



Par 3 No. 11 West
Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Laurel Oak Country Club

Everybody Knows What's Going On

By JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

Laurel Oak Country Club is a 36-hole golf and residential complex carved out of former ranch lands in eastern Sarasota County. Located a few miles east of I-75 on Bee

Ridge Road, the gated Laurel Oak community nestled itself among the native oaks that dotted the landscape and planted a few more over the years.

The Radnor Corporation developed the property and commissioned the Gary Player Design Company to design both courses. The West Course was built in 1989 and the East Course was opened in 1995. With Laurel Oak approaching total build-out, the Radnor company is slowly phasing out and the Laurel Oak members are preparing to take over full ownership of the golf club.

They should know what they're getting. Mack Baugh, CGCS, man-



Mack Baugh, CGCS

Originally from: Heth
Arkansas.

Family: Wife, Susan. Son, Rhett

Education: Arkansas State University 1964-66. U. S. Navy 1966-70. A.S. Golf
Course Operations, Lake City Community College 1972.

Employment history: 1989 - present Laurel Oak Country Club; 1974 - 1989
Superintendent Longboat Key Golf Club, Sarasota, FL; 1973-74 Point. Alexis
Golf & Racquet Club, Tarpon Springs, FL; 1973 - Magnolia Valley CC, New
Port Richey, FL.

Professional affiliations: Suncoast GCSA - Founding member. First vice president
and second president. Currently on the Board of Directors, Education
Chairman. 1998 Suncoast Scramble Committee. FTGA - Served on the Board
of Directors. Scholarship and Research Funding Cochairman in 1981. GCSAA
- Member since 1973. Certified since 1979. FGCSA - Member since inception.

Honors/Awards: 1997 FGCSA President's Award.

People who have influenced your life and career: My father for his great work
ethic. My mother for her kindness to people. The Navy and all my school
teachers who taught me self discipline. My son who made me so very proud
when he decided to get into the business. My peers, from whom I learn
something almost daily. All of my "ex-assistants": Larry Edwards, Bruce
Allison, Jerry Monley, Tom Norton, Jim Nyers, Jim Lamb, Al Steichen and most
recently Keith Einwag, who just took the head superintendent's job at Lone
Palm CC in Lakeland. Also my East and West Course superintendents, Ronnie
Ford and newly promoted, Dwayne Carter.

How did you get into the business: Our postmaster in my hometown in Arkansas
was an avid golfer. I watched him hit balls in our farm fields and fell in love
with the game. My parents belonged to the Meadowbrook CC in West
Memphis Arkansas. I went to work for Bonnie Harper the pro at the club and I
knew I wanted to get into golf some way. I was not good enough to go on tour
and I didn't want to be a club pro or teacher. So, after I got out of the Navy I
went to Lake City Community College and it is all history from there on.

Goals: My immediate goal is to make the transition as the Golf/Landscape Manager
of Laurel Oak as the members assume full ownership of the club. **Philosophy:**
Treat people the way you would like to be treated. **Advice:** Care about your
employees. To prospective superintendents, develop a thick skin to take
criticism. On the other hand there will be times when you see work and
dedication pay off when a members says, "Everything's great! Keep up the
good work!"

Memorable moments: My parents' deaths. My son Rhett's graduation from Lake
City in May 1997. Catching a 10-lb., 2-oz. largemouth bass on March 6, 1998.

Hobbies and interests: Golf. Bass fishing. Greyhound racing. We have a
greyhound called CharlyMack Fast racing in Tampa and St. Petersburg.
Watching people, the Tampa Bay Bucs, the Arkansas Razorbacks and sports in
general.

ager of golf course and landscape opera-
tions for Laurel Oak, has probably the
best communication program I've ever
seen, from training newly hired employ-
ees to green committee orientation vid-
eos and maintenance facility tours for the
members. As we find ourselves in the
rapidly expanding information age, I
found that Mack and his staff are way
ahead in the business of keeping their
owners and members informed about
what's going on in their part of the opera-
tion.

Baugh's communication strategy
tends to be proactive rather than reac-
tive, and some of it is as subtle as the road
signs that tell residents and visitors that
Laurel Oak uses reclaimed irrigation wa-
ter to conserve natural resources, or the
reminder to be watchful of the many
wildlife inhabitants that share the green
spaces and roads with the human resi-
dents, or the sign that simply tells folks
where the maintenance complex can be
found.

If there is a member who doesn't know
where Baugh's office is located, they sim-
ply have chosen not to visit. The mainte-
nance facility hosted a series of open-
house tours to show the members all the
equipment necessary to maintain the two
courses and the common landscape
grounds. In addition, Baugh gets to show
the environmentally friendly and effec-
tive covered degradation complex that
had to be built back in 1988 to win the



*The feathered and furry residents of
Laurel Oak appreciate this reminder to
vehicle operators. Photo by Joel Jackson.*



A large native area highlights the 157-yard, par-3 7th hole on the West Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

permits necessary for the project to get off the ground. The roofed-over, twin open concrete vaults filled with gravel and sand allow for the collection, filtration and microbial breakdown of all equipment and pest control rinse waters collected by sumps in the mix and load

and wash down sites.

Prior to the open house tours, Baugh and his staff filmed a video of the greens aerification process to show to the green committee.

"The video displayed in detail the various types of aerifiers and tines used in

aerification and what each one was used for and why," Baugh said. "It also explained the important role of the equipment technicians in setting up the equipment and making crucial periodic adjustments. We even showed how different operators had their own styles and



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Laurel Oak CC

Location: Sarasota.

Ownership: In transition to member-owned.

Playing policy: Private.

36 holes: West Course - Par 72 at 6676 yards. Course Rating 72.3 Slope Rating 129. East Course - Par 72 at 6862 yards. Course Rating 73.2 Slope Rating 128.

Designed by: Gary Player Design Co. Constructed by: Wadsworth Golf Construction of the Southeast.

Opened: West Course, August 1989. East Course, April 1995.

Management: Bob Weber - general manager; Bob Intrieri, PGA Master Professional - director of golf; Rudy Hanisch - club president; Don Rettinger - Green Committee chairman; Mack Baugh, Certified Golf Course Superintendent - golf and landscape operations manager.

Possible Future Renovations/Projects: Rebuild 1,500 linear feet of wooden bulkheads. Renovate fairways and roughs of the East Course to remove common bermudagrass infestation.

Acreage under maintenance: 250 acres.

Greens: 6 acres, average size: 6,000 sq. ft. Tifdwarf; cut: .125-.140 (summer) .160-.210 (winter); overseeding: none; green speed goals: 9.5-10.5 (East Course) 8.5-10.0 (West Course).

Tees: 12 acres Tifgreen 328 (West Course) Tifway 419 (East Course); cut: .500; overseeding: none

Fairways: 64 acres Tifway 419; cut: .500-.750; overseeding: none.

Roughs: 168 acres Tifway 419; cut: 1.0 (summer), 1.75 (winter); overseeding: none.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: 46 acres managed by Florida Environmental Consultants.

Irrigation: Source - Reclaimed water. Gator Pumping Modules pumping stations.

Staff: Total 49 including superintendent and landscape/common grounds crew; 2 superintendents: Ronnie Ford and Dwayne Carter; 4 mechanics; 2 pest control techs; 2 irrigation techs; administrative/clerical: Laurie Brown.

Special or unusual conditions: Blue-gray clay subsoil throughout the West Course. Ground can be as hard as concrete sometimes. East Course has common bermudagrass infestation on 13 holes. This year with the El Niño conditions, managing the thin bermuda turf was not fun.

Interesting or unusual features: Two people were found living in a homemade cave on the property during construction. Wetland area on the West Course was formerly the watering hole for cattle during the ranching days of the property

Maintenance equipment: Greens-Toro 1000 walkers year-round. Tees-Toro 3000s, 3100s & 3200s triplex mowers. Fairways: Toro 3000s, 3100s & 3200s triplex mowers on the East Course. Toro 6500 Lightweight 5-gang mowers on the West Course. Roughs: Toro 6500 5-gang mowers.

Mix/Load/Washdown practices: All rinsate is collected and contained in a pesticide degradation holding tank. This roofed-over facility is unique in the industry.

Stewardship - We have applied for the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Laurel Oak annually hosts a National Audubon Society Christmas bird count — 69 species have been identified. Within the confines of the Laurel Oak gated community there is a large, resident, white-tailed-deer population that cannot easily exit the property. Sometimes the deer graze a little too often on the residents' landscaping.

finesse with the equipment. Each step in the process was explained so the members could see the time, effort and coordination required from start to finish. They were really amazed at how complex the entire process was."

It was out of that video presentation that the maintenance tours were born so every member could have the opportunity to see what really goes on in maintaining a golf course.

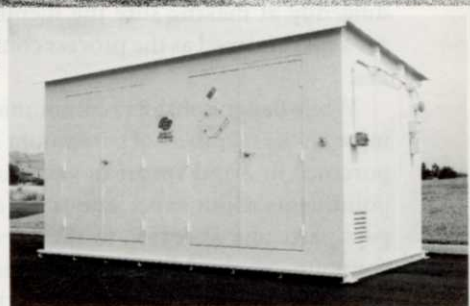
"After the green committee took the tour and started talking about all the things they learned, other members indicated they wanted to take the tour also," Baugh said. "Except for any recent members, we have hosted everybody that has had an interest. Of course that's great, because now they can give informed answers when people start asking questions in the clubhouse. They put out a lot of little fires for us before they get started."

Beyond those formal presentations and club newsletter announcements on upcoming projects on the course, Baugh and his superintendents make it a point



Just part of the large white-tailed deer herd residing in Laurel Oak. Photo by Mack Baugh.

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If we get word from someone — either staff or a member — that someone is unhappy about something, we look them up or call them as soon as possible to address their concern.

We don't want misinformation circulating, so we try to respond to them quickly.

This aquatic planting on No. 3 East provides cover for aquatic and terrestrial critters and it looks great too! Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

to talk to the members during their daily rounds. It may be just a casual greeting and conversation or it may be a deliberate search for a member who has voiced a concern or has a question about some-

thing on the courses. Baugh always returns resident and member phone calls promptly and follows up on questions they may have on landscape issues.

"If we get word from someone —

either staff or a member — that someone is unhappy about something, we look them up or call them as soon as possible to address their concern. We don't want misinformation circulating, so we try to respond to them quickly," he noted.

One of Baugh's most important priorities right now is being the communication link between the developer and the members as the transition of ownership of the club takes place. Baugh works diligently at making sure the members are kept informed as the process continues.

While Baugh considers communicating with the members of paramount importance to avoid surprises and disappointments about expectations, he also pays particular attention to the lines of communication within the department. Like so many clubs in today's marketplace, the Laurel Oak staff has a large number of Hispanic workers. Using bilingual training videos, operator manuals and equipment decals, Baugh and his superintendents team up new hires with experienced operators for training.

"We put the new employee with a



Wood Storks, Great White Herons and White Ibis line up for breakfast. Photo by Mack Baugh.

Snapshots of Laurel Oak

By Joel Jackson



For nearly a decade this covered concrete vault system has been successfully filtering and degrading equipment washdown water and pest control rinsate.



Baugh uses this range finding system to verify distance yardages on sprinkler heads when the tags are worn off; the head is replaced or whenever a member needs reassurance about the accuracy of the yardage.



Information signs begin the communication process at Laurel Oak as soon as you drive through the gate.



The red and white stake marks just one of many patches of Common Bermudagrass infestation on the 419 fairways of the East Course. The source was a contaminated soil stockpile used during construction in 1995.



A lightning detection system and sirens on the course warn golfers and staff when storms are too near.

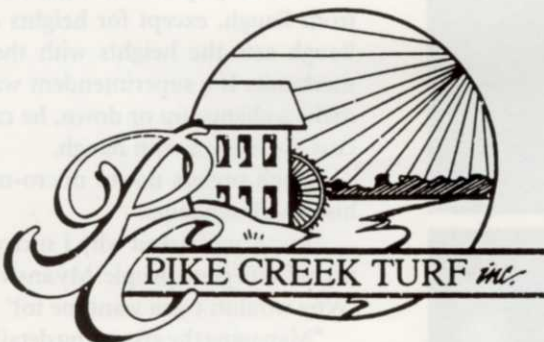


trainer for a few days and ask the trainer to evaluate his progress," said Ronnie Ford, superintendent of the West Course. "Our employees tend to stay with us a long time, so they take pride in their work and responsibilities. If we ask them if a rookie is ready to solo, they may ask for another day or two with the employee to make sure they have the routines down pat.

"Many of our new hires come from employee referrals. There is a great incentive for the families to stick together and help each other out. If somebody doesn't perform satisfactorily in being punctual or producing a good result on the job, there's a lot of peer pressure on them to shape up because they are help-

Superintendents Dwayne Carter, left, and Ronnie Ford oversee daily operations on the East and West Courses respectively. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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The early morning fog flirts with sunrise on the 5th hole of the West Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

A pair of sandhill cranes, right, takes a stroll on the golf course.

A flock of mallard ducks, below, calls this golf course lake home. Photos by Mack Baugh.



ing with the rent and the groceries.”

Each golf course and landscape superintendent holds weekly meetings with his respective crews, going over safety issues, schedule changes or upcoming events. Each superintendent meets one-on-one with Baugh to discuss anything they need to talk about. Joint meetings are held with all department heads on renovation schedules and equipment-sharing issues. The superintendents run their own courses’ daily operations with little input from Baugh, except for heights of cut. Baugh sets the heights with the head mechanic. If a superintendent wants to make a change up or down, he can discuss his reasons with Baugh.

Baugh prefers not to micro-manage his superintendents.

“I was once asked why I surrounded myself with good people. My answer was, ‘Why wouldn’t you want me to?’

“Managing the grooming details of an 18-hole golf course, monitoring the health of the turf, the playing conditions, monitoring and adjusting the irrigation system and evaluating and coaching the daily performance of your staff is a full-time job. That doesn’t begin to address the administration of the budget of 36 holes



This large wetland area seen from No. 10 West was once a watering hole on a cattle ranch. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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The par-five 9th and 18th holes on the East Course converge at a large double green complex near the clubhouse. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

and landscape areas, dealing with vendors, meeting with contractors and other managers at the club, filling out reports, responding to members calls and simply coordinating it all so that it runs smoothly.

"If I didn't have capable competent people around me, I'd be up the creek."

Baugh is also proud of the number of superintendents and assistants who have worked with him and have taken head superintendent jobs or moved up to their own operations. The Baugh alumni include Larry Edwards, Bruce Allison, Jerry Monley, Tom Norton, Jim Nyers, Jim Lamb, Al Stichen and, most recently, Keith Einwag, who just left to take over the Lone Palm Country Club in Lakeland. Working with Baugh currently are Ronnie Ford on the West Course and Dwayne Carter who was promoted to Einwag's slot on the East Course.

There is one last area of communications that I found to be unique in all my cover story assignments. It has to do with warning golfers and employees about dangerous storms and lightning. Florida

is the thunderstorm capital of the United States and a band from the central west coast to the central east coast of the state is probably the most active.

The Laurel Oak club has a Toro Electrical Storm Indication Device (ESID) in the pro shop and Baugh has a DTN Weather Center at the maintenance facility. Both systems allow the club to detect and monitor the movement of thunderstorms and lightning in the area. While the club has sirens mounted on the courses' rain shelter/restroom buildings, equipment operators wearing noise protection devices can't always hear the sirens. Laurel Oak takes that proactive stance and goes one step further.

Baugh provides beepers to his employees. He can dial one number and then can enter one of three codes: 5555 - Go to Shelter; 6969 - Go to Work; or 911 - Come to Maintenance.

Baugh explained the logic behind the \$3,500 budget line item. "We have almost 50 people scattered over the project at any given time. They can't all hear the

sirens. Why would we put someone *else* in jeopardy by sending them out into an oncoming storm to find the others and warn them? Using this beeper system and the DTN we can tell them to take shelter and, if it is a small storm, we can give them an all-clear and save the time of running back and forth from the shop. If we have a big storm system coming, we can get them all off the course with one phone call. It makes pretty good sense to me and it shows we value our employees."

Superintendents are fond of telling students and young assistants, "Growing grass is the easy part of the job!" We have spent a lot of time talking about how important effective communication is to Laurel Oak's success. Communication just happens to be that part of the job that addresses perceptions and helps shape the reality that a well-informed membership sees with its own eyes. Don't ever neglect the opportunity to tell your members what's going on at your club.