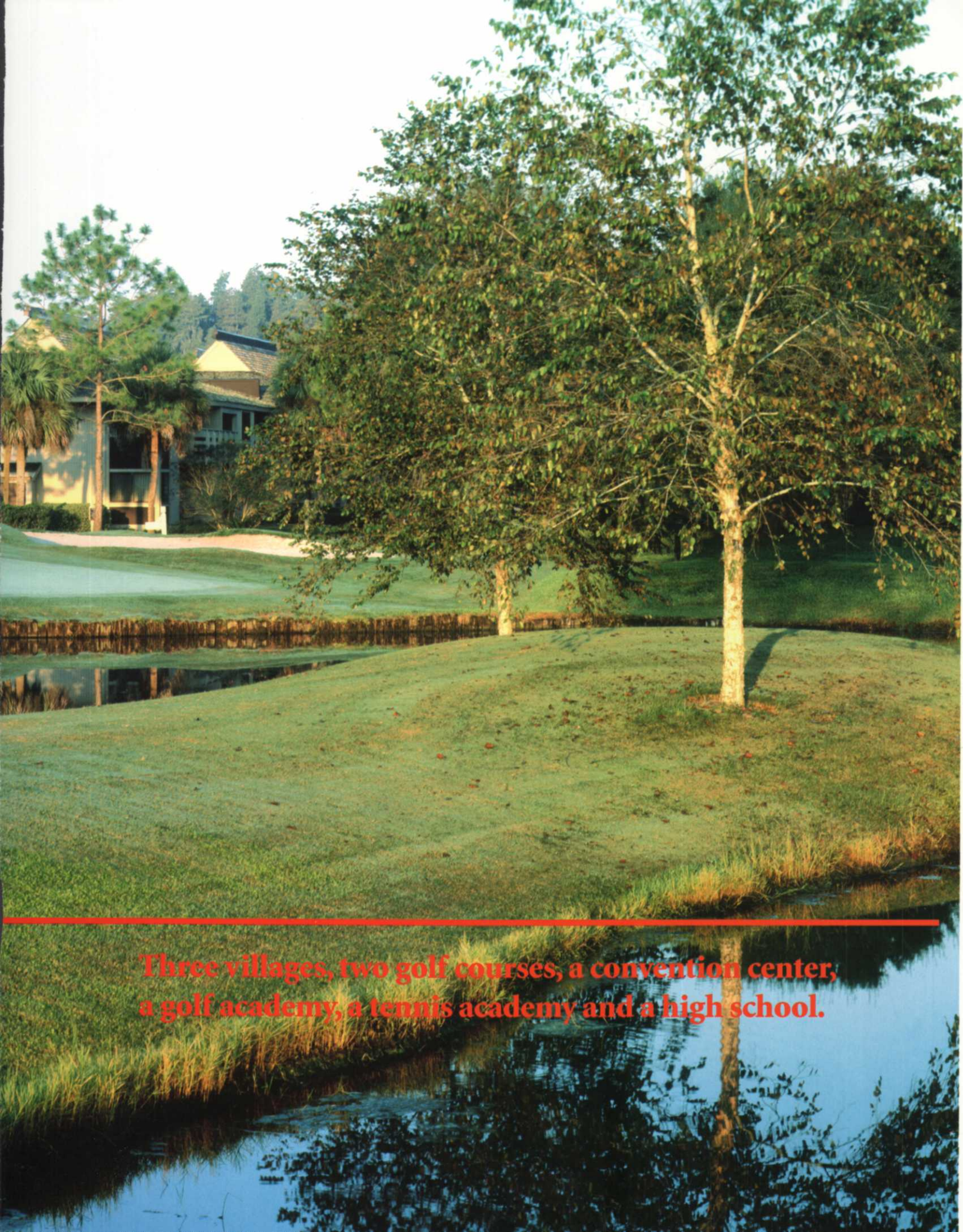


A photograph of a golf course clubhouse and a pond with a wooden bridge. The clubhouse is a two-story building with a dark roof and light-colored walls, surrounded by palm trees. In the foreground, a green golf course is visible, with a small pond and a wooden bridge crossing it. The bridge has a circular opening in the center. The word "Saddlebrook" is written in large, red, serif font across the bottom of the image.

# Saddlebrook

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**Three villages, two golf courses, a convention center,  
a golf academy, a tennis academy and a high school.**





*Palmer Course. Aquatic plants border the water hazard on the 9th hole.*

# Saddlebrook Golf & Tennis Resort

## *It's Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

Our Mr. Rogers' neighborhood is a 490-acre golf and tennis resort just northeast of Tampa. It consists of three residential villages, two golf courses, a convention center, a golf academy, a tennis academy, and a high school!

If that isn't enough of a challenge, Chuck Rogers, CGCS, is currently serving as president of The Florida Turfgrass Association. He is also the immediate past president of the Ridge Chapter of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association and he serves on the Southwest Florida Water Management District's Green Industry's Advisory Committee.

Chuck's title, Director of Grounds, is an indication of a direction he sees in the future for more superintendents. "I'm doing a lot more develop-

ment work now than ever before. If you are at a resort or real estate development-type course, you really need to get to know the contractors, environmentalists, regulators, and water agency people in your area. You need to establish a good working rapport with them to help them do their jobs correctly and to help your own project function smoothly. Don't let anyone tell you it isn't a political world out there! I'm dealing with all of these folks on a pretty regular basis. Growing grass has become just one of many functions required of a modern superintendent."

With all the large-scale and long-range planning involved at the resort, Chuck relies on his department managers to carry out the vital daily routine to make the resort successful and keep it looking beautiful. "Behind the scenes we have Sue Morrison, our office manager, who keeps me or-

PHOTOGRAPHY  
BY  
DAN ZELAZEK



*Saddlebrook Course. Pampas grass and pilings accent the first tee.*

## *Built in a cypress bayhead*

**‘We are the  
world  
headquarters  
for the  
Arnold  
Palmer Golf  
Academy ...’**

ganized and keeps the necessary paperwork flowing. Dick Gamelin, shop manager, oversees five mechanics to keep our fleet of vehicles and equipment in operation. Out where the green grass grows and the azaleas bloom, we have Golf Course Manager Al Schram and Landscape Manager Cecil Douberly. These folks do a great job.”

“Saddlebrook is a very unique resort. It was built in a cypress bayhead long before wetland regulations were in existence. But our owner, Tom Dempsey, and our management are committed to being an environmentally-friendly operation. We take daily piezometer measurements of the sub-surface water and also record pond

levels and outflow. We are on a total integrated pest management program which is quite challenging because of the severe year-round mole cricket pressure. There is a shopping center just down the road which is lighted all night. This attracts the mole crickets to the area and they find open pasture land next door. From there it is just a short flight to our bermudagrass turf. Like I said, it is a challenge!”

“The resort is also unique in that we are host to two world class sports academies. We are the world headquarters for the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy and home of the Hopman Tennis Academy.

“Because of the fairly large number of students who attend these academies on a year-round basis when not in tournaments, we have built a fully accredited high school for about 70 students. When not training they attend classes, and when



## Both courses take advantage of the wetland topography and offer spectacular target golf layouts

they are on the road they submit and receive lessons via a computer network. We expect the enrollment could grow to about 150 in the future."

As mentioned earlier, the resort consists of three villages. The Fairway Village is a section of about seventy private homes. The Lakeside Village is a section of privately owned condominiums which are sometimes placed in the rental pool by the owners when they are out of state.

The Walking Village is also a section of condominiums clustered about the Convention Center. It functions like a hotel, and as the name implies all the resorts amenities are within walking distance for the guest. The landscaping for all of these areas is performed under the management of Chuck and Cecil.

Chuck and Al Schram team up for the management of the Saddlebrook and Palmer Golf Courses and the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy teaching facility. The Saddlebrook Course was designed



*Saddlebrook Course. The 18th green sports a fountain and a unique application of railroad ties.*

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and built by Dean Refram in 1976. Harvey Jones added an additional nine holes, and in 1985, the Palmer Design Group added another nine holes to complete the Palmer Course and made minor modifications to the other 27 holes.

Both courses take advantage of the wetland topography and offer spectacular target golf layouts. The original Tifgreen 328 greens are on a program of rebuilding and replacement with Tifdwarf. That program may be accelerated by the request for lower cutting heights. This year on the Saddlebrook Course the greens will be overseeded with a blend of *Poa trivialis* and fescue. The Palmer course greens will remain in perennial ryegrass this winter. The Tifway 419 tees, fairways, and greens slopes will also be overseeded with perennial ryegrass. The roughs will not be seeded.

"The mowing program for our greens consists of using walking mowers as much as possible in what I call the "seed-ing season", Chuck explained. "On weekends and on shotgun tournament days, we have to park the walking mowers and use triplex mowers because of the time element. Once we get through transition, we generally use triplex mowers all summer."

When asked how the overseeded fairways were maintained at a resort course, Chuck replied, "We normally use a Jacobsen HF-15 and it works pretty well for us. Sometimes we have to mow and then drag clippings. However, because of our soil profile, we sometimes have to revert to using smaller National mowers. We have two Nationals and we're trying to get two more this year. When we get really wet, it is almost impossible to put anything out there on the turf. Fortunately, we only have about forty acres of fairway to maintain."

"Without a doubt, one of our most difficult challenges is managing and grooming turf on these heavy clay soils. We have developed a pretty intense growth regulator program to help ease the mowing pressure, especially during wet periods. We have been using Cutless for several years now, and we are also testing and using Primo to find what works best for our situation."



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## Chuck Rogers, CGCS

**Education** - Kennesaw College; Certified Golf Course Superintendent since 1986.

**Professional Affiliations** - President of The Florida Turfgrass Association; Past President of the Ridge GCSA; member of West Coast GCSA; member of the GCSAA.

**Previous Employment** - Georgia: Cherokee Town and Country Club; Oklahoma: Ponca City C.C.; Florida: John's Island C.C.(the Adam Yurigan years); Sun Air G.C.; Grenelefe; Saddlebrook Golf & Tennis Club.

**Family** - Wife, Sharon; Daughter, Deena(14 years); Son, Chris(12 yrs).

**Hobbies and Interests** - Golf when possible. Going to the beach. Not much free time lately!



Palmer Course. A creek meanders along the 7th hole.

***'Show me  
what you  
want, and  
stand back!'***

Improvements and projects are an integral part of any operation and Saddlebrook is no exception.

"We are in a long-range plan to rebuild and replant the greens with Tifdwarf. In addition to that, we are rebuilding many of the wooden headwalls at some of the greens, and we are going be putting in concrete cart paths as well. In fact, it was one of these projects that gave me one of my most satisfying moments in the

business."

"We were having a problem with cart damage to the landscape and traffic congestion around the

cart staging area which could impact several guest areas including the pool. The owners had a plan to widen and reroute some of the pathways, but they balked when they ran into a couple of large oaks that interfered with the plan. They said, 'You can't move those trees!'. I said, 'Show me what you want, and stand back!'

Two days later we had a crane in there. We root pruned the trees and moved them out of the way."

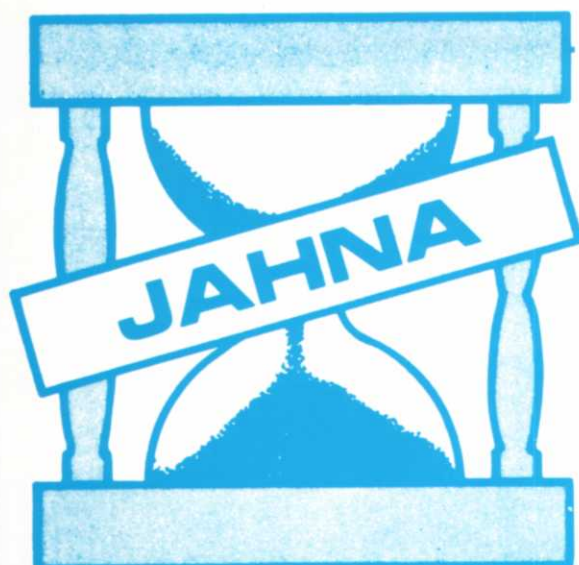
"They still haven't gotten over that one! The really neat thing about it was that it opened up their eyes to the potential for other improvements that they had dismissed. They didn't realize what could be accomplished and how flexible we could be. Because of today's regulations, we must maximize the use of our land. I am pleased that we were able to react and deliver in a way that has made the impossible seem possible for future planning."

"Besides the satisfaction on the job, I really enjoy my involvement with the FTGA and the Ridge Chapter. In the FTGA, we address large issues that have statewide impact for the industry.





*Saddlebrook Course. Cypress trees flank the 8th green.*



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But, I really get a lot of satisfaction meeting with a small group of my peers on a monthly basis and focusing on common everyday problems and helping each other out. That is the heart and soul of our business as far as I am concerned."

How does one become a Director of Grounds, able to pop mighty oak trees in and out of the ground at will? Well, you could have had a father who built and managed officer's clubs while in the military. After he retired, maybe he might have helped to develop the Cherokee Town and Country Club in Atlanta. And just maybe, he might have gotten you a summer job on the golf course while you were on break from Kennesaw College. That is exactly what happened to Chuck!

"Steve Wilcoxon was the superintendent at Cherokee and a good friend of my dad's. I worked for Steve for a couple of summers, and during my third year break, he moved back to Oklahoma to take the superintendent position at the Ponca City Country Club. I was twenty or twenty-one and looking for a career so, I joined Steve in Ponca City and spent two years learning the basics of turfgrass. He could be a real son of a gun, but he was a master at getting things done. He was a model of good work ethics and drive, and he taught me how to prioritize my workload."

"I returned to Florida and took a job at John's Island during the Adam Yurigan years. He was a most inquisitive man, and he taught me that there may be more than one solution or answer to a problem. He was a former golf professional, and I learned how a superintendent needs to be able to communicate with the owners and members. I definitely learned a lot about public relations from Adam."

"I then did a short stint at Sun Air G.C. in Haines City before moving on to work with Paul Hickman at Grenelefe. Paul was the Director of Grounds, and I became his Golf Course Manager. Under Paul's direction I fine-tuned my Florida turfgrass knowledge and took it to another level. He guided me through the steps necessary to manage a multi-course resort operation. I cut my teeth on planning and organizing while working with Paul."

"Then there are fellows like Dave

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## 'Get your hands dirty'



Superintendent Al Schram oversees a bunker excavation project.

*Understand  
that this  
job is not  
just  
growing  
grass!*

Barnes and Mike Ayers who have been a wealth of information on technical matters and business management. They grew up in the G.C. Horn days of expanding turf-grass education. It is guys like these and my peers in the superintendent associations that keep me on the cutting edge of what's happening in today's turf industry. All of these people have had a very positive influence on me, and I am grateful for their help along the way."

And for those out there who would aspire to become a superintendent, Chuck had these words of welcome and warning. "Be ready to put in a lot of hours! Understand that this job is not just growing grass! If you think this job will give you easy access to play golf, think again. I get that from guys all the

time. Sometimes, playing golf is the last thing you'll have time to do. Learn how to be a good sprayman. Get your hands dirty. I have to laugh at some of the kids who come out of school and tell me they're going to put in a year with me and then move on to a superintendent's job somewhere.

They need more hands-on experience and a good taste of the real world before becoming a head superintendent."

The phone rang, and Chuck apologized for having to cut our interview short, but he was needed at another meeting involving future plans for Saddlebrook. Plans that would mean making more changes to Mr. Rogers' neighborhood.





*The Saddlebrook Resort is the world headquarters for the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy.*

## Saddlebrook Golf & Tennis Resort

**Location** - Wesley Chapel, Florida

**Owner** - Tom Dempsey

**Playing Policies** - Private. Resort guests. Some public play in off season.

**Management** - General manager, Dick Boehning. Golf Professional, Neil Postlethwait.

**Designed by** - Saddlebrook course by Dean Refram in 1976, Palmer course by Harvey Jones(9 holes) and Palmer Design group(final 9 holes plus modifications to entire complex completed in 1985).

**Construction** - Dean Refram

**Number of holes** - 36 plus World Headquarters for the Arnold Palmer Golf Academy.

**Tees** - 6 acres in Tifway 419. Height of cut-1/2 inch. Overseeded with perennial rye.

**Greens** - 4 acres. Average size 6,000 sq. ft.. Thirty-three in Tifgreen 328. Three in Tifdwarf. Height of cut-5/32 inch or lower. Overseeding-Saddlebrook Course greens with *Poa trivialis* and *fescue* blend for 1993-94 season. Palmer Course greens with perennial rye.

**Fairways** - 40 acres in Tifway 419. Height of cut-1/2 inch. Overseeded with perennial rye.

**Roughs** - 100 acres in Tifway 419. Overseeding-none.

**Irrigation System** - Water sources include surface ponds and lakes, wells, and effluent.

**Four pumping stations** - Toro VT II and Varitime 4000 control systems.

**Staff** - Director of Grounds, Chuck Rogers,CGCS; Golf Course Manager, Al Schram; Landscape Manager, Cecil Douberly; Shop Manager, Dick Gamelin; Office Manager, Sue Morrison.

**Crew** - Golf Course Operations-Currently, 15 full-time and 4 part-time. Landscape Operations, 32.