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# Darren Davis future-focused as GCSAA president

## Securing the next generation of golf course superintendents is atop the 2018 GCSAA president's agenda.

March 2018 | Scott Hollister **GCM**

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Darren Davis' (center) senior leadership team in the maintenance department at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., includes assistant superintendents Matt Klein (left) and Andy Polzin. Photo by Montana Pritchard

Editor's note: Read more about Darren Davis and his career path in [Passion play: Darren J. Davis, CGCS](#).

When Darren J. Davis, CGCS, considers the top priorities and goals he will bring to his year as GCSAA president, he thinks back to last August and a visit to Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C., for the PGA Championship.

While there, a young assistant superintendent volunteering at the tournament sought him out, confidently introduced himself, and told Davis how much he had wanted to meet him. Davis was humbled and impressed by the moxie shown by the assistant, but what he remembers more is the dismaying message that assistant delivered next on that warm summer day.

"He told me about his career track, how he had been an assistant for several years, and then just came out and said he was leaving the business," Davis recalls. "I was really taken aback and asked him why, and he just said that there were no head superintendent job openings in his area. He had relocated hoping the job market would be better elsewhere, but didn't have any luck. He said he had to take care of his family, so he moved back home and was going into the landscaping business."

Hearing that story and how much it affected Davis, it's no surprise that connecting with the next generation of turfgrass managers – both students and young assistants alike – and making sure the association is equipping them for long careers in golf course management will get plenty of Davis' attention in the coming year.

"I want to make sure that we're educating current assistants about what a great industry, a great profession, this really is," Davis says. "If we're sharing that message, if their bosses are sharing that message and we can get them to realize that the industry is strong, it's healthy and we're going to need

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them when old guys like me start to retire, I think the future can be really, really bright."

Part of Davis' passion for making sure the next generation of superintendents finds the same things in the industry that he did when he was in their shoes comes from the significant role education and mentoring played in his own career. He knows that without the counsel, guidance and cajoling of legends such as Penn State's Joe Duich, Ph.D., The Sharon Golf Club's Frank Dobie and architect Rees Jones, among many others, that a nearly three-decade tenure at Olde Florida Golf Club and a long history of industry service would have never been possible for him.

That's the main reason Davis is taking the somewhat unusual step of serving as the chairman of GCSAA's Student Task Group in 2018. Normally, standing presidents take a pass on serving as committee and task group chairs because of the other demands they face during their year in the role. But Davis believes positioning the association to best help up-and-coming superintendents chart their career paths is important enough to break with that tradition, at least for one year.

"This industry needs smart, talented students the same way it needs smart, talented assistants if we want to be ready for the future," Davis says. "It really is my passion, and I want GCSAA to be a place that is helping bring new faces into the business, while at the same time serving all of those who have already found a career in golf course management."

"Every one of the nearly 18,000 members of GCSAA needs to know from me that this is their association. It doesn't matter what your budget is or how many holes you have, GCSAA is for you. I want to know what they need, what we can do as an association to help them do their jobs better, and at the end of the day, how we can serve them and the industry in the very best way we can."

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*Scott Hollister is GCM's editor-in-chief.*

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