

COVER STORY

All In



The infamous 12th hole at Colony West. 452 yards. Par 4. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

The Family

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

When incoming FGCSA President Dale Kuehner, CGCS listed "From birth to 1988 - Seven Springs Country Club" as his first job experience on my interview questionnaire, I knew this wasn't going to be a typical story!

Forty-five years ago Dale's grandfather, Edward Rack, built Seven Springs Country Club in Elizabeth, Pa., a town 40 miles southwest of Pittsburgh. Rack was an excellent amateur golfer in his day and he competed against another western Pennsylvanian of that time, a fellow named Arnold Palmer. Palmer followed in Rack's footsteps some years later and built a few courses of his own.

From the very beginning, the entire Rack family was involved in staffing and operating the club.

"As a kid, I did everything from kitchen cleanup to being a range rat picking up and cleaning balls to manning the 'weenie hut' on the par 3 course on rainy days to sell a random greens fee or hot dog to a hard core golfer!" Dale says.

Dale loved the outdoors and he came into his element as a teenager when he was old enough to operate the equipment. When pressed for any unusual anecdotes of growing up on a golf course,

Dale did share one story from his teens.

"One Saturday, my cousin and I were mowing greens in the dark getting ready for a shotgun tournament. He developed a hydraulic leak and striped an entire green. As soon as we discovered it, we raced back to the shop and got some detergent and we saturated the stripes and then we began scrubbing and watering it in. By dawn's early light there was a huge foam ball oozing down the approach and fairway. It was quite a sight!"

Dale's aptitude and interest in grooming the Seven Springs course began whet-

ting his appetite for more information.

Merle Smith, a Toro sales rep for the E. H. Griffith Company in Pittsburgh was the source of most of the advice and information the family used to manage the turf. In those days, the E. H. Griffith distributorship sold everything from equipment to fertilizers and chemicals. Dale would ask all the "what," "how," and "why" questions he could think of.

When Smith wasn't around, Dale would seek answers from a neighboring superintendent, Tom Fox. It was these two gentlemen who steered Dale to Penn

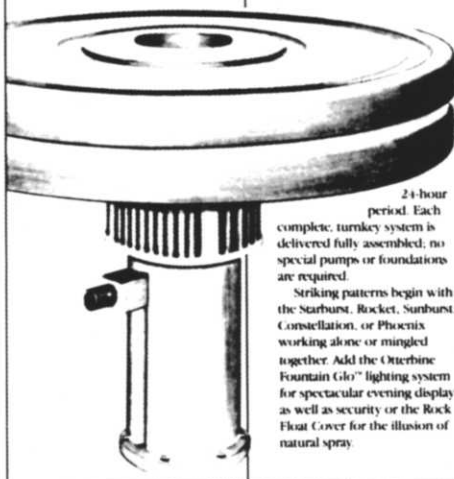
One Saturday, my cousin and I were mowing greens in the dark... He developed a hydraulic leak and striped an entire green ... we saturated the stripes (with detergent) and began scrubbing and watering it in. By dawn's early light there was a huge foam ball oozing down the approach and fairway!

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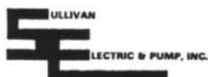
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Hole #6. 403 yards of water down the right side. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

State to formalize all this education and to broaden his knowledge of the business.

Dale began as an agronomy major, but changes in the family fortunes would alter these plans temporarily.

As the family grew and the course was successful, Rack saw the need to expand. He was an equity member at the Colony West Country Club in Tamarac and it was going through some difficult times.

After concluding successful negotiations with the membership, Rack purchased the course and his family split up the duties of running both courses. Dale's mother, brother, sister and uncle operate Seven Springs in Pennsylvania, and Dale (superintendent) along with another uncle (GM) and cousin (head pro) operate Colony West.

Colony West has its own place in history.

The Championship Course, designed by Bruce Devlin and Robert Von Hagge,

was built in the late 1960s and was slated to be the site of the first Jackie Gleason Classic. It was also going to be the first 18-hole televised golf tournament and miles of cable were being laid during construction.

But financial problems arose and partners Ken Behring (current owner of the Seattle Seahawks) and Gleason parted ways, selling the property to Leadership Housing, which built condominiums around the course. Later, dissatisfied members from Inverrary bought the golf course and started a private club which led eventually to the Rack purchase.

The Championship Course has been rated by *Golf Digest* as the 16th toughest layout in the state.

Eager to complete his formal education, Dale returned to Penn State during the first winters in Florida and completed the Turf Management Short Course, graduating in 1988.

It was a real concern for Dale to prove

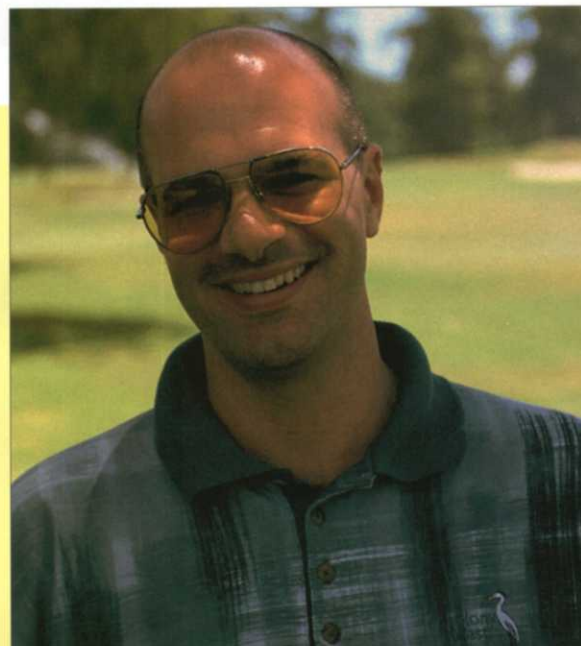
himself worthy and qualified to fill the role as superintendent. He did not want the job strictly because of family ties.

During that time he received a lot of advice and guidance concerning the turf business from Dr. Joe Duich. Dale credits Dr. Duich for giving him a perspective that allowed him to channel his youthful enthusiasm and independence into a more patient approach to the family business.

After graduation and marriage to wife Cindy, Dale found his grandfather more willing to accept his ideas and suggestions and that gave Dale a feeling of finally coming into his own.

Dr. Duich also told Dale to look up a couple of Penn State alumni in South Florida—Tom Burrows and Ray Hansen. They encouraged Dale to join an FGCSA chapter and get involved. Their friendship and mentoring opened up a world of problem-solving information, practical help, loaner equipment and — best of all

Dale Kuehner, CGCS



Dale Kuehner, CGCS. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Originally from: Elizabeth, Pennsylvania. Southwest of Pittsburgh.

Family: Wife - Cindy

Education: Penn State Turfgrass Management School. Graduated 1988.

Employment History: From birth to 1988 worked at family owned and operated Seven Springs Golf Club. 1988 to present, Superintendent Colony West C. C.

How did you get into the business? My family has owned and operated two golf courses. Seven Springs G. C. in Pennsylvania and the Colony West C. C. in Florida.

People in or out of the industry who have influenced your life and career: Mr. Merle Smith, Toro sales rep for E. H. Griffith, Co. in Pittsburgh. Superintendent Tom Fox who convinced me to attend Penn State. Dr. Joe Duich, the Penn State legend who gave me lots of sound advice about the business. Former superintendents, Penn State grads and FGCSA presidents Tom Burrows and Ray Hansen who were models of professionalism and association involvement.

Goals/Accomplishments: Returning to Penn State as a speaker for the Annual Turf Conference. Topic: Quality Public Golf North and South. Serving the FGCSA in the various chairs of the board.

Advice to prospective and new superintendents: It's easy to get burned out in this business. It's even worse to rust out. I'm always trying to learn something. A different slant on problems and possible solutions. I stay in touch with my peers. I find them the greatest source of help from information to sharing equipment. Continuing education helps me get out of any ruts I've fallen into. Monthly meetings, conference seminars and peer networking educate, energize and motivate me to renew and improve my performance.

Professional affiliations: South Florida GCSA all offices, FGCSA all offices, GCSAA Voting Delegate for Florida.

Hobbies: Computers & Computer gaming. Winter Sports, especially skiing.

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— a circle of professional friends who had the same or similar lifestyles.

"In this business you can burn out real fast or rust out if you stagnate and withdraw into your own narrow little world," Dale says. "I can't count the number of times a phone call or visit with fellow superintendents casually or at meetings has given me the answer or at least a better understanding of a current problem."

This fall finds Dale passing on the gavel as president of the South Florida Chapter and accepting the same as president of the State Association.

"I will always stay involved on committees even when my official board duties are over," says Dale.

"The excitement and motivation I get when I attend conferences and meetings helps recharge my enthusiasm for the

business. Superintending can be tough, especially in periods of bad weather. These breaks at conferences, surrounded by professionals, sharing shop talk, learning new ideas, seeing new products and techniques is like a tonic when you're weary."

After one conference his old adviser, Dr. Duich, asked Dale if he would return to Penn State and speak at their Annual Turf Conference. Dale was mortified at the thought of public speaking, but he owed so much to Dr. Joe he couldn't refuse.

"How long?" Dale asked. "Oh, just an hour to an hour and a half," said Dr. Joe. Dale's topic was "Quality Public Golf North and South." He survived. He had come full circle at Penn State.

He has other fond memories of Pennsylvania as he recalls Pittsburgh's pro athletes from the Steelers, Pirates and

Penguins escaping the glare of publicity to hang out and play golf at Seven Springs. When in South Florida, they also stop by Colony West.

Dale showed me the "wall of fame" in the clubhouse lined with autographed pictures of Pittsburgh stars and said, "When Mean Joe Greene was coaching for the Dolphins, he was a regular here. Many of the former players still come by whenever they are in the area."

Dale's conference topic wasn't a desperate choice to fill the time, either. Public golf is the mission of Colony West.

"We strive to provide a course that will appeal to golfers looking for high-end quality that is still affordable. The price of belonging to some private clubs is becoming prohibitive. We think we can fill a niche that is growing in golf," he says.



View from behind the 413 yard 2nd hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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The Colony West golf course maintenance staff. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Colony West Country Club

Location: 6800 NW 88th Ave, Tamarac, Florida.

Ownership: Edward Rack Corporation.

Playing policy: Public.

Management Team: Clubhouse Manager, Norm Rack; Head Golf Professional, Craig Rack

Designed by: Bruce Devlin & Robert Von Hagge . 36 holes. Championship Course — Par 72 at 7,271 yards. Glades Course — par 65 at 4,207 yards.

Course/Slope/rating: Championship Course: Gold — 75.8/138; Blue — 73.9/135; White — 71.8/130; Red — 71.6/127.

Acreage under maintenance: 285 acres.
Waterways — 20 acres.

Championship Course/Glades Course Greens: 3.5/2.5 acres. Average size — 6,800/5,700 square feet. Turf type — Tifdwarf. HOC: Winter — .140 -.156. Glades — .170. Summer — .156" - .180". Glades — .180" - .200". Overseeding: Both — Poa trivialis @ 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Championship/Glades Tees: 4/2 acres. Turf type for both — Tifway 419. HOC for both: Winter — .56". Summer — .43". Overseeding both — 30 pounds per 1,000 square feet of perennial ryegrass.

Championship/Glades Fairways: 32/45 acres. Turf type both — Tifway 419. HOC both: Winter — .56". Summer — .43". No overseeding.

Championship/Glades Roughs: 68/30 acres. Turf type — Tifway 419 and Common Bermudagrass. HOC — 1.5"

Irrigation: Source — surface water (lakes). Equipment: Championship Course — Two 100 hp vertical turbine pumps with one 25 hp jockey pump. Glades Course — One 100 hp vertical turbine pump with one 15 hp jockey pump. Controls: Championship Course — 30 Rainbird M5C Satellites. Glades Course — 18 Rainbird 15C Satellites. Rainbird Nimbus Computer 545 Central Controller.

Staff: Total of 21 including superintendent. Assistant superintendent, Gary Chaney. Head equipment technician, Duane Laney. Pest Control Techs, Dick Cline and Mike Wilson. Irrigation Techs, Steve Peraza and Brett Miller. Admin/Clerical, Cindy Kuehner and Nancy Rack.

Avoid the bunkers on the par 3 17th hole and you're almost home. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



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Colony West, like many public golf courses, tries to accommodate play as early as possible. With a 7:00 a.m. noise ordinance in effect, getting the course prepared for early morning shotgun tournaments requires constant and accurate communications with the pro shop!

Dale spoke about another challenge he faces managing the 285 acres under his domain.

"We are located in a Broward County well field. For the past 11 years we have undergone an annual site inspection for pesticide storage procedures. We have to submit quarterly samples from the two on-site monitoring wells. In all that time we have had one hit for arsenic levels. We initiated independent testing to find the source and the final conclusion was, 'Area soils naturally higher in arsenic content'."

On a lighter side, the Rain Bird Corporation uses Colony West as one of its Florida test sites so Dale gets his hands on new equipment from heads to controllers. We were riding around during my visit and Dale was turning zones on and off to water around golfers with his handheld unit—a new tool envied by all of us who don't have line-of-sight control of our irrigation.

Somehow we have to build a bridge to the owners over the sea of apathy that separates us so we can get their support for our lobbying efforts on behalf of golf.

On a philosophical note, Dale talked about the state of golf in Florida.

"Just look at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina! They market the entire area. They're united and it pays off.

"I don't know what it will take to be able to do something like that in Florida.

My uncle originated a First Union Bank MasterCard with golf discount privileges up to 40% in special walk-in vacancy situations and 20% in call-ahead reservations.

The clubs that initially participated couldn't even manage to train their point-of-sale people that the special existed and it never really grew into a strong marketing initiative. Somehow we have to build a bridge to the owners over the sea of apathy that separates us so we can get their support for our lobbying efforts on behalf of golf."

Dale also touched on job security.

"I realize I am in a unique position, but I am nonetheless concerned for the industry. I was talking to Tom Mascaro not long ago, and he has a long career to draw from. He sees changes more as recurring cycles that often hit the industry. Involved, dedicated, educated, progressive professionals will always have a better chance of survival no matter who is in charge of the club."

The Colony West acquisition by his family has allowed Dale to rightfully earn his spurs as a certified superintendent.

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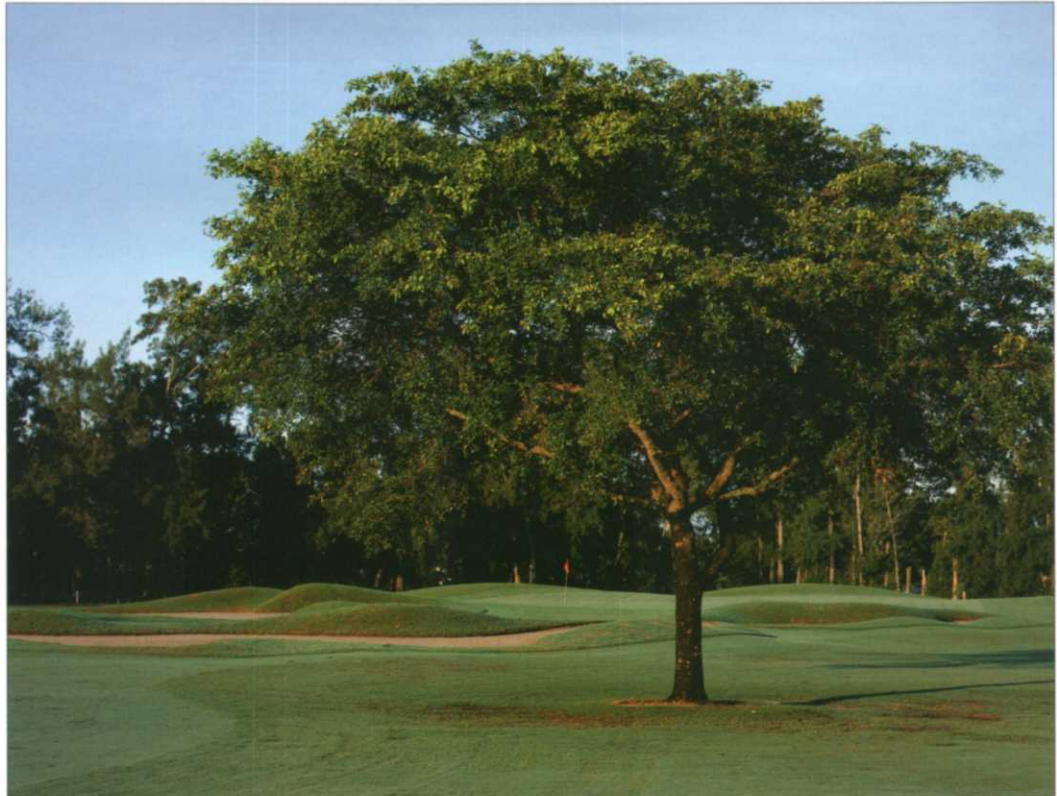
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Sometimes casual family gatherings or even holiday gatherings can turn into impromptu board meetings. But no matter what is discussed or when it is discussed, one thing is for sure. It's all in the family.



The 10th hole is the shortest par 4 at Colony West, but a sharp dogleg and green side bunkering keep applying the pressure. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Turf Trivia

Water Purification and Conservation

The biology of turfgrass soils makes lawns a near ideal medium for the biodegradation of all sorts of environmental contamination. The soils are active in purifying the water as it leaches through the rootzone and down into underground aquifers. Soil microbes associated with turfgrass cover help break down chemicals, including turf pesticides, into harmless materials.

As the population of an area increases, more impervious surfaces are constructed like streets, driveways, parking lots and roofs, and as a result, the rate of surface runoff increases and the time elapsed before runoff occurs decreases. A thick healthy lawn reduces runoff "to next to nothing."

A high quality turf will buffer loss of nutrients in runoff water or in the leachate. When effluent water is used on turf, the water is cleaned and this is a tremendous benefit to our environment. Ten percent of U.S. golf courses are already using effluent waste water for turfgrass irrigation. This reclaimed water by law cannot be returned to most municipal water supplies nor released into streams, lakes or oceans. Turfgrass therefore helps recycle this water into the environment.

Turf fertilization has resulted in unfounded accusations against lawns when nitrates are found in nearby ground water. Growing grass plants absorb most fertilizer nitrogen almost immediately, or, in the case of slow-release fertilizer, the nitrogen remains immobilized in the sod for gradual feed-out. Tests of water seeping through sod show that very little in the way of applied nutrients escape the grass itself.

Groundwater recharge is an important benefit of turf. An acre left in open space provides an average of 600,000 gallons of recharge per year. An average golf course of 150 acres will recharge the water table with a net of 90 million gallons of rainwater and snowmelt a year allowing for evaporation and transpiration. Consumption of water by a golf course of the same size would be about 9 million gallons.