

COVER STORY



*The Sanctuary
at Wulfert Point*

The tee shot carries over native area on the seventh hole.



A sanctuary and a golf course wrapped in a wildlife preserve

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

A golf course sanctuary wrapped in a U.S. Wildlife Preserve might seem to some to be like the old saying, “a riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped

in a paradox!” To those of us who have witnessed the tremendous diversity of wildlife on our golf courses, the term, sanctuary, is perhaps indeed a most accurate description.

Last year when Dan Jones told me there was a new 18-hole private club on Sanibel that we might want to consider for the magazine, I was amazed. I knew South Seas Plantation resort had a nine-hole course on the tip of Captiva Island just north of Sanibel, but I wasn't aware that there were two other public access courses, Beach View and The Dunes, on Sanibel. And now a new private, 18-hole, championship-length course. It

was hard to imagine.

Many of you may know Sanibel Island as the sea-shell-collecting capitol of Florida. What you may not know is that they have some of the most rigid rules about any type of development in the state. There are no towering condominiums or gaudy signs of rampant commercialism like those

found in most of our coastal areas. No McDonald's or Burger King's. There are, however, over 40 award-winning restaurants from The Mucky Duck to Windows Over the Sea.

Jerry's, the main grocery store, is hard to spot hidden in a grove of trees. Everything is low key, low profile, slow paced and quality driven. It is one of the few places left where one can truly enjoy a Florida barrier island environment.

Wulfert Point is credited as Sanibel's first settlement. The Calusa Indians called it home for nearly one thousand years as recently as 800 AD. It wasn't until around 1887 that the first modern homesteader's began arriving raising citrus and vegetables. Disastrous hurricanes in 1910, 1921, and 1926 finally ended these efforts and the farms were replaced by Clarence Chadwick's lime and coconut groves. This small agricultural community had a school, a post-office store and about one hundred citizens for a brief history of little more than forty years.

Nearly 70 years later, the owners of the Wulfert Point area had to overcome some stiff opposition to exercise their private property rights to develop the area. After much negotiation, the permits were granted. In return the developers had to build a wastewater treatment plant to serve Captiva and Sanibel Islands; design the course to retain run-off from the development; and then deed a strip of land around the development to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which puts The Sanctuary technically within the boundaries of the John “Ding” Darling Wildlife Preserve.

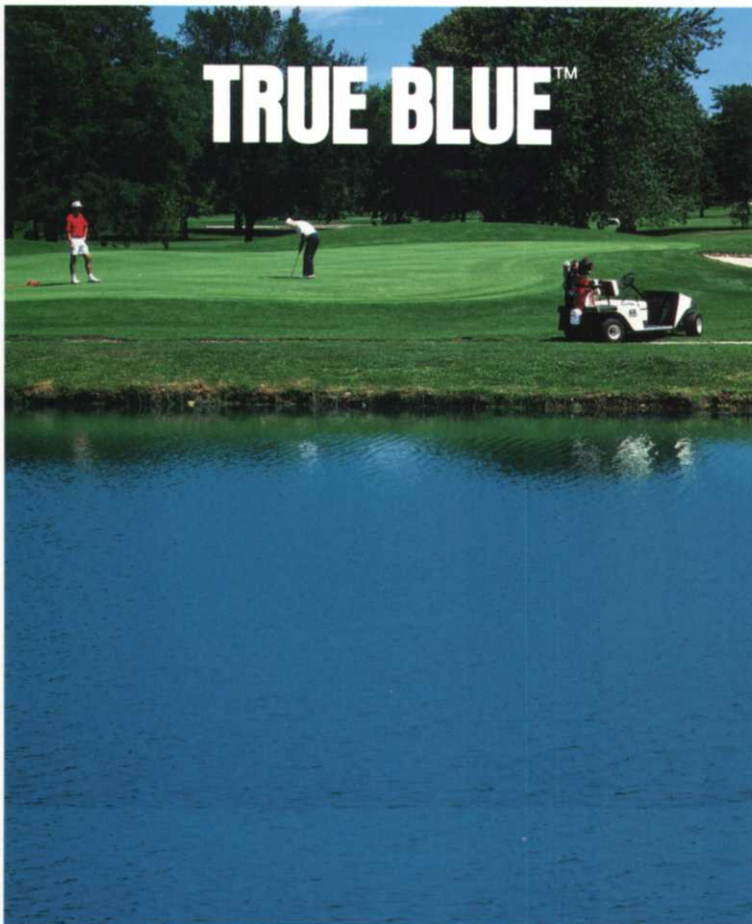
Getting the development approved and constructed was a challenge in itself. And now Tim



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Sever, the superintendent, and his staff have a unique opportunity to demonstrate that properly-executed turf management techniques can be quite harmonious with nature. It will be an exciting and interesting project to watch in the years to come.

During the construction process, generating good usable fill was difficult as most of the clearing work had to be done by dragline. Much of the needed fill had to be trucked in from the mainland which was an expensive proposition. Fortunately the character of the golf course did not require high mounds, but rather subtle mounding, which Arthur Hills masterfully blended to the low lying island features.

Consequently, the course does not look artificial or imposed on the landscape. It flows gracefully through the habitat framed and accented by the more than 10,000 trees that were moved and replanted along its route. Those trees were tagged by Sanibel's Vegetation Inspector, Steve Mullins. It is Steve's responsibility to see that any developed property follows the landscaping and native plant guidelines required by the City of Sanibel.

Of paramount importance during this phase was minimal impact on the existing wildlife. A state-licensed handler was hired to relocate any of the over 200 gopher tortoises on site that might wander into harm's way. They were placed into three specially protected areas to keep them safe. Over three miles of plastic barrier fencing was erected to separate wildlife areas from construction activities.

One of these areas was known as the Eagle buffer area and was the site of an active bald eagle nest. It was off limits to any development within 750 feet during nesting season October 1 to May 15. Natural screens of tall Australian pines were left intact to prevent even visual contact. No foot or motorized traffic could approach the nest at anytime. A 60-foot perch pole was erected near the nest for their future use while the eagles were gone during the summer. Unfortunately, the nest was destroyed by Hurricane Andrew and the eagles relocated to an adjacent area on Sanibel. They are still seen on the golf course and frequently use the perch pole.

I saw no eagles during my interview ride with Tim, but I did see an abundance of wading birds and two very large gators taking the morning sun. On this day in February, the course and the native vegetation were reacting to a rare frost earlier in the week. The sun ricocheted off the shiny sleek bark of the tropical gumbo limbo trees as their thinned out canopies provided little shade. The prolific sea grapes had slimmed down for winter as

well. But the turf was green and the pattern of carefully crafted stripes stood out like vivid light and dark shadows in the fairways.

The greens were tight and closely cropped and to the trained eye there was evidence of a recent light top dressing. The bunkers were all neatly raked in swirling patterns and tiny white shell fragments in the sand tied the brand new course instantly to the legacy of the island.

As we rode the course, Tim detailed some of the challenges facing his department:

"Our irrigation water, as you might expect, has a high salt content ranging from 1200 to 2900 parts per million. I always thought 2000 ppm was considered lethal for fine turf."

I asked why he wasn't using effluent from the waste water plant that had to be built. "We will eventually, and I can't wait till that happens, he said, "but right now, there isn't enough demand from Sanibel or Captiva to even warrant starting up the plant."

"Our soil also has a high pH, around 8.0, from the calcareous sand profile. We apply sulfur seasonally and we also buffer our irrigation water to prevent further aggravation of the problem. We go through a tank of buffering solution each month.

"We don't get that much annual rainfall, maybe averaging only about 30 inches per year. We can get the showers from the south and west, but most all the easterly afternoon thundershowers rain out or split before they reach us.

"It has something to do with the physical orientation of the island and the surrounding water. Even the south-

ern part of the island gets more rain than we do here on the northern end.

"When we do get rain we have to retain the runoff from the development and golf course on the course itself. It isn't that evident just looking at the course, but the margins of the course actually have a five and a half foot berm designed into the roughs.

"Retention lakes and spreader swales and drains all hold the water until it percolates or evaporates. If we get inundated and the lakes fill up, we can have some soft wet areas around the mouths of some of the drains for a day or two."

"Another challenge comes from residing and operating in a U. S. Fish & Wildlife Preserve." I work very closely with the Director of the Preserve, Lou Hinds. I have to submit a list of chemical products I would like to use to the Fish & Wildlife

'I have to submit a list of chemical products I would like to use to the Fish & Wildlife regional office in Atlanta. They study the list and delete any product they don't want us to use.'



At hole 16, gentle mounds and swales aid drainage and add interest.



The 10th green uses a bit of the native wilderness to guard itself.

regional office in Atlanta. They study the list and delete any product they don't want us to use. So far, we have not had any problems that we couldn't treat successfully with the available chemicals.

"We obviously hope that the biological controls being introduced will prove to be very effective. That would be a plus for everyone!"

As we continued our ride, I spied some folks working in the adjacent woods.

Tim explained, "We also use the services of an outside contractor for another unique requirement of the development permit. We have to go through annually and scout for and remove any exotic vegetation even if it was here before the development began."

I couldn't help but notice how immaculate the course was as we toured. It reflected the conscientious nature of Tim's management style, and the integrity of the ownership and the staff of The Sanctuary.

Superintendents are always interested

in the work routines and staffing levels of other operations. I'm no different.

At The Sanctuary, the crew works Monday through Friday. They can't get started until 7:30 a.m. because of a noise ordinance. Consequently, the first tee times aren't until 8 a.m. The crew works ten hours on Mondays and leaves early on Fridays. Half the crew works each weekend, alternating weekends. The crew is paid overtime for the weekend work.

"We pay a pretty good wage, Tim said, "and you have to remember most of these folks have to come a long way to get out here to the island. We provide uniforms, lunches, toll money, and a good insurance package. In my experience, this has to be one of the best groups of people I've ever had assembled on a crew."

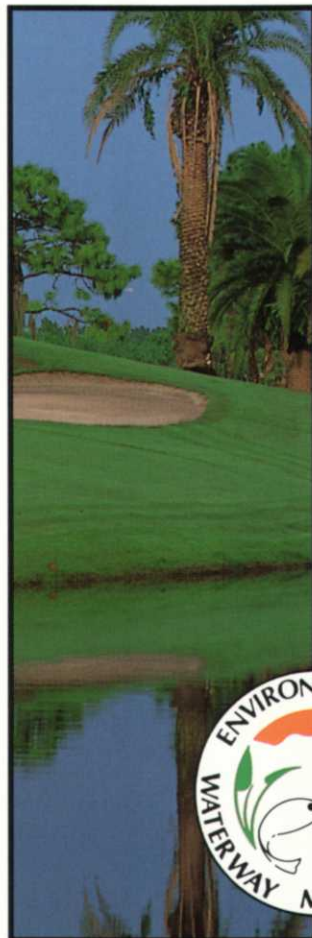
Tim was also quick to credit his assistant, Kyle Sweet, with helping to make the job run smoother and the management programs successful.

"Kyle is an outstanding person. He's ready if the right opportunity comes along." And in return, Kyle is impressed by Tim's consistency. He said, "Tim follows through on all the cultural programs. This is one of the few places I've seen where we have been able to become so successful in the needed cultural practices. Tim requires it. I wanted to experience a unique, high-quality operation and this is a great place to be."

This team work and commitment extends to the ownership as well. Tim said, "We have had very few complaints from the owners or members. Our membership is somewhat unique. At a lot of clubs the members winter down in Florida all season. Play is steady but it seems as though they come in for a month or so and then leave. The owners are extremely conscientious. They ask lots of questions if they see something they don't understand. They listen. If a problem exists, it's solved. I appreciate the fact that they are committed to doing things right!"

Doing things right! A common thread connecting Tim Sever, The Sanctuary, and Sanibel Island.

Editors Note: For further details on The Sanctuary's maintenance facility, check out Tim Sever's IPM article in the Heads Up section of this issue.



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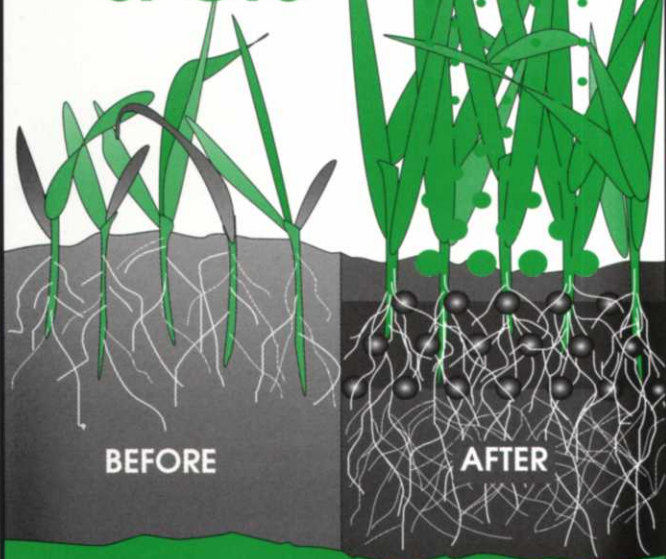
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Tim Sever

Golf Course Superintendent The Sanctuary GC

Originally from: Clearwater, Florida.

Family: Wife, Nedra. Children: Justin (3).

Education: Graduated high school in Dunedin, Florida. Has attended the GCSAA Conference & Show and FTGA Turfgrass conference annually since 1988.

Employment: Sanctuary G.C. since 1992; Sugarmill Woods, Southern Woods and World Woods, Director of Maintenance, 1988-1992; Bardmoor C.C./Bayou Club, Assist. Supt., 1983-88 (J.C. Penney Classic); Firestone C.C., Akron, Ohio; Countryside C.C., Foreman, 1977-1982.

Hobbies/Interests: Camping, fishing, golf, home projects, home life.

Professional affiliations: FGCSA, GCSAA, FTGA.

Memorable moments: Being involved in the planning and construction of 66 holes of golf (Southern Woods, 18 holes, and World Woods, 48 holes) while maintaining a 27-hole complex at Sugarmill Woods.

Advice: Learn as much as you can continually. This business is changing almost daily. Concentrate on interpersonal skills. You are only as good as your staff. Treat people the way you'd like to be treated. Explain what and why you do things. Knowledge makes a better employee. Hire a good assistant. It can make you a better superintendent.

Mentors: My dad, *Robert I. Sever Jr.*, Always preached that if a job was worth doing then do it right! *John Luper*. His management style in handling people with different personalities. He had confidence in me and let me experiment with various jobs and projects. Promoted me to my first Assistant Superintendent position at Bardmoor.



Native grass planting guards 5th hole.

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The Sanctuary Golf Club

Above are Superintendent Tim Sever (right) and Assistant Superintendent Kyle Sweet. Right is The Sanctuary golf and landscape staff.



Location: Sanibel Island, Florida.
Ownership: Sanctuary Golf Club, Inc.
Playing policy: Private — 350 equity memberships
Management: Project Manager, Paul Scoggins; Golf Professional, Art Smithwick; Club President, Jeffery J. Milton; Chairman of the Board, John Nauman; Food and Beverage Manager, David Williford.
Designed by: Arthur Hills
Opened: 1993, 18 holes.
Acreage: Total turf = 88 acres. Lakes = 10 acres.
Tees: 5 acres, Tifway 419. HOC = .438. Overseeded w/ Sabre Poa trivialis.
Greens: 3 acres, Tifdwarf. HOC = .157 (During season = .125). Average size = 6,000 square feet. Overseeded w/Cobra creeping bentgrass @ 4 lbs. per 1,000 square feet and Sabre Poa trivialis @ 6 lbs. per 1,000 square feet. Green speed 8 - 10.
Fairways: 40 acres of Tifway 419, HOC = .625.
Roughs: 41 acres of Tifway 419, HOC = 1.00 summer, .500 November - April.
Irrigation: Source: Deep wells. Salt concentration 1200-2900 ppm. Controls: Network 8000 computer system.

Staff: Assistant Superintendent, Kyle Sweet (2 years).
Equipment Technicians: Head Technician, Tony Hansard (2 1/2 years); Assistant Technician, Rex Schad. Pest Control Technician, Brian Johnson. Irrigation Technician, Scot Marion (2 1/2 years). Administrative Assistant, Joni Stokes (2 1/2 years). Foreman, Tom Wesendorf. Landscape Supervisor, Frank Delatorre.

Total Staff: 24, including superintendent and landscape crew.

Wildlife Inventory: Mammals – river otter, raccoon, wildcat, skunk, opossum, armadillo, Florida panther (probable, but unproven). Reptiles – alligator, American salt water crocodile, diamondback rattlesnake, coral snake, gopher tortoise, eastern indigo snake. Birds - bald eagle, pileated woodpecker, red-shouldered hawk, kestrel, moor hen, blue and green-winged teal, mottled ducks, pied-billed grebe, great horned owl, wood ibis, white ibis, brown pelican, sandpipers, plovers, knots, gulls, terns. Migratory birds include all the ducks, loons, white pelicans, sharp shinned hawk, red tail hawk, and peregrine falcon. And all of the warblers and other song birds.



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