

Number 8
Par 3
Lagoon Course
Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Plantation Inn & Golf Resort

Welcome to the Nature Coast

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

Editor's Note: By request, this story is dedicated to the memory of William Joe Brooks. Dedicated and loyal Plantation Inn employee of 38 years.

The Plantation Inn & Golf Resort is located on the Crystal River nine miles from the Gulf of Mexico where the river meets U. S. Hwy 19 some 60 miles north of Clearwater. This area is near the beginning of coastal Florida's low country that extends all the way around the Big Bend area to Carrabelle and St. George Island.

There are no sandy barrier islands here with high-rise condos. The coastline is marsh grass and hardwood swamps punctuated by river mouths with names like Chassahowitska, Homosassa, Withlacoochie, Crystal, Wacassa, and the famous song-inspiring Suwannee. Florida has its First Coast (Jacksonville), Space Coast



Glenn Oberlander

Personal: Originally from Chicago, Ill. Family: Wife Delia; children Glenn Jr. (9), Raymond (15), Ryan (17) and Marissa (20).

Education: 1973 - Seminole HS, Seminole; 1975 - Lake City Community College Mechanics School; 1977 - A.S. degree, Lake City Golf Operations Program.

Employment history: 1979 to present, superintendent, Plantation Inn C.C.; 1977-78 assistant superintendent, Sheraton Savannah Resort, Savannah, Ga.; 1969-73 from laborer to assistant superintendent, Bardmoor C.C., Largo, FL.

Professional affiliations: Class A GCSAA member and member of FGCSA and FTGA (17 yrs). Past president (2 yrs) & board member (5 yrs) West Coast GCSA. past president (2 yrs) & board member (5 yrs) Seven Rivers GCSA. Chairman of the Envirotron Golf Classic (7 yrs).

Mentors: My father Walt Oberlander started me playing golf at age 2. I've loved it ever since. Dad also taught me you can succeed if work hard and get an education. No one can ever take that away from you. My brother Greg Oberlander got me a job as a service man at Bardmoor CC in 1969. There I learned to love maintaining golf courses. Got to help build the East Course at Bardmoor.

Goals: Graduate from college. Own my own golf course some day.

Accomplishments: 21 years with the Plantation Inn. Helped form the Seven Rivers GCSA. Got involved in our associations early in my career. You never stop learning.

Philosophy: Treat your employees like you would want to be treated.

Advice: A golf course superintendent works long, hard hours. It can take a toll on personal and family life. Make sure they understand what you do and why you do it. "To be a successful manager, surround yourself with quality people and provide them with an enjoyable, fulfilling work environment."

Memorable moments Happy - Landing, tagging and releasing a 7-foot sailfish with my name on it. I'll never forget my surprise 40th birthday party. My wife Delia really got me!; **Sad** - Losing one of my best friends and co-workers, Joe Brooks, to cancer. He was the most devoted family man and dedicated employee I have ever experienced in my life.

Hobbies: Like to play the stock market. Fish whenever I can find the time. Golf. Travel to the Blue Ridge Mountains every winter.



(Cocoa Beach), Treasure Coast (Vero Beach), Gold Coast (Ft. Lauderdale-Miami), Suncoast (Sarasota-Tampa). And now this area is billing itself as the Nature Coast.

The many spring-fed rivers that flow to the Gulf in this area become warmwater havens for the endangered seagoing manatees. The Crystal River has a population of 380 manatees each year in winter. The guests of the Plantation Inn are treated to views of the manatees as they cruise the spring-fed creek behind the hotel.

Since the remote coastline in this region is not accessible for the same type of rampant development so common along most of Florida's shores, hotels like the Plantation Inn are rare and thus appealing destinations for those seeking a more secluded getaway location for vacations and small business conferences.

Over the years, the Plantation Inn has hosted celebrities like Elvis and golfing legends Sam Snead and Tommy Bolt, who used to drop by in the early 60s for a little fishing after the PGA Tour's Florida leg and before the Masters tournament. Some of their memorabilia is displayed in the Inn.

The Inn recently underwent a major renovation of the 144 rooms, a total which includes 12 villas and six condominiums. There is also a conference center which can host up to 300 people.

The Inn has had a long history of repeat business from groups who have enjoyed the special brand of southern hospitality over the years. The pool area is being completely revamped this year and there is also a full-service marina as part of the hotel's amenities.

Someone else who has a history with the Inn is Glenn Oberlander, the golf course superintendent for the past 21 years. One of Glenn's career goals after graduating from college was to find an employer who would treat its employees more than just a number.

Oberlander accomplished that goal with the William Caruth family which owns the Plantation Inn.

"The Caruths are just good, down-home people," said Oberlander. "Mr. Caruth told me long ago, 'I'm not going



Number 3 on the Lagoon nine. The Lagoons Course is a little tighter layout than the original Championship course, giving guests a challenging change of pace. Superintendent Glenn Oberlander helped the owner Mr. Caruth design and build the new nine. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

to tell you how to run the golf course. That's why I hired you. However, I may want to try some little projects from time to time. It's my money and we'll try it, whether it works or not."

"For example, we've planted lots of trees over the years and we even built the nine-hole Lagoons Course in-house in 1980. It's obviously been a good experience or I wouldn't have stayed here this long. I got a taste of working for a tyrant of a boss during one of my assistant-superintendent jobs. This misguided individual took sadistic delight in scaring employees and intimidating them. I vowed that if I ever became a superintendent I would treat my employees with a lot more respect."

Oberlander seems to have done just that. While he acknowledges some recent turnover, he also has employees with 12-14 years of service with him. "Depending on the circumstances, I don't

adhere to a three-strikes-and-you're-out policy. Even good employees can have some bad times. I try to be sensitive to what's going on in their lives, and work it out whenever we can."

At the beginning of this story was a dedication to William Joe Brooks. Brooks worked for the Plantation Inn for 38 years until he passed away recently. He was the irrigation technician and one of Oberlander's weekend supervisors. "Losing Joe was tough," Oberlander said. "He was one of my best friends and the most devoted family man and dedicated worker I have ever known in my life."

Oberlander is also losing his shop manager who is moving back home to the Lake City area. He plans to promote his assistant mechanic and give one of the crew members a shot at the assistant's position. He believes in promoting from within the organization to show the staff that hard work does pay off, a trait he

says that was instilled by his father Walt Oberlander.

"Dad told me you can succeed only if you work hard and get an education. No one can ever take that away from you."

Oberlander's education came from the Lake City Community College's Golf Operations program. Oberlander first graduated from the mechanic's program in 1975 and received his A.S. in golf course operations in 1977.

His first look at golf began as a two-year-old playing at golf with his father. His brother Greg, now at Mission Valley, got him a job on the crew at Bardmoor CC in 1969 where he developed his love for maintaining golf courses. He worked his way up to assistant superintendent and then went to Lake City for his formal education.

In his 21 years at the Plantation Inn, Oberlander has watched the fads and trends in turf management come and go



Number 7 Lagoons Course, Plantation Inn Golf Club. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Plantation Inn Country Club

Location: Town of Crystal River in Citrus County

Ownership: The William Caruth family out of Dallas, Texas.

Playing policy: Resort guests and general public.

27 holes: The 18-hole, par-72 Championship Course was designed by Mark Mahannah and opened in 1957. The 9-hole, par-36 Lagoons Course was designed and built in-house and opened in 1981.

Management: General Manager, Chris Kehn; Golf Course Superintendent, Glenn Oberlander.

Major Renovations/Projects: Just completed a new pesticide storage building and a self-contained mix-and-load site. Recently completed a five-year, concrete-cart-path project for all 27 holes. We plan to rebuild several ladies tees. We will begin a program to add irrigation to the unirrigated rough areas a few holes at a time. In 2000 we will resume a 15-year tree-replacement program that was stopped in 1993. The inn just completed renovations to all the hotel rooms. In 2000 the pool will be replaced with new pool and spa and new landscaping. The main entrance will be redesigned, rerouting the road and adding new landscaping.

Acreage under maintenance: 220 acres of turf. **Greens:** 3.5 Acres, average 4,500 sq. ft.; Tifdwarf and 328. We raise the height of cut in the summer; green speed goals 8-9 in the winter, 7-8 in the summer; overseed with *Poa trivialis* at 20-25 lb./1,000 sq. ft. **Tees:** 3 acres Everglades bermudagrass and Tifway 419. HOC 3/8 inch; overseed with perennial rye at 15 - 20 lb./1,000 sq. ft. **Fairways:** 35 acres Everglades bermudagrass and Tifway 419; HOC 9/16 inch year round. Overseed with perennial rye at 350 lb./acre. **Roughs:** 175 acres — 60 Everglades and Tifway 419 cut at 1.25 inch all year and 115 natural rough and bahiagrass cut at 2.5 inch all year. Overseed only the slopes around tees and greens with perennial rye at 300 lb./acre.

Bunkers/Native Areas: 70 bunkers, sand type 37M & 37C. All are machine raked with a Cushman-Ransome unit with standard tines and flaps. Pot bunkers are hand raked. There are 2 acres of pine straw native area.

Waterways: 28 lakes and ponds covering 20 acres. Lake management by Aquagenix. Wanted professional contractor responsible for maintaining water quality with manatees in our canal.

Irrigation source: Surface water and two wells. Main station is PSI surface-water system with 75- and 30-hp pumps. The two well stations each have 30-hp pumps. The control system for the 500 heads is Toro Osmac. We have fertigation capability for wetting agents and fertilizing, but it is not used very often.

Staff: Including the superintendent, 15 full time and 1 part time, including 4 landscape staff. Average weekly budget 700 hours straight time. Assistant superintendent John Shuff; shop manager Cliff Ford; assistant equipment technician Bob Slanker; part time administrative assistant and equipment operator Alice Greenman; landscape supervisor Rose Humenik. Special posthumous recognition of our irrigation technician, William Brooks, a 38-year veteran employee who recently passed away.

Plantation Inn Wildlife: Alligators, bald eagles, cormorants, coots, egrets, fox, herons, ibis, manatees, osprey, sandhill cranes, wild hogs, wood stork and many varieties of fish. For safety reasons we are building an osprey nesting tower so we can remove the dead pine tree that they have been using. A unique feature of the Plantation Inn is that our guests can view manatees in the canals behind the hotel that connect to the Crystal River.

and admits to following the crowd for awhile.

"I used to beat myself to death trying to keep the greens shaved down and rolling faster and faster, keeping up with the Joneses around the state. Then I realized what our resort clientele really wanted was just good, consistent greens.

"Six years ago I did a study of greens heights and scoring. For four months we tracked handicaps after I raised the height of cut slightly. On average, for men and women, their handicaps dropped three shots. Some complained that their putts were coming up short, but they were tapping in for pars and bogeys instead of fighting four-footers they had blown past the cup.

"It taught me a lesson. I want to have people walking off our course with a smile on their faces having shot the best round of their lives. Those people will be back. We strive to keep our green speeds in the 8 to 9 range depending on the season."

One of Oberlander's challenges on the greens is the turf itself. The Plantation Inn rebuilt the greens in 1987 and ended up with a bad batch of Tifdwarf like so many greens built in that era. Now plagued with off-type patches on the greens, they're always playable but their appearance is subject to the weather conditions.

"The off-type spots don't like hot weather," he said. "The closer we get to 100 degrees, the more they go off color. Sometimes you think you've got hot spots, but as soon as the temperature drops back down to the lower 90s they green up. Of course they don't like verticutting or close mowing either, which makes a case for raising the height of cut."

Like moderation in heights of cut, Oberlander has made a conscious effort to return to basics in turf management.

"I have seen a lot of superintendents, especially the younger ones, trying every new product that comes down the pike

I used to beat myself to death trying to keep the greens shaved down and rolling faster and faster... Then I realized what our resort clientele really wanted was just good, consistent greens.

in an effort to grow the perfect turfgrass. For one thing it just isn't going happen. Mother Nature is just too fickle for us to be perfect.

"Instead, I concentrate on being playable, not perfect. Maybe that's just maturity kicking in. Anyhow, I have gotten

South Florida Grassing, Inc

Over 35 Years in the Grassing Industry

419 • TifEagle

Sod, Sprigs and Rolls available

- We provide reworking and planting services for fairways, tees and greens
- Our grass is grown in Hobe Sound on gassed, sand-based soil
- Hydro-mulching, grassing and mulching also available

TifSport

(561) 546-4191



Certified Producer

Southern Seed
Certification Association

800-483-4279

Tifdwarf

(561) 746-7816



Number 4 on the Lagoon nine. Photo by Daniel Zelazek. The water hazards on the course are interconnected and can rise and fall with the nearby Crystal River. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

away from slow-release fertilizers. I watch my grass clippings caught by the greens mowers and I apply light rates of soluble fertilizer as needed. Bermudagrass likes to be fed. The days of lean and mean are over. Consistent, pleasing and playable are my goals."

This year has been a tester for everyone not just Oberlander. The wet, stormy summer gave way to a cooler, windy fall and with it comes a myriad turf management challenges and a constant learning experience.

"I thought this year we were going to have the smoothest overseeding ever. We got the seed out in two days according to plan and three days later it rained just right. Just as I settled back to watch the seed pop, the winds began to blow 15 to 20 mph every day.

"The seed started germinating, but it seemed only in a seven- to eight-foot band around the greens perimeters. The middles of the greens were very sparse

looking and I was beginning to panic. Finally, they began filling in, but it was weird.

"The only thing I can relate to the cause was the wind. I think the sandier USGA-spec mix under the greens was drying out too fast while the native soil near the edges had more moisture, making the germination rates different."

Oberlander and his staff keeps tabs on the golf course by working a variable schedule consisting of 10 hours Monday, 8 hours Tuesday through Thursday and 6 hours Friday. Each employee works a rotating weekend shift every third week.

Oberlander supervises one of the weekend crews, but generally stops in every weekend to check the course and irrigation set up to monitor changing weather conditions. He classifies himself as a "working superintendent" and will often be the service or set-up man to see the course from a different perspective than just riding through.

With a staff of 16 people when he's at full complement, Oberlander has to stretch the manpower to take care of the whole project. Four of his 16 crew members have the hotel, condos, villas and golf course landscape beds as their first priority. Sometimes for special events or if he's short-handed he has to steal them to prepare the golf course first.

Besides his commitment to the Plantation Inn, Oberlander has dedicated himself to serving his profession through extensive service to his professional associations. He is a past board member and president of the West Coast GCSA and he was a founder and the first president of the Seven Rivers GCSA, which split off from the West Coast group.

Oberlander has also served for seven years as the chairman of the highly successful Envirotron Classic fundraiser for turf research held annually at the World Woods Golf Club.

Oberlander credits his success to his



Number 11 green Championsip Course in the foreground. In the background, parallel holes dominate the parkland layout that winds through many of the trees planted by Oberlander himself. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

early involvement in the associations.

"In this business you never stop learning. Attending meetings and being involved in what's going on is one of the best educations a superintendent can get."

"The business has changed a lot over the years. I think golf course superintendents overall are getting more respect, but the stricter regulations and higher expectations are burning people out faster. I really feel sorry for the younger superintendents these days. I think they are under a lot of pressure with so many people looking over their shoulders."

Nurtured by his love for golf and the desire to create and be part of a harmonious working environment, Oberlander says hopefully one day down the road he might like to own his own golf course. At 44 years old, Oberlander has plenty of time to pursue that dream. Meanwhile, he's enjoying working and living on Florida's Nature Coast.

Seven Rivers Chapter

History: The Seven Rivers Chapter was formed in 1991 to provide travel relief for West Coast members who lived well north of the Tampa-St. Petersburg area. Named for the seven rivers flowing in Citrus County, the chapter serves superintendents from the Gainesville-Ocala-Brooksville area.

New Approach: In trying to avoid some of the problems of big chapters, the Seven Rivers GCSA took a different approach to membership. They established a 3:1 superintendent to vendor membership ratio. Vendor memberships are by company, not individuals, and the companies must be members of the Florida Turfgrass Association. Only one person from the company may attend meetings, except for a couple of special meetings during the year. The companies are charged a higher dues rate, but they are not asked for any other support the rest of the year. Beverages and refreshments are paid by the chapter from the funds of all supporting vendors. It must work. There is a waiting list to join.

Founding members: Jeff Hayden, Glenn Oberlander, Tim Sever, Dave Hoggard and Stuart Bozeman were among the first to meet and discuss forming the new chapter. Legend has it that Glenn was called from the room for a phone call and while he was away, the others voted him in as the first president. Glenn swears it was a set up.

Activities: The Seven Rivers Chapter has distinguished itself for all time by the organization and operating of the annual Envirotron Classic each April at the World Woods of Golf Pine Barrens and Rolling Oaks courses. With the generous support of the World Woods ownership, which donates the use of the courses, the Seven Rivers GCSA has been able to raise nearly \$272,000 for equipment and research at the University of Florida. Glenn Oberlander has been the chairman and chief whip for the event all seven years.

Officers for 1999-2000: Paul Illgen, World Woods of Golf, president; Bob Marrino, Magnolia Valley GC, vice president; Buddy Keene, Gainesville CC, external vice president and secretary; Stuart Bozeman, Seven Rivers G&CC, treasurer. There are currently 112 members of the Seven Rivers GCSA.