

## President's Award

# Bill McKee —

## *Pennsylvania's loss is Florida's gain*

BY ROBERT G. KLITZ, CGCS

In July 1994, the South Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association chose Bill McKee of the Oak Tree Country Club to be the recipient of the President's Award. Bill has been working in South Florida for over 20 years and also had about eight years of experience in Pennsylvania. The purpose of this article is to give the other members of the organization some insight into a key figure in the South Florida community of superintendents.

As incoming President of the SFGCSA, I was given the honor of presenting this

award to Bill at the Crowfoot Open in August. Prior to the formal presentation, it was my pleasure to inform Bill that he had been selected by his peers for this prestigious and highly coveted award. When I told him that he had been chosen unanimously by the SFGCSA board, his emotional reply was, "Is everyone else dead?" After that response, I realized that I was not only going to have some good material for the Crowfoot "roast" presentation, but I might even be able to use some of the more tasteful material in a Florida Green article.

The illustrious Bill McKee was born and raised in Butler, Pennsylvania. Bill

started working at the Butler Country Club when he was 15 during summers while attending high school in nearby Saxonburg. After graduating from high school, Bill continued to work at Butler C.C. during breaks from college. Bill received a four-year degree in Pre-Law History from Grove City College in western Pennsylvania. While working on the golf course during a break in his final year of school, Bill realized that playing golf is listed in a golf course superintendent's job description but not in a lawyer's job description. Now I know Bill didn't just fall off the turnip truck, but did it take

## *Ray Hansen honored by peers with DSA*

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when he said it!).

Ray's Penn State ties are very important to him, and he has given back to the college by serving as President of the Penn State Alumni Association for the past two years. He credits Joe Duich and his informal classes as having the most influence on his career.

Ray's nearly 40-year career in the golf business has been very diverse. He started as a caddie at Ridgewood Country Club during high school in Fairlawn, New Jersey, also spending summers maintaining a pitch-and-putt course. This sowed the seeds, but a two-year stint in the Army, followed by two years pursuing a physical education degree at Panzer College, preceded his formal turfgrass education at Penn State.

His first job out of college was selling golf course supplies for a company called Person's Mill. He then accepted the job as superintendent at Essex Country Club in West Orange, New Jersey, where he had spent his summer internship while attending Penn State. Here he had the

unique opportunity of managing 18 holes of public and 18 holes of private golf course, at the same 36-hole facility. Four years later he became the general manager, responsible for the entire project. Ray considers this his most satisfying position.

Still, four years later, another challenge presented itself, and Ray left to build and manage the two sister resort communities of Lake Naomi and Timber Trails in the Pocono Mountains, including the construction of an 18 hole golf course. Though he enjoyed the challenges provided there, acting more as a city manager than a golf course manager, Ray was ready to move on when he finished putting his kids through college (Ray has a daughter, Cheryl, in addition to son Kurt). He arrived in Florida in January of 1986, surprising friend and PSU classmate, Tom Burrows. Four days later he secured the superintendent's position at Ocean Reef Club on Key Largo. He stayed there for four years then moved up to Delaire CC in Delray Beach staying there for four years until his resignation this past November.

Reflecting on his many years in the golf business, Ray feels the best thing about being a superintendent is the satisfaction of providing a quality golf course for peoples' enjoyment, and the worst thing is trying to do the necessary renovation work in the summer with members around.

Having experienced both warm and cool-season golf courses, Ray sees no particular advantage of one over the other—the differences more or less offset one another.

His advice to anyone contemplating a golf course management career: Serve an internship under a qualified superintendent and work your way up slowly. Not surprisingly, he considers the plethora of turf graduates competing for too few jobs as the biggest problem our industry currently faces. When asked how he'd like to be remembered, Ray answered, "As a superintendent that gave something back to the profession."

There can be no more tangible proof of that than the 1994 Florida GCSA Distinguished Service Award!

four years for him to figure this out? College in the 1960s. Those were the days!

After graduating from college, Bill decided to celebrate by torturing himself on a 650-mile bicycle trip from Pennsylvania to Boston in 10 days. Bill decided he had enough of the winters in Pennsylvania and he was lured to South Florida by the promise of year-round green grass, mole crickets and bikinis. He is still having problems with all three.

Bill still stays active by playing tennis during his time away from the golf course. One of his favorite playing partners is Allen MacCurrach III of MacCurrach Golf Construction. Allen did some renovation work at Deer Creek and at Oak Tree during the summer of 1993 and Bill would challenge Allen several evenings a week. (I believe the cigars must have finally caught up with Allen and given Bill the edge.)

Bill started to work in Florida at the Golf Club of Plantation in 1973 as a laborer. He worked his way up to superintendent and left to accept the superintendent position at Oak Tree Golf Club in 1988. Bill is still the Golf Course Superintendent at this private club and is responsible for the 18-hole golf course, practice facility, and clubhouse grounds.

Bill was President of the SFGCSA for two years in the late 1980s and served on SFGCSA board for five years. He is a member of the GCSAA, FTGA, and has served on the Broward County School System AgriBusiness Advisory Board for two years. Bill has been a major part of the SFGCSA/Adam Walsh



Bill McKee (left), recipient of one of the 1994 FGCSA President's Awards was roasted handily by his good friend and presenter, Bob Klitz.

Golf Tournament Committee for the past seven years. This is a fund raising tournament for the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center that has raised over \$50,000 over the past ten years to help find and aid missing children and their families. This



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tournament took on even more significance for the superintendents involved in South Florida with the recent child abductions and murders that have made headlines nationwide.

During Bill's twenty years in South Florida he has been assisted by almost all area superintendents by trading equipment, ideas, and suggestions and borrowing equipment or supplies during a breakdown or shortage of materials. Early in Bill's career he attended a turfgrass course at Broward Community College with Dr. Max Brown as the instructor. Dr. Brown was of great assistance when Bill was learning to handle the difficulties of growing quality turfgrass in South Florida.

Phil Amman was another pioneer of the turfgrass industry in South Florida who had a significant impact on Bill's career. Phil built the Golf Club at Plantation, started the SFGCSA, and offered a great deal of encouragement to young Mr. McKee as he started out in this business.

Elroy Timmer, part owner of AmerAquatic, Inc., also was a significant contributor to Bill's early success in this area. Elroy was the individual who contacted Bill when Orthene first became labeled for mole cricket control in Florida. One of Bill's most memorable moments was experiencing the thrill of driving over hundreds of mole cricket bodies doing the "Orthene Shuffle" the morning after that initial treatment.

**1994 FGCSA  
Presidents Awards**

- Bill McKee**
- Paul Nevers
- Lou Oxnevad
- Joe Snook
- Royce Stewart
- Lonnie Stubbs

Some of the most dramatic changes in the industry that Bill has witnessed include the introduction of the Verti-Drain aerifier which brought him several years of successful aerifying programs at Oak Tree. Also, the changes from manual labor to complex equipment, walk mowers to triplexes, and back again to manual labor, has been an interesting display of how some of the older techniques are still the best.

As Bill reflected on some of his past experiences and thought about the future of our industry during our interview, he mentioned several key points that might be beneficial for those starting in our industry to ponder as they're mowing that first green in the morning. First, be patient. Spend your time on a crew gain-

ing the knowledge, making mistakes and suggesting improvements. Spend the early years developing and maintaining friendships and relationships that will be a benefit to you throughout your career. Second, take time to enjoy the environment and wildlife that is around you. We are all very fortunate to work in such beautiful surroundings and we should take every opportunity to appreciate the special environment we are maintaining. Third, don't get wrapped up in your own problems on your golf course! Stay in contact with other superintendents! Join your local superintendent's chapter! Go to meetings! Give yourself the opportunity to discuss your problems so your associates can help you find a solution. Bill's last words of wisdom are to develop some outside interest away from the golf industry. We all need a break to gather our thoughts and recharge our batteries. Too much of the best job will still cause you to lose some of your effectiveness.

Although Bill's family is still up in Pennsylvania, he has started a new family of friends in South Florida.

The close circle of people Bill has assisted over the years throughout the area will attest to his great attitude, willingness to help with area events, and his frequent phone calls and visits to check on fellow superintendents. We are fortunate to have Bill in South Florida, and we are proud of his accomplishments and commitments to the industry in South Florida.

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