They call him the Sand Man but you’ll never see him sleeping.

Not with seven Florida GCSA chapter meetings to attend every month and 500 golf courses to keep supplied with sand.

Joe Johnson, Emil Jahna’s ambassador to the golf course industry, has seen a lot of changes to the industry since he joined the Lake Wales firm in 1973.

“Golf course construction is a heck of a lot more sophisticated now than it used to be,” says Johnson, a retired submarine navigator. “Superintendents are much sharper — they’re more dedicated and better educated. They sure are a lot smarter.”

Bear’s Paw CC in Naples was Johnson’s first customer; Everglades GCSA, which serves the south Gulf Coast, was the first superintendents’ association he joined. Soon he picked up two more Jack Nicklaus courses in Palm Beach County — Loxahatchee and Bear Lakes — and it was about that time that the Palm Beach GCSA broke off from the South Florida GCSA. Johnson joined both.

Now he also belongs to the Treasure Coast, North Florida, Central Florida and Florida West Coast associations as well. And company pilot Gene Vaadi belongs to the Suncoast GCSA.

“There were only four chapters in the whole state when I joined Everglades,” he said.

With half the state’s golf courses and most of its builders buying at least some of their sand from Jahna, golf accounts for “about 20 percent” of the firm’s business, Johnson says. The rest is used for construction.
E.R. Jahna Industries was founded by Emil R. Jahna, Jr., in 1950. Emil, Sr., had been a sand miner in Lake Wales and his son wanted to branch out. Now the company owns five sand mines, two rock mines and a trucking subsidiary with a fleet of 60 trucks for hauling his product.

Jahna has two sand mines in Clermont, one in Polk City and two more—the famous Ortona mines—in LaBelle. The rock mines are in Crystal River and Brooksville.

But it is Ortona sand—a world-renowned quartz silica sand at the south end of Florida's Ridge—that is the company's big draw.

Jahna "makes" seven different kinds of sand at its various mines: three specifically for golf courses, DOT, well point, and two grades of dried sand for sandblasting. DOT, the medium-coarse sand specified by the Florida Department of Transportation for highway construction, accounts for about 60 percent of the company's production.

The three golf course sands, sometimes called tramp sand (although the medium grade is also popular for making greens mix), are all finer than DOT sand. Well point sand is slightly coarser than DOT.

One grade of sandblasting sand is finer than the finest tramp sand and the other is an interesting story.

It's a very coarse sand; the grains are about 1 to 2 millimeters in diameter, almost large enough to be considered very fine gravel. Florida sand producers never made very much of it because there wasn't too much demand... until the United States Golf Association's guidelines for construction of a golf green suddenly became popular with Florida architects and builders.

The coarse grade of sandblasting sand is about the same size as the USGA's infamous "choke" sand, the two-inch layer it specifies between the topsoil and the gravel and drainage tiles.

"Now we can't make enough of it," says Johnson, who was not convinced the choker layer was really necessary until very recently. "I think I've changed my mind on choker sand, but I don't think they need to hold to such strict specs. We sell coarse sand for septic tanks with some fines in it and it works great."

USGA specs do not permit any "fines."
Clermont East is one of five Jahna sand mines in Florida and one of two that can produce choker sand.

To those who have known him for a long time, the Sand Man's changed attitude toward the choker layer must be put on a scale with the worst-to-first finishes of the Minnesota Twins and Atlanta Braves... or a major religious conversion—say, atheism to Christianity.

The problem with choker sand, according to Johnson, is that it is very difficult to make. Out of a ton of high-grade Ortona sand (choker sand is also made at Jahna's Clermont East mine), no more than 15 percent will screen out to choker size.

"It takes about 1,000 tons of choker sand to make 18 greens and

Blake and Lanier examine some stockpiled sand.

Conveyor can be rotated around the washer to stockpile sand once it has been screened and washed.
Screws force the screened sand out of the washer and onto the conveyer.

we've never been able to get more than 700 tons at any one time," John-
son says. "Right now (late Novem-
ber) we have 125 tons on the ground."

The rate at which the company can make choker sand is set largely by the rate at which it can sell the other grades that are left after the coarse stuff has been screened out.

A rejuvenated state highway con-
struction program would do won-
ders for the availability of choker sand.

Ironically, while he'd certainly like to sell more sand, and the more of the common grades he can sell, the more choker sand will be available, Johnson says one of the most com-
mon mistakes young superinten-
dents make is to put too much sand in their bunkers.

"I always recommend that they don't put in more than 3½ inches and then wait and see how much it settles. They can always add more, but it's hard to take it out."