

Tom Benefield:

1995 Distinguished Service Award Winner

BY SCOTT BELL

At the 1995 Crowfoot Banquet at the Bay Hill Club, Tom Benefield, CGCS was recognized for his outstanding service to the FGCSA as an outspoken champion of new ideas, a leader in representing the golf industry in water use issues and his association work as officer, voting delegate and magazine editor.

Tom was born in Orlando and raised in Alachua. Out of his love for the outdoors and working the land, he began to farm in the mid-70's. He and his partners were among the first to use plastic for growing peppers. Their technique greatly increased yields on their west coast farms and they were doing quite well until a hard freeze ruined them after a few years.

Out of a job and stung by farming, Tom was bitten by the golf bug. In 1981 he graduated from Lake City Community College and he took a job as assistant superintendent at River Oaks in Houston, Texas. From there Tom returned to Florida to take an assistant job at Sun Air CC near Haines City. That job was all encompassing since he was responsible for horses and orange groves as well as the golf course.

Tom's first superintendent job was at Beacon Woods GC in Pasco County. He enjoyed much success there, but his greatest reward was winning over a green committee chairman who did not want to hire him at first. After five years the chairman had grown to respect and admire Tom enough that he did not want him to leave when Tom had an opportu-

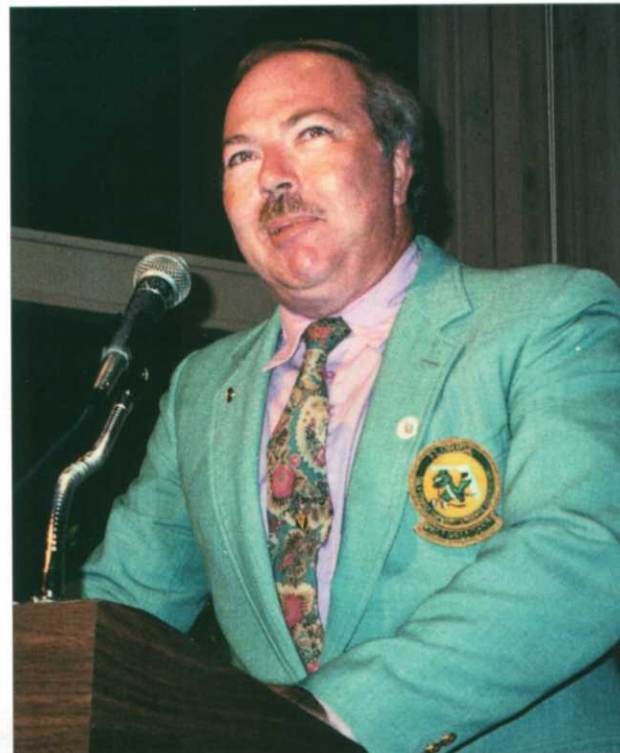
nity to move to JDM in Palm Beach Gardens.

While at Beacon Woods, Tom became interested in chapter service. He was the editor of the West Coast Chapter newsletter, The West Coast Wind and the External Vice President. His good friend, Cecil Johnston, urged him to serve as an FGCSA Officer. Tom's service culminated with his presidency in 1991-92. Tom also represented the FGCSA as the GCSAA Voting Delegate from 1989 to 1993.

While at the JDM Country Club, Benefield became very active with the South Florida Water Management District. He served on water management committees and attended countless district meetings and hearings. He awak-

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ened many FGCSA board members to the water politics that went on and how poorly represented the golf industry was in these issues and debates. Many, including Benefield, feel that his best contributions were made at this time. He



Tom Benefield receives the FGCSA's 1995 Distinguished Service Award at Bay Hill. Photo by Joel Jackson.

made many contacts and he got superintendents involved in with their local Water Districts.

During Tom's tenure on the FGCSA board, The Florida Green magazine was undergoing changes. After Dan and Irene Jones "retired" from producing the magazine for thirteen years. The FGCSA retained Janlark Communications to manage and produce the publication. Janlark did a great job helping The Florida Green earn Best Overall awards from the GCSAA in 1989, 1990 and 1991. The FGCSA desired to take over management of the magazine once again and the task of reorganizing that effort fell to Tom as the new editor. He did an excellent job with the help of Paul Crawford as Business Manager and Marie Roberts as Advertising Manager. Tom was instrumental in getting more superintendents to write articles and make it truly the voice of Florida superintendents once again. Janlark Communications still assists the FGCSA in producing an award-winning magazine.

Meanwhile, the JDM club and development went into bankruptcy, leaving Tom a lot of property to maintain and not much to do it with. He stuck it out, hoping things would get better. After a couple of tough years, a new owner and the CCA management group arrived and JDM did begin to improve.

Then, disaster struck.

A misapplication of a herbicide instead of a fungicide on thirteen of the East Course greens ruined them. An unfortunate costly mistake by a seasoned veteran spray tech. As superintendent, Tom accepted full responsibility for the mishap and offered his resignation

CCA reluctantly accepted his resignation and Tom has nothing but praise for the generosity and professionalism that CCA demonstrated with regard to his leaving.

Presently, Tom is the Southeast Regional Manager for Eco-Soil Labs. Eco-Soil provides equipment wash down sites and microbial injections through irrigation systems. Tom is very active in the Florida Turfgrass Association and is currently serving as Chairman of the External Affairs Committee.

Through this position he can still work with and help superintendents. Tom is also serving on the Green Advisory Committee of the South Florida Water Management District. He has been instru-



Still active in water use issues, Tom presents FTGA's case for funding a Water Watchdog service at the FGCSA Summer '96 board meeting in Orlando. Photo by Joel Jackson.

mental in the FTGA's hiring of a water consulting firm in response to growing pressure for new regulations on water use and allocation.

He encourages all superintendents to get involved in the industry by serving on committees and boards or writing for publications. Tom is now the editor of the Florida Turf Digest for the FTGA.

Tom misses the early mornings on the golf course and the fellowship with other superintendents, but he enjoys his new career. His innate sense for forward thinking sees pesticide usage declining in the future and the use of biologicals more widely accepted.

Tom lives in Hobe Sound, Florida with his wife Debbie and his fifteen year old son, Joshua. Joshua went to work for

another legend, Dick Grey at the new Florida Club this summer. While his son may not follow his father, he is learning about hard work while growing in a golf course.

Tom feels that Hobe Sound is "just right" and hates to see anymore growth. Like most superintendents, he is concerned about the environmental impacts for future Florida growth and he advocates slow managed growth.

As a fellow FGCSA Board member during Tom Benefield's presidency, I saw first hand his dedication to the association, the Florida Green and the industry. This dedication continues today. I feel that the FTGA is very fortunate to have Tom on their team. His involvement helps us all!

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