



15th Green
View from 17th tee
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



Winter Pines Golf Club...

The People's Choice!

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

The Winter Pines Golf Club averages 80,000 to 90,000 rounds of golf a year! Those kinds of numbers bring to mind muni courses with hardscrabble turf and often neglected amendments. Not Winter Pines.

Located one block west of State Road 436 on the east side of the city of Winter Park, the club has evolved over the years into a popular and well maintained facility. Under the visionary ownership and operation of the McMillin family and the professional stewardship of new FGCSA President, Joe Ondo, CGCS, sweeping changes and subtle improvements have been introduced over the years to keep providing a profitable and pleasing product to the golfing public.

The club opened in 1968 and was originally a par-62 layout. Never long but always challenging, the course is ideally suited for senior golfers, young golfers and beginning golfers of all ages. Even the good players looking for a venue to hone their approach game find Winter Pines a test of skill.

"The first tee time is officially 6:30 a.m. this time of year, but they'll tee it up as soon as they can see," said



The flash barely lights up this group of "dew sweepers," and they are the second group off! Photo by Joel Jackson.

Joe. Using a flash attachment, I took a picture of what I thought was the first group off the tee. Wrong! It was the second group.

The first group was already approach-

ing the third tee in the slowly brightening dawn as we rode the course..

"These are our regulars. These guys have been teeing it up every day, six days a week ever since I've been here," said

Joe. There's a lot of golf to be played and there's usually 294 more folks behind them on the busy days.

Like so many golf course sites in Florida, much of Winter Pines was de-

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veloped on mucky land not suitable for other building. In 1977, however, one parcel of the land containing holes 4 through 8 was sold for real estate development. A new set of holes was designed and built on some of the remaining low-land portions of the property.

“No one seems to recall who did the original design, and I couldn’t find a name in any of the files,” said Joe. “Bud Timbrook and Gardner Dickinson are on record as doing the new holes.”

This redesign allowed the course to be lengthened and the par increased to its present 67 giving patrons a couple more holes to unleash a long tee shot. Two years later, Joe Ondo would arrive to begin his role in the continuing transformation of Winter Pines.

With a staff of only eight including himself to groom the course, Joe Ondo

Reflections of the 2nd hole as seen from the green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Florida Club Course Designer Dick Gray Uses Georgia Grass On His Greens.

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Tall trees shadow the 5th green at sunrise. Note the newly planted cypress tree along the lake bank. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

is a prototype working superintendent. He can be found on a greens mower, fairway unit or rough mower when weather puts the mowing schedule behind, or when the ranks are thinned by illness or vacation. He is often the cup setter when the crew is busy verticutting or fertilizing the course.

He works hand in hand with owner Ed McMillin on projects like concrete cart path pouring, and he is the final shaper when greens and tees are rebuilt.

Joe's staff contains a blend of young and experienced alike.

Veterans Steve Brown, Bob Keeth and Bob Farrington provide a core of de-

pendable workers to anchor the team.

"I first met Bob Keeth when he was the superintendent of Rosemont Golf Course and I was a student on the Lake City summer bus tour," said Joe. "Bob lives just down the street and after he left Rosemont he came by one day looking for a job. He's been here 18 years."

Brown has been mowing and going at Winter Pines for 18 years also along with Keeth. Farrington is the senior crew member with 21 years of service to Winter Pines, and he doubles as the irrigation and spray technician.

Equipment longevity is also a matter of pride.

"We have a 1979 Toro HTM fairway mower that is still going strong," said Joe. "Having mature responsible operators helps make the equipment last longer."

Joe is no stranger to caring for the equipment as he has taken his turn grinding reels in his role as a hands-on superintendent. Grinding is a talent he learned while in the Lake City Golf Operations program.

With a small crew and big ambitions, Winter Pines has found a way to success-

Major renovations/projects

Starting in 1981 to 1987, added automatic irrigation system to holes #1 and #9 through #18 and the driving range. We did all the work in house. We kept the quick coupler system running while we did the renovation. Most holes now have double row coverage with Griswold controllers and valves. We did 1 to 2 holes per year as time and money permitted. We added on to the new system after the new #4 through #8 holes were built. In 1985, we took on effluent water from the city of Winter Park after they installed a 10-inch main line to the middle of the course. Over 2 miles of drainage lines have been installed in the last 18 years to keep the course open as much as possible. Constructed and poured over 6,000 linear feet of concrete cart paths to either replace old asphalt at greens and tees or to extend paths so they ended in dry areas to lessen damage by cart traffic. All this work was done by the owner and our crew. Rebuilt greens #2 through #7 and both practice greens one hole a year to replace contaminated Tifgreen 328 or Tifdwarf surfaces. All work done in house except for fumigation.



1979 Toro HTM fairway mower and operator Bob Keeth are both 18-year veterans of Winter Pines. Photo by Joel Jackson.

fully accomplish its desired improvements. By doing things in-house, slowly and deliberately, one step at a time, they have shown their customers how they are making things better while keeping 99 percent of the golf course in play at all times.

Perhaps one of the biggest undertakings was to re-grass eight of the greens that were still planted in Tifgreen 328. All are push-up style construction with no under drains.


While it was impractical and cost prohibitive to core out the muck-based greens, the sod was stripped, herringbone drain fields were added to the base and greens mix added to the surface to provide a well drained root zone. Working at a pace of one green per season, seven of the greens have been completed to date.

The other greens contain some of the old original Tifdwarf from the 1960s.

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Winter Pines Golf Club

Location: Winter Park, Florida.

Ownership: Ed McMillin and family.

Playing Policy: Public.

Average rounds per year: 80,000 - 90,000

18 holes: Par 67 playing at 5,402 yards.

Course/Slope Rating: Gold = 74/137; Blue = 71.8/132; Green = 69.6/127; Red = 71.8/127

Management Team: Club Manager & President, Jon McMillin; Head Golf Professional, John Pohira; Superintendent, Joe Ondo, CGCS.

Original designer: Unknown. The course opened in 1968 as an 18-hole par 62 course. In 1977, the original holes 4 through 8 were sold for homesites and bud Timbrook and Gardner Dickinson designed five new holes to make it a par 67.

Acreage under maintenance: 80 acres.

Waterways: Nearly 1 mile of canal and pond bank running through the property. Water quality managed by Aquagenix.

Greens: 3 acres. Average size = 5,000 sq. ft. Turf type = Tifdwarf. HOC: 5/32" year round. Overseeding - Type and rate: PhD Ryegrass and Winterplay Poa trivialis blend.

Putting surface goals: Consistent roll. Medium speed.

Tees: 1.5 acres Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC: .5" year round. Overseeding = Bright Star Perennial Ryegrass @ 15 lbs/m.

Fairways: 20 acres. Tifway 419. HOC: .75" year round. No overseeding.

Roughs: 50 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC including seasonal changes) = 1.5." No overseeding.

Irrigation: Source = 100% effluent from the City of Winter Park. Griswold electric controllers and valves with one or two heads off each valve. Double row Rainbird and Thompson heads.

Staff: Total of 8 including Superintendent. Mechanic - Steve Grode; Pest Control and Irrigation Tech - Bob Farrington. Bob has been at the club 21 years. Part time equipment operator and former mechanic (12 years) - Bob Keeth (18 years total). Bob is a retired Central Florida Superintendent. Equipment operator - Steve Brown (18 years).

Special circumstances, unusual conditions, which are challenging in managing the turf: Most holes built on muck or peat. Poor drainage and continual settling of soil creating water holding pockets. Constant modification of drain lines. Adding new lines and collection basins for quick removal of water.

Equipment: Toro triplex greens mowers; Jacobsen Greensking for tees and collars; Toro HTM 175 for fairways. Toro Spartan 7 gang for roughs and banks.

Cultural/pest control/fertility programs: Mole cricket program - Spring application of fertilizer with Oftanol. Spot treat areas as needed with 1% Microflo Dursban bait and Orthene. Weed control program - Fall application of fertilizer with Barricade for winter and early spring control. Spot treat areas as needed for sedge and goosegrass. Fertility programs for greens - .5 to 1.0 pounds of nitrogen per month with liquid supplements as needed.

Wildlife: Mallard ducks, anhingas, white ibis, blue heron, cranes, and 2 red tailed hawks that fly in and out from the nearby former navy training center.



Early morning at the 8th green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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Joe and company cut out the herringbone pattern, saved the turf and then trenched the lines. Meanwhile, the customers played on only one temporary green for a few weeks.

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Compared to some of the new material planted on the renovated greens it is denser and less susceptible to the infamous "mutation" spots. Joe keeps the greens mowed at 5/32 of an inch all year with minor exceptions during overseeding and renovation.

"I apply .5 pounds of granular nitrogen per month to the greens and then spray weekly with a liquid fertilizer complete with minors. We like to verticut once per week and double cut the greens twice per week to keep the surfaces rolling consistently," said Joe.

These greens are also getting attention with the installation of drainage as needed. During the record rainfalls of the summers of 1993 and 1994, it was obvious that the other push-up greens would also need attention. Once again, taking one green at a time, Joe and company cut out the herringbone pattern, saved the turf and then trenched the lines. Meanwhile, the customers played on only one temporary green for a few weeks.

Cosmetically, the course has improved tremendously over the years. New lakes and ponds were created and recently over 100 cypress trees have been planted to accentuate the waterways and fill the low areas.

"We have had excellent results using Primo growth regulator on our fairways," said Joe. "We apply it at the 16-ounce-per-acre rate since we keep out fairways at 3/4 of an inch. The turf density has improved and we have fewer clippings to clean up. If we do have some clippings because of the early start, we come back

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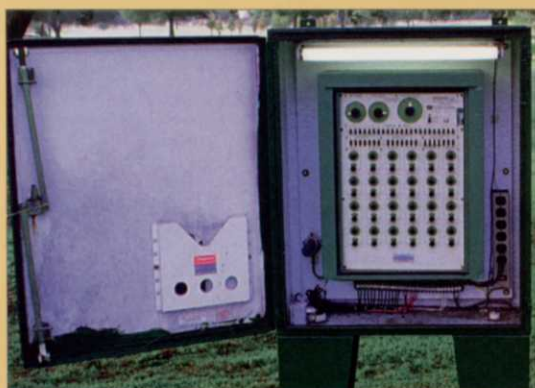
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Safety first! A dense podocarpus hedge is planted to trap possible stray shots on a parallel hole.



Unique and effective — all of Joe's controllers are housed in a second cabinet for maximum protection from the elements.

Winter Pines Tips

Photos by Joel Jackson



To eliminate worn turf on the busy first tee, a railroad tie ramp and landscape beds were installed.



Practical alternative — These artificial mats provide relief for the practice range turf when it needs a rest.



Judicious use of annuals can add color and highlight important features without being labor intensive.



View from behind the 16th green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

when it's dry and remove those areas."

Joe has altered his preventive pesticide programs over the years also.

"I used to treat wall to wall in the spring and fall with a preemergent herbicide, explained Joe. "Because we have so much traffic in the winter, I found that the spring application was retarding our transition on many occasions so, I quit the spring application. We just monitor any activity and spot treat as needed and limit the boom sprayings much as possible. Now I just use Barricade on fertilizer in the fall to control poa annua and volunteer rye seed that may get tracked around."

Old asphalt cart paths with their traditional crumbling edges have given way to neatly edged concrete paths. While not able to go wall to wall with paths, each tee and green path have been extended to begin or end in a high and dry area that can handle the traffic.

"The crew came up with a path edging system which works for them," explained Joe. "One guy edges and then a second

person follows with a Flymo. The Flymo chops up the clipped off runners, mows the turf and helps scatter the debris. They follow up with a blower which scatters the remainder leaving nothing to rake or shovel up."

Landscape plantings and railroad tie curbing and steps have been added to upgrade once downtrodden and worn tee and green slopes. The first tee and practice green areas are beautiful focal points and the judicious use of annuals adds a splash of color without being labor intensive.

Dense podocarpus and viburnum hedges have also been cultivated to provide protective screening around some of the tees on the compact layout that sports several parallel holes reminiscent of the old style course architecture.

Blessed with an involved and understanding owner, Joe is able to achieve these improvements and also actively participate in the industry he loves. Because Joe is a key player in the workforce of his club, he must pick and choose

carefully the conferences, classes, seminars and events that he can attend. On the other hand, he is living proof that it can be done successfully.

I have known Joe for almost 20 years now. Hard to imagine it's been that long, but he was practically the only external vice president of the Central Florida Chapter I have ever known. He served faithfully in that capacity for 14 years. That's a lot of FGCSA Board meetings and local chapter meetings.

But there are the rewards of all the friendships, the golf competitions and the learning that make it worthwhile. He has earned the respect of his peers by his unselfish service to his fellow superintendents. Look for Joe's tenure as president to be filled with thoughtful progress and willing participation from those who have come to know him over the years.

Joe's quiet, unassuming manner belies the passion which he harbors for his profession and the game of golf. If you want to know what kind of person he is, just watch him play golf. Thoughtful club

Joe Ondo

Originally from:

Kinsman,
Ohio.

Family: wife of 14

years,
Kathryn; 3
Shihtzu dogs.



Education: Joseph Badger High School, Kinsman, Ohio 1971; A. S. Golf Course Operations - Lake City Community College, class of 1975.

Employment History: During high school and summers, crew member at Bronzwood G.C., Kinsman, OH; 1975-78, Assistant Superintendent, Sharon C.C., Sharon, PA; six months at Lost Tree CC, North Palm Beach until accepting superintendent position at Winter Pines on April 2, 1979.

Professional affiliations/Offices held/Honors/Awards: 1975 Scholarship from Florida PGA for Outstanding Achievement in Golf Course Operations at Lake City Community College. External Vice President of the Central Florida Chapter for 14 years. President of Central Florida Chapter 1985-87. GCSAA member since 1980. FTGA member since 1981.

People in or out of the industry who have influenced your life and career: Jim Bronson owner of the Bronzwood GC gave me my first job on a golf course. I still play the course every time I go home to Ohio to visit. Carl Bronson, superintendent, Eastlake Woodlands. Jim is Carl's father. Carl and I played high school golf together and worked on the golf course. I visited him at Lake City Community College once and decided to attend school there. John Lapika, Superintendent at Annadale GC in Mississippi. I worked for John at the Sharon CC in Pennsylvania and at Lost Tree CC when I moved to Florida. John used to be the superintendent at Winter Pines in the early '70's and helped get me an interview and the job at Winter Pines. Last but not least, my father, Frank Ondo and neighbor Roy Posey. We all started playing golf when they built the Bronzwood Golf Club in the early 1970's.

How did you get into the business? In high school, I earned a golf scholarship to Youngstown State University. I started out as an engineering major, but calculus and physics and I didn't get along. I switched majors to education, but didn't really like it. I visited my friend Carl at Lake City and found a home in Golf Course Operations. I graduated in 1975. Took a job as an Assistant at the Sharon Country Club and I've been at it ever since.

Goals/Accomplishments: I became certified in 1986. It was and is an incentive to keep taking classes and keep up to date with our growing profession.

Philosophy: Plan as best as you can, but take each day separately and deal with what it brings you to best of your ability. Don't be afraid to work hard and put in the hours it takes to get the job done. Good things will eventually happen and you'll be a better person for it.

Personal memorable: I had a hole-in-one on the 3rd hole of the New Course at Grand Cypress during the 1990 GCSAA Golf Championship. Conversely, I got hit in the head with a golf ball one day while out on the course talking to our owner about where to put a new cart path. I spent half a day in the hospital. Now we all wear hard hats on the job!

Hobbies and interests: I try to play in as many amateur golf tournaments in the state as time and money will allow. I like to read about golf, work related subjects, the history of our profession and the history of the game itself, so I subscribe to a lot of magazines and collect books on those subjects.



On this day, the working superintendent monitors mole cricket "hot spots," and applies a 1% Dursban bait where needed. Photo by Joel Jackson.

and shot selection. Smooth, unhurried powerful swing. Precise accuracy. Consistent and determined execution. Appreciative but humble with the results. Relentless competitor.

The way he plays the game reflects the way he approaches his daily work and his relationships. I'd call him "a natural."

Not surprisingly with those characteristics, Joe is an excellent amateur golfer. Sporting a USGA handicap that hovers around 3 to 5, he traditionally places high in local and state amateur events and at all the superintendent events around the state.

On several occasions he has made the FGCSA national team to represent Florida in the Golf Course Superintendents Association Golf Championship held annually in conjunction with the national conference and show.

Joe is also a voracious reader on any subject dealing with golf. He gets tremendous satisfaction and relaxation from

reading articles and books that tell about the history of the game.

He also reads all the trade journals to keep up with the latest innovations in the business.

He is keen to watch and learn anything and everything he can from a golf outing at another course. If he doesn't get a chance to talk to the host superintendent about something he saw on the course, he will call him within a few days later to discuss whatever caught his attention.

Meanwhile back at Winter Pines, it's always about people and participation. There is a feeling of family and camaraderie. From the regulars flocking to play the course to the banter in the clubhouse over lunch, after golf and after work.

The strong teamwork among Joe, owner Ed McMillin, general manager, Jon McMillin, and head pro John Pohira makes for a facility that definitely rates as the people's choice.

If you want to know what kind of person he is, just watch him play golf. Thoughtful club and shot selection. Smooth, unhurried powerful swing. Precise accuracy. Consistent and determined execution. Appreciative but humble with the results. Relentless competitor.