was training on ways of properly adopting these now-available tactics.

Indeed, in the first edition of *Golf Course Management* from the year 1980, certified golf course superintendent Gary Bethune implored his colleagues to take to the classroom:

Apathy and complacency are the greatest threats to our profession. One of the most important tasks we have as managers is maintaining a high degree of expertise and interest in each segment of our responsibilities. This ability and interest level is directly proportional to the amount of effort we devote to acquiring knowledge relating to our profession. So, if we want to grow professionally, we must be willing to learn. (Bethune, 1980: 46)

The backdrop for Bethune’s comments was the changing environmental policy landscape of the day (discussed further below). As such, Bethune did not fail to portray environmental matters as among those in which superintendents needed to be fluent. The theme of the GCSAA’s 1980 International Turfgrass Conference and Show – ‘Conservation . . . our key to the future’ – sat nicely alongside Bethune’s take on education (Anon., 1980). Incoming GCSAA President Melvin B. Lucas Jr. also impressed the virtues of education and certification as the decade began (Marquis, 1980). With respect to the latter, by 1980 there were 512 superintendents with the designation Certified Golf Course Superintendent (Lucas, 1980).

Seven years on, GCSAA President Donald E. Hearn (1987a) echoed the sentiment of his predecessor. In his April 1987 message to *GCM*’s readership, however, Hearn addressed ‘The need to listen and learn’ on the matter of *pesticides* specifically. Pesticide critics were often misinformed, Hearn stated. Still, the

subtitle of his text – “The time is at hand to recognize the dimensions of everyone’s responsibility for professional self-education” – suggested that superintendents still needed to develop a knowledge base of their own, and a robust one at that. “To say, ‘I didn’t know ...’ carries little weight when confronted by a regulatory agency or your employer” (Hearn, 1987a: 5).

What lurked around the corner from Hearn’s words of encouragement was a formal system for providing the type of environmental education he seemed to value so highly. To be sure, by the late 1980s the GCSAA had arranged for workshops on environmental themes for some years. But just as IPM and BMPs were adopted as *formalized* procedures for golf course management, as described in Chapter 5, the Environmental Management Program (EMP) of the early 1990s was devised as a formal mechanism for environmental training. GCSAA Education Manager Claudia G. Larkin described the certificate programme as follows:

When fully implemented, the [Environmental Management Program] will offer six distinct certificate programs. Each program will consist of a curriculum developed by superintendents, experts in particular fields of study and GCSAA curriculum specialists. This will enable participants to develop their expertise in chosen areas of specialization. Superintendents may choose to complete one or more of these specializations. (Larkin 1992: 58)

According to Larkin, one of the first areas of specialization made available was IPM.

At roughly the same time, Mark Dufresne (1993), President of the CGSA, noted that education programming would be ratcheted upwards in Canada as well in the face of growing environmental concerns. In general, golf superintendents further north seemed to have walked a similar trajectory to their American counterparts as the post-war years unfolded. For example, there was recognition in the early 1970s that a superintendent’s job description was growing increasingly complex. “[The superintendent] is no longer a simple lawn mower,” wrote Camil Labelle in his August, 1971 President’s Message, “but a technician” (Labelle, 1971a: 2). Sound knowledge of agronomy, entomology, chemistry, agriculture engineering, mechanics, horticulture, and other disciplines was therefore required. And although Labelle (1971b) used the same platform months later to implore *GreenMaster’s* readership to take advantage of the many agricultural-themed programmes at Canadian educational institutions, there was evidently still a need – as in the United States – to repudiate the idea that certification is meaningless (e.g. see Finn, 1971).

Nonetheless, through the 1970s and 1980s the CGSA offered educational opportunities through seminars, its own annual Turfgrass Conference and Show, and features in its flagship publication, *GreenMaster*. It was 1987 when the Association introduced their own accreditation programme – one recognizing experienced and qualified candidates as ‘master superintendents’ (see Gurney, 1987; and CGSA, n.d.b). With the arrival of the 1990s, CGSA President Mark Dufresne was not alone in stressing the need for enhanced training specifically on environmental management. In the same issue of *GreenMaster*, for example, CGSA Executive Director R. Vince Gillis emphasized the Association’s support of environmental education and reflected on the matter of public perception: the challenge facing superintendents, Gillis wrote, was to simultaneously *be* environmentally responsible and to *be seen* as environmentally responsible from an external perspective (Gillis, 1993). Professionalization among golf industry stakeholders was a core concern across North America.

## Golf is in good hands: managing impressions

With Gillis’ comments on golf’s public image in mind, it is useful to circle back yet again to the late 1960s and early 1970s – the time of ‘pro-golf’. While educational opportunities were evidently in short supply at that time (at least compared to later years), so too was there a sentiment that golf was not doing enough when it came to impression management. As noted in the previous section, Stanley Metsker (1969) saw ‘political agitation’ as central to professionalization. One year earlier, GCSAA President James W. Brandt (1968) also reflected on the matter of external communication – though his message centred on other ‘audiences’ of note. Brandt commented:

For too long we have neglected the responsibility of informing our ‘publics’ – the golfer and would-be golfer, the club official and owner, and all the other professionals involved with us in the operation of today’s golf courses – of the problems we face. (Brandt, 1968: 7)

Brandt acknowledged that some within the profession might see an enhanced communication strategy as an excuse for making superintendents into ‘glamour boys’. He insisted that this was not the case.

What we find in analysing trade publications like *Golf Course Management* and *GreenMaster* is that government officials and members of the public were indeed primary ‘target’ audiences for the golf industry over time – and grew

increasingly so as chemical-intensive golf gave way to its ‘responsible’ successor. This makes sense. On the one hand, and as we have seen, the tide of public sentiment was turning against many of the golf industry’s common practices in the wake of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. On the other hand, and as previously mentioned, the environmental policy landscape was changing too. In the United States, the EPA was formed in 1970 and was soon helping to enact regulations that took important ‘tools’ from the golf course manager’s toolkit. Most uses of DDT were banned in the early 1970s. The passage of the Pest Control Products Act (PCPA) in Canada in 1969 and the related PCP Regulations three years later were likewise a step towards greater stringency (see Millington and Wilson, in press). We shall look closer at environmental policy and its impacts on golf in the next chapter.

Returning to impression management, the point is not that golf associations never sought to sway the public or policy makers before the 1980s. In 1970, for example, GCSAA President Norman W. Kramer expressed consternation that “hippies and yuppies” – presumably a euphemism for environmentalists – might influence the young people they encounter. Superintendents, in turn, could not be “shrinking violets”:

you, as a professional man in your own right, must stand up and make your club officials know that YOU are the man that is responsible, YOU are the man that has professional training and integrity to meet the problems and answer the questions related to the maintenance of a golf course and grounds. (Kramer, 1970b: 9, emphasis in original)

The message was therefore on the importance of engaging the public. Indeed, even two years before this clarion call, the GCSAA had embarked on a PR programme around two high profile golf tournaments aimed, in part, at explaining that the golf superintendent was a “greatly experienced and capable man” (Anon., 1968: 24).

The point instead is that impression management grew to be much more formal – *professional* – and environmentally focused as time passed. By our reading, the key messages for publics and/or policy makers were as follows:

### *Key message 1: Golf is in good hands*

That golf superintendents were ‘greatly experienced and capable’ was in fact a common refrain as organizations like the GCSAA enhanced their PR

programmes. As the 1980s drew nearer, GCSAA President George W. Cleaver was still lamenting that superintendents stood as ‘gardeners’, ‘farmers’, or ‘greens-keepers’, rather than respected professionals, in the public imagination (Cleaver, 1978b: 9). By the middle of the next decade, though, the Association had devised ‘TV spots’ of thirty and sixty seconds to help redress this problem. For instance, the spot entitled ‘Without them’ contrasted the factual scenario of golfers on a well-manicured course with the fictional one of golfers looking for their balls in what was effectively a wilderness setting. The latter would be a reality if not for the golf superintendent. Meanwhile, the script for the spot ‘Unseen partner’ unfolded in part as follows:

When you take to the golf course ... there’s someone with you that you may never see ... but who’s with you on every shot. Someone with the education from leading universities ... in business management ... and in the science of turfgrass management. (Anon., 1986: 68, ellipses in original)

That ‘someone’, of course, was again the skilled but ‘hidden’ superintendent.

Roughly a decade later, the GCSAA pursued an even more noteworthy endeavour of this kind – and one connected more intimately to the Association’s professed environmental sensibilities. ‘Par for the course’ was the name given to the GCSAA’s official television programme, to be aired on the American sports channel ESPN on Sunday mornings. As said in *Golf Course Management*: “The program highlights golf from a course management point of view and provides an important platform for positive environmental messages that will benefit the entire golf industry” (Anon., 1995b: 142). Interestingly, it was also noted that the show was about “managing golfers’ expectations of fantastic conditions on less-than-fantastic budgets” (Anon., 1995b: 144) – an apparent allusion to Augusta National syndrome. GCSAA Director of Communications Pat Jones also signalled the ‘golf is in good hands’ trope by noting that superintendent professionalism was an underlying theme for the show.

Perhaps ‘Par for the course’ was seen by lawmakers in addition to the (green fee paying) public. Regardless, a more direct mechanism for reaching government officials was devised as the GCSAA was making its way onto TV: the Association’s Government Relations Program. This was an initiative with many stated aims. Communication was to flow in two directions, with the GCSAA’s government relations staff (inclusive of a Government Relations Manager) sharing information on superintendent practices ‘upwards’ to the EPA and updates on environmental policies ‘downwards’ to the Association’s membership (Anon., 1987b; Hearn, 1987b).

It seems clear too, however, that the GCSAA was especially keen to express their level of expertise to key government officials where possible. An article entitled ‘Government relations in practice’ in *Golf Course Management*, for example, reported on the testimony given by GCSAA Secretary-Treasurer William R. Roberts to the US Senate Subcommittee on Toxic Substances in March 1990. Roberts made clear that more than 1,100 superintendents had at that point successfully passed through the Association’s certification programme. “In order to achieve this level of professional recognition,” he added, “a superintendent must meet stringent educational requirements, complete a six-hour examination and subject his or her golf course to a formal review by a team of certified peers” (Anon., 1990a: 56). Roberts furthermore noted the steady promotion of IPM within the industry. Golf, as a result, was clearly in good hands.

### *Key message 2: Golf is a boon to the environment*

More than this, though, the messaging emanating from key golf spokespeople was that golf *itself* is a public good. If one of the (still lasting) concerns about golf is that it occupies an inordinate amount of space, and that there is an environmental ‘opportunity cost’ in that the same land might be a forest or wetland (concerns we explore further in examining the ‘dark-greening’ of golf in later chapters) – it makes sense that golf proponents would aim to make golf’s purported environmental benefits known as widely as possible.

Certainly, golf industry representatives had for some time suggested that golf could be a boon to the environment. Once again, though, in the 1980s and beyond this notion found its way into formal impression management campaigns. One of the best cases in point comes with the adoption of a new logo for the American golf industry in 1982. In a context marked by concern over waning water supplies – a January, 1982 article in *Golf Course Management* was titled ‘Water. Will it become as precious as oil?’ (Goldsmith, 1982) – the GCSAA teamed together with the PGA tour, the USGA, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), the American Society of Golf Course Architects, and other major golf associations to devise ‘A logo with a message’ (Anon., 1982b). In front of a black, circular backdrop was drawn a white water droplet, itself containing a putting green and flagstick in the foreground and a mountain range and sun in behind. Around the circumference of the circle were the words ‘Golf Courses’, ‘Recycle Water’, and ‘Part of the Solution’ – all connected together through arrows reminiscent of the now-famous recycling symbol. The

logo on the whole was described in *GCM* as a key step towards heightened public awareness of golf's role in water maintenance at a crucial time. Indeed, the subheading of the article introducing the logo to *GCM*'s readership – 'Golf is one of the good guys!' – left little room for an alternative interpretation (Anon., 1982b).

Furthermore, according to trade publications, golf's environmental benefits did not end with the use of recycled water. Readers of Canada's *GreenMaster* magazine were told in 1991 that "greenspace managers have a strong public benefits story to tell" (Anon., 1991a: 21). The Green Care Horticulture Association, in which the CGSA held membership, had recently delivered a brief at a Federal Pesticide Registration Review hearing. The value of greenspace – and by extension, golf courses – was said to include, among other things: its role in water and energy conservation; soil erosion control; heat dissipation and temperature moderation; and the conversion of carbon dioxide emissions. In the same vein, the Executive Summary of a *Golf Course Management* article from one year earlier went so far as to say that turfgrass, with benefits like oxygen production and temperature modification in tow, was 'An environmental hero' (Anon., 1990b). The important point again for these purposes was that this type of messaging was deemed ripe for external communication. For example, the GCSAA embarked on a print advertising campaign in the early 1990s emphasizing golf's 'hidden benefits'. One ad showed cartoonish animals huddled beside a putting green with the caption "Golfers aren't the only ones who love golf courses". Another showed a golf course with the simple heading "Air conditioner" (GCSAA staff, 1991).

With this last point in mind, the agency of the golf course manifests yet again. In this case, it is not so much that the immaculate golf course is 'hailing' the golfer (and, for that matter, the golf course owner, superintendent, TV executive, etc.) as with Augusta National syndrome (see Chapter 4), but that the golf course allegedly takes on a 'heroic' quality in its ability to yield environmental benefits. An important caveat here, however, is that human agency does not disappear. In the eyes of the golf industry, it is *properly cared for* courses that yield these benefits. The text accompanying the GCSAA's environmentally themed print advertisements from the early 1990s made this clear:

Each ad concludes with the question, 'Who's in charge of keeping these amazing ecosystems in harmony with nature?' The ad wraps up by underscoring the fact that today's golf course superintendent is more than the person who keeps golf green, but a business manager, scientist, troubleshooter and 'all environmentalist' rolled into one. (GCSAA Staff, 1991: 91)

Thus, this is still a Promethean inclination in the end. The golf course has agency – amazing ecosystem as it is – but the human superintendent remains ‘in charge’.

### *Key message 3: ... and a boon to the economy as well*

That golf is a boon to the environment – point 2 – was likewise professed in a *GCM* article entitled ‘GCSAA responds to report from New York’. The report in question was published by the State Attorney General’s office for New York State. Following a survey of fifty-two golf courses on Long Island, NY, it was found that golf courses used seven times more pesticides per acre than food crops. The GCSAA’s first claim in response was that the report was baseless. In communicating with state officials and media afterwards, the Association added that properly maintained golf courses benefit entire communities – for example by preventing erosion, cooling the atmosphere, and providing ‘green space’ in urban settings. Added GCSAA President Stephen G. Cadenelli: “Modern emphasis and education is on using pesticides ‘curatively,’ as a doctor would use a specific medicine to treat a specific problem” (Anon., 1991b: 98). Again, the medical metaphor arises in place of the combat metaphor of times’ past.

Importantly, though, according to *GCM*’s post hoc analysis, GCSAA representatives also stressed the economic merits of golf courses: “They provide thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in property taxes” (Anon., 1991b: 98). This, in fact, appears not to be an aberrant view. If golf’s environmental benefits did not go far enough in managing impressions on the sport, the game’s economic dividends could be highlighted as well.

Take another *GCM* entry, in this case from 1981 – just one year before the golf industry in the United States released its ‘water friendly’ logo. The topic matter in this case was how golf industry representatives might deal with pressure and even legislation requiring their water usage to be significantly curtailed during water crises. It was acknowledged that under such circumstances everyone would surely be required to do their part. But golf’s ‘bottom line’ was an important consideration too:

Figures should be collected concerning the cost of renovating the course after it has gone without water and the cost to the club facility in terms of employees, purchases, membership, reputation and tax and revenue loss. The complete picture should also include the impact on suppliers, hotel patrons, area businesses and the long-term effect on the area’s reputation for quality golf. (Goldsmith, 1981: 17)

Such figures were not to be a ‘hammer’ in negotiations with key officials, said then-GCSAA Director of Education (and past President) Palmer Maples Jr., but rather “a base to seek changes in any unreasonable situation” (Goldsmith, 1981: 17).

A similar view on golf’s benefits arose in the case golf industry representatives put forth to a ‘task force’ in one US county towards the end of the same decade. Among other benefits, the forty-eight golf clubs in the region were said to generate nearly US \$6 million in annual tax revenue. This was in addition to golf’s many environmental benefits – that golf courses can act as de facto air conditioners, for example (Anon., 1988a). Likewise, in 1994, *GreenMaster* provided its Canadian readership with a series of ‘tips’ – presented in the style of a Q&A – on explaining golf’s relationship with the environment to ‘non-expert’ members of the public and media. The response to the first question – “Why do golf courses use pesticides?” – included commentary on how pesticides can selectively limit damage to turf, trees, and other living things. It also included a common refrain:

Golf courses are tremendous economic assets as well as vital green spaces for communities. They employ thousands of people, enhance local economies through tax revenues and tourism and provide many ecological benefits. (Anon., 1994: 16)

Golf’s ‘agency’ thus extends to its economic benefits as well.

#### *Key message 4: Golf representatives are leaders in the environmental movement*

Taken together, these first three points lead towards a fourth and final one: that the golf industry was adopting a *proactive* position in the quest for sustainability. That is to say, in expertly providing services (message 1) that are environmentally (message 2) and economically (message 3) beneficial, golf was positioned as neither an enemy of, nor a bystander in, the environmental movement. Golf representatives were in fact environmental leaders.

Perhaps the best case in point in this regard involves the golf industry’s environmental leadership awards. In 1991, the GCSAA unveiled its President’s Award for Environmental Leadership, given first to four courses participating in a study of pesticides and local groundwater (Anon., 1991c). The Environmental Steward Awards – then funded by Ciba-Geigy and Rain Bird,

chemical and equipment companies, respectively – were unveiled the following year, and were deemed an opportunity for superintendents to gain public recognition for their devotion to environmental management. Indeed, upon announcement of the Environmental Steward Awards in *Golf Course Management*, success in PR was portrayed as both an outcome of *and* an avenue towards success in the awards competition. Judges would be looking for submissions that showed a course's environmental value – for example, through the use of computer-controlled irrigation, the presence of native or endangered vegetation, “or even efforts by the superintendent to communicate ecological information about the course to golfers or the public” (Anon., 1992: 94). The CGSA eventually devised their own industry-sponsored environmental awards as well (e.g. see Anon., 2000).

Furthermore, ‘leadership’ in the time of responsible golf also came to mean *policing* one's self with environmental sustainability in mind. The adoption of best practices such as IPM, as described earlier, can be interpreted as a form of self-policing, or self-regulation: in IPM theory, pesticides are to be used only if absolutely necessary. Indeed, in 1997, golf superintendent Mark Clark went so far as to say that golf's adoption of BMPs was evidence that golf superintendents had become the ‘true environmentalists’ (Clark, 1997: 105).

Yet as time passed, the task of making inroads with governments was further helped by the fact that the golf industry was also adopting strategies that privileged autonomy in assessing a course's environmental strengths and limitations. A primary example here involves the provision of self-auditing kits for superintendents – something made possible in the late 1980s through the GCSAA's partnership with Hall-Kimbrell Environmental Services. In short, with a self-auditing kit in hand, the superintendent completed a lengthy questionnaire on matters ranging from pesticide usage to water quality to hazardous waste and beyond. Hall-Kimbrell then assessed the questionnaire responses before providing a detailed compliance appraisal (Jones, 1989). The upshot in the first instance was regulatory compliance – the GCSAA's desire to achieve this should not be overlooked. For their part, the EPA was actively encouraging self-audits of this kind, while also urging that self-auditing should remain voluntary (Anon., 1988b). Furthermore, self-auditing was said to yield benefits in terms of public perception:

The superintendent who thoroughly examines his management practices and develops standards that go *beyond* the existing regulatory requirements can also be assured of maintaining a positive public perception about his course and his profession. (Anon., 1988c: 52, emphasis in original)

Golf was thus in a leadership position, not just in the expertise of golf superintendents or in the game's environmental and economic merits. Formal mechanisms were available for checking golf's environmental impacts and for championing superintendents as environmental leaders.

## Professionalization in the new millennium

Interestingly enough, in 1990 Stanley Metsker – presumably the same Stanley Metsker who had two decades earlier lamented the state of professionalization among golf superintendents – commented on professionalization in the golf industry yet again:

It is clear that GCSAA is well on the road to professionalization for golf course superintendents and recognition for its members. It is not a process that can happen overnight, but the prospects are bright for our profession moving up the ladder of success. (Metsker, 1990: 9)

This seems a fair assessment. In the time since Metsker penned his 1969 article, 'How professional are we ...?', golf superintendents, often working together with those in other facets of the industry, took major steps towards developing both robust educational curricula and formal mechanisms for liaising with governments and the public. There are clear links as well between our analysis of scientific and technological developments in the golf industry, as described in Chapter 5, and the emergence of environmental training and PR campaigning, as described above. For example, IPM, a key scientific development, was an area of specialization in the GCSAA's certificate-based Environmental Management Program from the early 1990s. With the advent of environmental awards, it also became commonplace for winning superintendents to state their allegiance to an IPM programme in their daily management activities (e.g. see Berndt, 1996). Professionalization and ecological modernization are closely linked in this case, as becoming a qualified superintendent requires faithful commitment to IPM's science and technology-reliant narrative for managing golf-related environmental problems.

These trends that began in the 1980s with the arrival of responsible golf only continued as the 1990s came to a close and the 2000s arrived. Consider that the Environmental Institute for Golf (EIFG) – the GCSAA's research-focused philanthropic arm, as discussed in Chapter 5 – notes that both education and advocacy form key components of its work. For example, as the GCSAA reoriented

its educational offerings around a set of core principles – agronomy, business management, communication, environmental management and leadership – the EIFG deployed resources to ensure that the environment was properly included on this list (GCSAA, n.d.e). When it comes to advocacy, the Institute continues to stress golf’s economic, environmental, and social/recreational benefits. It evidently does so through multiple platforms: “Publications including daily newspapers and magazines, television, radio, digital platforms and social media are now flooding the market place with the advances being made in the golf industry” (GCSAA, n.d.f.).

More broadly, the GCSAA has teamed together with an array of partners from both within the golf industry (e.g. the PGA Tour, the National Course Owners Association, the USGA, the Golf Channel, the manufacturer Ping®) and beyond (e.g. Chevron, Yamaha) to form the coalition ‘We Are Golf’. Their messaging is thorough, if predictable to those familiar with golf’s responsible turn: golf yields invaluable economic impacts; its charitable side is commendable; it has benefits in terms of environmental sustainability; and – perhaps most debatably of all, given golf’s associated costs – golf is ‘a game for all’ (We Are Golf, n.d.a). It is with these benefits in tow that We Are Golf claims to advocate on the golf industry’s behalf on a daily basis to Congressional leaders (We Are Golf, n.d.b). The coalition in these ways is not unlike Canada’s National Allied Golf Association (NAGA) – itself made up of constituent organizations such as Golf Canada, the Canadian Golf Superintendent Association, and the National Golf Course Owners Association Canada.

Furthermore, in the spirit of Hall-Kimbrell’s environmental auditing kit, there are now ample independent parties to whom golf industry members can turn for environmental assistance. The most notable of these in the North American context is Audubon International – an organization that certifies qualifying golf courses as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries (and one that is in fact distinct from the more famous National Audubon Society). Indeed, articles urging golf superintendents to obtain the ‘sanctuary’ designation date back more than two decades in golf industry trade publications. In 1993, the Sanctuary Program was deemed a valuable, albeit strictly voluntary, PR opportunity in the pages of *GreenMaster*. That certification was awarded by an independent body was deemed a source of credibility (Anon., 1993a). In this same year, Audubon was awarded the GCSAA President’s Award for Environmental Leadership (Anon., 1993b).

Achieving Audubon designation is certainly far from a PR endeavour alone. Audubon International provides educational materials in six areas – environmental planning; wildlife and habitat management; chemical-use reduction and

safety; water conservation; water quality management; and outreach and education – while also performing a site assessment that goes towards a customized environmental management plan. From there, integrating and documenting environmental practices is the step that leads towards certification (Audubon International, n.d.).

The Golf Environment Organization (GEO) – a group known especially for its work with recent Ryder Cup hosts – provides a similar certification programme, and has carried out work in more than forty countries to date. As with Audubon certification, obtaining the ‘ecolabel’ ‘GEO Certified golf club’ requires both engagement with educational materials and an on-site visit. GEO Certified, again like Audubon certification, is depicted as a way of achieving ‘real results’ – water efficiency, lowered electricity use, protection of wildlife, and so forth – and enhancing communication with the public at large (e.g. see Golf Environment Organization, n.d.a). GEO’s action plan more broadly is to devise “a new modern sustainability system” inclusive of a set of clearly defined Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Golf (Golf Environment Organization, n.d.b). Now 45 years from Stanley Metsker’s exhortations towards the development of formal educational systems and the pursuit of political agitation, one might indeed observe how professional golf superintendents had become.

## The (post-)politics of professionalization

All told, a rather straightforward narrative again seems to be in place. In Chapter 5 we saw how the golf industry moved towards heightened sophistication in their course management practices as time passed. From the above discussion, heightened *professionalism* seems to have been a high priority as well – something achievable specifically through enhanced educational opportunities and improved interfacing with governments and publics both. Indeed, from a place where relatively few educational opportunities existed in the late 1960s (at least according to the likes of Stanley Metsker), formal training programmes proliferated in subsequent decades. The GCSAA, for example, developed a thorough certification programme, offered educational services through its trade magazine and annual conference, and eventually devised a certification system around environmental issues specifically. In the time of responsible golf, organizations such as Audubon International have lent credibility to the golf industry’s professed environmental stewardship in that certification can be allocated by an independent party.

On the impression management front, the golf industry went from fretting over public misconceptions of golf and the work of golf superintendents to the development of polished materials for swaying public opinion. And whereas there was great concern in the late 1960s over the threat of government regulation, initiatives such as the GCSAA's Government Relations Program made for formal systems for liaising with policy makers. As GCSAA president Joseph Baidy said in 1994, "our ongoing contacts with government officials allow us to help shape realistic regulations, responsibly minimizing the burden of compliance where possible" (Baidy, 1994: 7). The GCSAA's interest in engaging policy makers is perhaps best shown by the Association's unveiling of Excellence in Government Relations Awards in the early 2000s, devised with the goal of honouring both advocacy and regulatory compliance (e.g. see McKeel, 2003).

The pursuit of education and enhanced external communication are, in the abstract, and to a great extent in practice, commendable. As said previously, we do not doubt the sincerity of golf industry representatives when it comes to their environmental stewardship. Yet, when we looked more closely at the range of industry-driven and environment-related developments that emerged over time (i.e. the developments in education and impression management outlined in this chapter) some key concerns and contradictions emerged. We outline some of these here.

In one sense, there is a concern that, in their haste to externally convey the golf industry's proactivity and responsibility on environmental matters, golf spokespeople seemed to overstate the extent to which golf is in fact 'in good hands' across the board. This point came from our observation that, on the one hand, superintendent training and formal systems like IPM were relatively slow to develop over time – and that, on the other hand, impression management campaigns that describe and highlight industry progress and leadership on environmental issues were strikingly candid. Put simply, it seemed at times that industry portrayals of its activities did not obviously match-up with what was happening in practice.

Indeed, dating back to the time of 'pro-golf', we find assertions that superintendents need not be 'shrinking violets' in the public domain due to their 'professional training' (Kramer, 1970b) and that superintendents are 'proven experts' not unlike medical professionals (Blake, 1971). These points were made, however, at roughly the same moment at which Stanley Metsker was observing that there was no way "to tell who knows what" among golf superintendents (Metsker, 1969: 32). A decade on in the mid-1980s, at a time when the GCSAA's TV spots implied that superintendents were necessarily schooled in turfgrass science, Association

President Donald E. Hearn was urging superintendents to recognize the need for professional self-education (Hearn, 1987a). To be sure, it is fair for contributors to *GCM* and similar publications to have different views on the state of professionalization in the industry. Even more recently, though, the Association has recognized problems in their history of external communication. Said GCSAA President Timothy O'Neill as the Association embarked on its multiyear Golf Course Environmental Profile project in the mid-2000s: "Existing environmental data is limited and not complete, uniform or centralized. *Information provided to the media, government and industry often is inaccurate or misleading.* This is not a healthy state of affairs" (O'Neill, 2006: 13, emphasis added).

A related point in this regard is that the professionalization mechanisms described in this chapter are in many cases voluntary, and that volunteerism is not an ironclad mechanism for ensuring uptake. For example, although Audubon certification has become part of golf's environmental leadership profile, in 2001 Ron Dodson, president and CEO of Audubon International, observed that only 247 of the roughly 16,000 courses in the United States had earned the designation 'Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary' (2,500 courses were Audubon members) (Dodson, 2001). Seven years later, *GCM* senior staff writer Terry Ostmeyer noted that participation in Audubon's programme had "all but stagnated" (Ostmeyer, 2008: 18). According to reports, the GCSAA's certification programme – central to PR over time – has likewise struggled with uptake in recent years (Jones, 2012; Kauffman, 1999).

In another sense, there is a deeper issue at play with the developments described in this chapter. Professionalization need be understood as part of a wider context in which golf representatives have obdurately stressed the need for pesticides – including those eventually found to be far more problematic than originally imagined, as per Chapter 5. It is a context too where the golf industry's sustained growth, and thus its growing occupation of land, is commonly taken for granted also. To put the golf industry in a leading position is, by extension, to put *these ideas* in a leading position as well.

To say this another way, the developments described above do *ideological work* in sustaining a particular interpretation of 'what's best' for golf and 'what's best' for the environment. Here we return to the aforementioned concept of 'post-politics', described first in Chapter 2. 'Post-politics' bespeaks a situation whereby dissenting opinions on the status quo are foreclosed under the weight of a seemingly irreproachable consensus. Subjective political views, often codified as irrational, are to a great extent replaced with technocratic knowledge; contentious politics are left behind, hence the concept's name. As Žižek explains, "Post-politics

thus emphasizes the need to leave old ideological divisions behind and confront new issues, armed with the necessary expert knowledge and free deliberation that takes people's concrete needs and demands into account" (Žižek, 1999: 198).

As noted in Chapter 2, geographer Harvey Neo (2010) has convincingly applied the post-politics concept to the study of golf and the environment. His focus laid specifically with the provision of new golf courses in Singapore. While there was room in planning discussions between stakeholders in Singapore – activists, industry, and government officials among them – for consideration of modifications that might be made to new courses in the interest of environmental sustainability, the underlying assumption and consensus from which these stakeholders were working was such that new courses would in fact be built in the end. Said otherwise, the alternative of *not* developing new courses – for example, because their environmental impacts would be too severe – was foreclosed. Indeed, Eric Swyngedouw argues that neoliberal capitalism, with its focus on sustained growth, effectively draws boundaries around the possibilities for consensus under conditions of post-politics. The 'environmental question', he further argues, is not simply representative but is *constitutive* of the process of post-politicization in contemporary times. It is around environmental matters, as much as any others, whereby antagonisms are displaced "on to the terrain of consensually manageable problems, expert knowledge and interest intermediation" (Swyngedouw, 2010: 225).

It is through the lens of post-politics that we can better understand the golf industry's professed environmental leadership. In February 1997, GCSAA President Bruce R. Williams titled his message to *Golf Course Management's* readership, 'We've come a long way'. Whereas once, he said, the issue was presented as golf versus the environment, the combination of science and superintendent dedication had led to a situation whereby golf and the environment had been rendered compatible. Williams continued:

Today, the collaboration of golf course architects, superintendents, developers, legislators and environmental groups has become an outstanding force for positive change. We have proven that we can accomplish a great deal by working together, rather than working against one another. We know that we can work together for the growth of golf, and we can anticipate continuing growth with continuing environmental sensitivity. (Williams, 1997: 7)

We shall explore the matter of legislation further in the following chapter. We have already seen, however, how the EPA took kindly to the golf industry's interest in self-auditing from the late 1980s onwards. As per Williams' comments,

the golf industry's different branches indeed rallied together frequently in the age of responsible golf – for instance, in devising a new logo pertaining to golf's water friendliness or in forming organizations like We Are Golf and NAGA. Environmental groups such as Audubon International have played a role in providing educational resources and certifying golf's environmental stewardship as well.

Consensus is not inherently problematic, and we would do well to stress yet again that organizations such as the GCSAA have urged environmental compliance as much as advocacy over time. The point is that golf's environmental leadership is tied to a specific vision of environmentalism – a 'light-green' one in which chemicals are 'medicine for the earth' and, as Williams says, continued growth should be anticipated. We would argue here that the emphasis on economics that is often inserted strategically into dialogue on environmental sustainability corroborates the 'consensus' put forward in the time of responsible golf. To depict golf as an environmental *and* economic boon fortifies ecological modernization as the 'consensus' way forward.

Thus, by situating themselves as the 'true environmentalists,' golf representatives also situate the responsible use of chemicals, natural resources, and land as the 'true' form of environmentalism. In the following chapter we consider in detail the extent to which governments have accepted this consensus view.

