



**Number 12**  
**Par 3**  
**Photo by Daniel Zelazek**



# *Olde Hickory G&CC Sharing Space with Old Florida*

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

In the booming southwest region of Florida, Olde Hickory G&CC is an anomaly. This low-density community of only 561 residential units is located just west of I-75 near the Daniels Road exit. This combination gated community and golf association offers a unique opportunity for its homeowners and equity members to enjoy both a challenging golf course and a slice of old native Florida at the same time.

While many developments of this size normally contain as many as 900 residential units and line both sides of the golf course holes, Olde Hickory has homes usually on only one side of each hole, thus providing ample access to Florida's natural beauty and wildlife. The 1991 Ron Garl-designed golf course winds its way through piney woods and cypress wetlands giving residents ample opportunity to commune with nature either from their back porches or on the



*The par 4, 400 yard 7th hole with a crowned fairway and a lake for drainage and runoff retention. Golf holes ring the property and transition the development into the wilderness. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

### Wildlife Inventory

**Alligators**, gray and fox squirrels, otters, wild turkeys, bald eagles, ospreys, sandhill cranes, wood storks, ibis, herons, egrets, snakes, turtles, and a variety of waterfowl.

**Bird nesting boxes**, a bat box and a turkey feeder have been installed. The wooden bluebird boxes had to be replaced with pvc houses because the woodpeckers would enlarge the entrance holes for their own use.

golf course. Many residents enjoy early morning and late afternoon bass fishing in the 41 acres of lakes.

Superintendent John Stach said when he first came to Olde Hickory five years ago, one of the biggest challenges was to explain and demonstrate the benefits of the natural state of the golf course.

"It took a little convincing to show the members that not every inch of the golf course had to be manicured, potted and pruned to be beautiful," Stach said. "And they have come to appreciate the wildflowers, aquatic plants, native grasses, cypress trees and the wildlife that shares the community because of the abundant natural areas."

Stach is a self-proclaimed naturalist who enjoys hiking in the woods and wetlands during the dry season. "I mainly

go in to monitor invasive exotic plants, but also just to look around. One of the things that is apparent is how our surface water movements are affected by development not only by surrounding properties but even our own development as it was completely built out. It is a hard thing for people to realize the potential impact we have on the environment and how we must be careful about what we do."

Stach said the impact was never more evident than during the recent drought.

"We were in Phase Two water restrictions this past summer which meant we could water tees, fairways and roughs only three times per week, but we could still water greens daily. We were lucky compared to those farther north who were limited to watering greens three



## John Stach



**Originally from:** Sarasota

**Family:** Fiance Andria Ferrarini

**Education:** 1995 Lake City Community College, AS in golf course operations

**Employment history:** 1993 OJT at University Park CC, Sarasota; 1994 OJT at Tara G&CC, Bradenton; 1995-97 assistant golf course superintendent Olde Hickory G&CC; 1997 - present superintendent Olde Hickory G&CC.

**Professional affiliations and awards:** Member GCSAA, FGCSA, FTGA; current president of the Calusa Chapter of the Florida GCSA.

**Mentors:** My grandfather, who loved the game of golf. If he were around today he would like to brag about his grandson being a golf course superintendent. Joe Fenner, the former superintendent at Olde Hickory, for helping me work for my goal of becoming a head superintendent. Others who helped me along the way: Jeff Keech, Andy Burmester and Howard Povey.

**Memorable moments:** College graduation made my family proud. It was good for them to see I was finally getting out of the house. Becoming a superintendent. I love what I do. Helping to found the Calusa Chapter and watching it grow.

**Goals:** My first goal was to graduate from college, since I never planned to attend after high school.

**Advice:** Respect your position, members and employees. They are only human you know. Many of their concerns can come from not being informed on situations you have to deal with. Communication is your best tool. Know how to make it work for you

**Work philosophy:** Since I like to work outdoors more than being in the office I really enjoy riding the golf course and communicating with members and educating them on our daily, monthly and seasonal operations. It is funny how our operations must vary with the weather, so I am constantly asked to give my forecast for the day. I feel like I should take a course in meteorology to help me make more accurate forecasts.

**Hobbies and interests:** Mostly scuba diving, offshore spear fishing and being in my boat. Other past times include hunting, golfing and watching the Gators play football.

*It's time for people to realize that we are trained professionals.*

*We are not just mindless grass growers and blatant water users. We are ecologists and biologists and resource managers.*

times per week and tees, fairways and roughs only once per week. I support the idea of changing restrictions to a percentage reduction of our daily average instead of a day of the week method.

"It's time for people to realize that we are trained professionals. We are not just mindless grass growers and blatant water users. We are ecologists and biologists and resource managers. Because of the water issues and restrictions that handcuff us, I try to manage our irrigation very tightly so that when we have to cut back it is not a big shock to the turfgrass."

In keeping with the natural setting of Olde Hickory and his sensitivity to the environment, Stach maintains spray buffers around the lakes to minimize any impact to the water quality. In addition, he uses Integrated Pest Management practices to apply pesticides only when and where necessary. He also encourages member participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary program by providing materials for constructing bird nesting boxes.

"We have several volunteer members who take the materials and construct the nesting boxes and then make them available to other members who want to install them in their yards along the golf course," he says. "We had one gentleman install a bat box on the 13th hole



## Equipment Inventory

**Mowers** - Greens: Jacobsen Greens King V mowers. Tees: Jacobsen Greens King IV mowers. Fairways: Jacobsen LF 128's. Roughs: 2-Jacobsen Tri-Kings and 1-Jacobsen 5111 and Kubota rotary deck mowers.

**Other** - Terra Topper and Olathe top dressers. Lely fertilizer spreaders: 2 @ 2,500 lb and 1 @ 500 lb capacity. Kubota 4800 tractor with loader/backhoe. Kubota 4030 and Kubota 2650 all purpose tractors. Six Jacobsen Hauler utility vehicles.

and we have a Moultrie turkey feeder on the 11th hole.

"We have had to make some modifications to the nesting box program. It seems the woodpeckers like to wallow out the entrance holes on the bluebird boxes. At first we lined the holes with a copper sheeting, but we have now gone to using 8" pvc pipe nesting boxes, which have proven successful on other courses in the area."

Stach has seen otters playing in some of the water hazards and seen either bobcat or panther tracks in the bunkers.

"We're not sure what it was but something was playing havoc with residents' potted plants and even knocking down some drain spouts for a while," he reported. "A few years ago we had to have a trapper come out and relocate nine wild pigs. That was a real revelation to some of our members from up north who had no idea of the extent of the wildlife in the area."

Stach says that he gets a tremendous

amount of cooperation from the members when it comes to policing the course on matters of golf etiquette.

"The members are very protective of their home course and do a good job of filling divots and fixing ball marks and reminding visitors to do the same," he said. "There is some discussion about creating an adopt-a-hole program where the members would go out and repair divots and ball marks on the area of the course behind their homes."

Stach is able to communicate current and vital information to his members through a community news cable TV channel.

"This channel plays music and flashes a continuous set of messages throughout the day. The club announces social events and meetings at the club, the pro shop announces sales and golf events and I relay information on rain-day closings and maintenance procedures.

"For instance, if we are have a bulk fertilizer application or fairway aerifica-

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The 3rd hole is a 389 yard par 4 flanked by one of the 12 lakes on property. The aquatic plantings provide cover for fish and many residents enjoy fishing the lakes. The yellow and green post in the left center is a traffic control reminder for carts to return to the cart path when approaching the green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



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## Olde Hickory Golf and Country Club

**Location:** Ft. Myers

**Ownership:** Member equity

**Playing Policy:** Semi-private, 18 holes.

**Yardage:** 6,601 yards. Par 72. Course Rating/Slope Rating: Men - 72.5/135; Ladies - 73.1/131.

**Designed by:** Ron Garl. Construction by: Golf Form. Opened in 1991.

**Management Team:** general manager Philip "Bo" White; club president Art Aspengren; head golf professional Peter Baxter; green chairman Norman Langlois; John Stach golf course superintendent.

**Average Rounds per year:** 52,000 - 54,000. Avg 280-300 rounds/day in season.

60-70/day in summer. Course promotes outside events during off season.

**Total turf acreage** under maintenance: 95 acres.

**Greens:** Average size: 7,750 Total 3.75 acres; turf - Tifdwarf; height of cut: .170" in summer - .150" in season. Overseed: Lesco's ProAm Poa trivialis@ 12 lbs/1,000 sq. ft.. Green Speed goal: Medium (7-8) at member request.

**Tees:** 3.0 acres of Tifway 419; HOC = 1/2" summer - 3/8" season; Overseeded with Perennial rye blend (Three Way) @ 18 lbs/1000.

**Fairways:** 25 acres of Tifway 419; HOC = 9/16" summer - 1/2" season. Overseeded Perennial rye (Three Way) @ 400 lbs/Acre.

**Roughs:** 63 acres of Tifway 419; HOC = 1" - 1 1/4". Overseeded with Perennial rye (Three Way) @ 200 lbs/Acre.

**Bunkers:** 57 bunkers with #200 screen sand. Mechanically rake all bunkers with Smithco Sandstar Rake with standard tines & flaps.

**Waterways/Ponds:** Twelve lakes covering 41 acres. Contract lake maintenance. Maintain turf spray buffers around lakes. Additional lake aeration systems planned.

**Irrigation:** Water source - wells. Equipment: Flowtronex VFD; 580 - Toro 650 and 670 heads. Wall to wall coverage design. Controls: Rainbird Freedom system.

**Fertilization:** Used as a supplement to granular program. Liquid 4-0-12 blend in summer; 8-0-8 and 16-0-4 blends and 30-0-0 in winter.

**Staff:** Total staff including Supt. = 22 full time budgeted/18 currently on staff. Includes one part time mechanic. Avg weekly hours budgeted: 40 hrs straight time/6 hrs OT year round.

**Key Personnel:** Assistant supt. Matthew Nieder; shop manager Laurence Asta; assist. mechanic Roland Dutcher; spray technician Miguel Aguirre; irrigation technician Mario Camarillo; course detail specialist Lawrence Sweeney.

**Major Renovations/ Ongoing Projects:** Cart path additions on holes 4, 9, 10; Hand removal of invasive exotic plants in native areas; Discussing possible greens renovation plans to improve soil profile, bunker drainage and putting surface grass.

**Special circumstances:** With high golf traffic and no continuous cart paths, turf wear and traffic control is a constant challenge. Induced drainage problems as natural surface flow is altered by surrounding developments.

**Communications:** Daily pre-shift meetings with crew; weekly staff meeting; monthly safety and operational crew meetings; monthly club newsletter article; current maintenance information posted on community cable TV channel.

**Cultural/Fertility Programs:** Greens - Aerify 4x/yr with 5/8" hollow tines and 2x in season with 5/16" solid tines; Fairways are verticut deep 1x/yr and aerified 3x/yr along with tees and roughs. Alternate biweekly granular and liquid fertilizer apps on greens and bimonthly on tees, fairways and roughs including Five major granular applications (contract out Fall fertilizer plus Dimension herbicide application) do others in house with tractor mounted Lely spreaders.



Olde Hickory Superintendent John Stach enjoys offshore spear fishing. Photo provided by John Stach.

## In Case You Didn't Know...

Here are some things you might not know about our cover story superintendent.

1. **Car:** 2000 Dodge Quad Cab. I'd like to own an Impala SS.
2. **Last good movie I saw:** American Pie
3. **I stay home to watch:** Gator football
4. **I've been reading:** Turf trade magazines
5. **Favorite meal:** Steak and lobster with baked potato and green beans.
6. **Favorite performers:** Jimmy Buffet, The Eagles, Alabama
7. **Prized possession:** My boat
8. **Personal heroes:** Everyone who gave their life for our country. There are a lot of heroes who were never spoken for.
9. **Nobody knows that I:** Had a hard time in college
10. **I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:** Getting along with anyone
11. **If I could do it over:** I would have tried harder in grade school and worked toward better grades.
12. **I'd give anything to meet:** Jacques Cousteau
13. **My fantasy is:** To scuba dive The Great Barrier Reef of Australia
14. **The one thing I can't stand:** A member will ask me something about the course and I don't know what they're referring to
15. **If I could change one thing about myself:** I'd like to be more organized
16. **The words that best describe me:** One of those people who make the most out of anything.

*I always treat every member's inquiry, idea or concern with respect. I acknowledge what they have to say and try to give a positive response in every case. Ideas that merit further discussion are passed along to the Greens Committee...*

tion or verticutting coming up, we can alert residents to keep their windows closed to prevent any blowing dust from getting in their homes. The close proximity of the homes does create some challenges and we have to keep an eye out for sprinkler heads getting out of adjustment, especially on windy days."

All in all, Stach says the members are very supportive and respectful of his efforts to achieve 100 percent member satisfaction. He says the key to gaining that respect is practicing good communication and being visible.

"I always treat every member's inquiry, idea or concern with respect. I acknowledge what they have to say and try to give a positive response in every case. Ideas that merit further discussion are passed along to the Greens Committee, especially if it is something that is not in the current budget.

"Other times I have to explain why a particular suggestion doesn't fit into the programs we have adopted for a variety of reasons. In any case, I think it's best to be visible and answer questions directly and not hide in the office."

To accommodate the nearly one thousand resident golfing members in the winter season, Stach and his crew start work at 6 a.m. on most days, but will adjust to 5 a.m. for early-morning shot-

gun tournaments.

"Because pace of play is so critical and can be an issue," he said, "we have No. 1 and No. 10 tee times for our normal daily operation. It means we have to prepare both nines simultaneously in the morning, but we have found and convinced the members that we can put out more golfers by using the crossover tee times. It helps remind the golfers they have to make the turn on time."

Stach and his staff have also made some modifications to the course to help in the pace of play. They created a bailout area to the right of the 220-yard, par-three 8th hole. Rated as one of the toughest par 3s in the area, players face water on the left and woods on the right. Installation of bulkheading and a sandy waste area created a natural "catcher's mitt" to help avoid prolonged searches in the woods for errant shots.

On other holes, low-lying turf areas along the homeowners' lots and unmowable outer roughs of the course

that held water had become mosquito breeding ponds. They have been drained and mulched with pine straw to create accessible natural areas. The areas still serve their original intent of surface drainage, but now the water percolates into a drain pipe and sump and is pumped into a nearby lake.

Golfers can find their balls and play moves along more easily.

One of the reasons Stach can devote a lot of time to member satisfaction, communication and inspecting course conditions is his partnership with his assistant superintendent Matt Nieder.

Nieder actually graduated from Lake City two years before Stach. After an internship overseas on a grow-in of a course in Turkey and a year-and-a-half tour as an assistant superintendent at the Cypress Greens GC in Sun City Center, Nieder was lured away to work as an area manager for Smallwood Landscaping in Naples.

He spent five years with Smallwood

*The adage that there is never a dumb question is absolutely true. You are in a learning mode. Never be afraid to ask questions. Also, be open-minded to all options that come your way.*



Matt Nieder  
assistant  
superintendent

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Another view of the short par 4, 10th hole showing how golf courses provide diverse "edge" habitats by combining open spaces, native grass areas and deep woods. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

rising to the rank of operations manager in charge of all field operations. With his golf course background calling, he learned of the assistant opening at Olde Hickory a year ago and took the job.

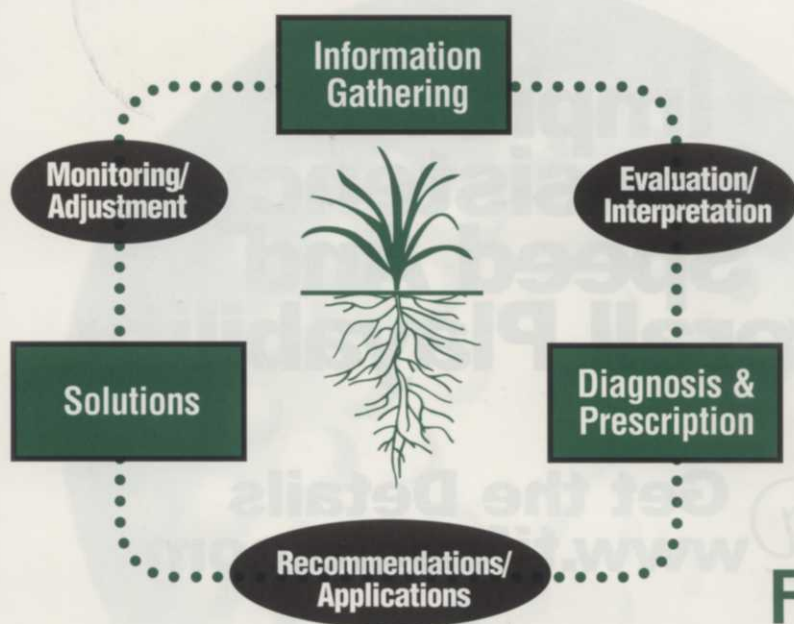
Nieder has no regrets about leaving the golf course work to learn more about landscaping. In fact he feels it has helped sweeten his resume when it comes time to look for his own superintendent position.

"In Turkey, it was amazing what we had to work with," Nieder recalls. "It was very hard to have a consistent turf management program because fertilizers and chemicals were hard to come by. We had a soil pH around 8 and no sulfur to apply to mitigate the alkalinity. While it was difficult, it was also beautiful country. It looked a lot like the foothills of Colorado with mountains, woods, and streams with trout."

Since it was obvious that Nieder is Stach's right-hand man, I asked what advice he had for assistants working their way up the ladder.

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*The view of hole #13 from the tee area shows the benefits of the low density development at Olde Hickory. The residential areas at Olde Hickory border the course on one side and provide panoramic views of the course and the native landscape while not being intrusive. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

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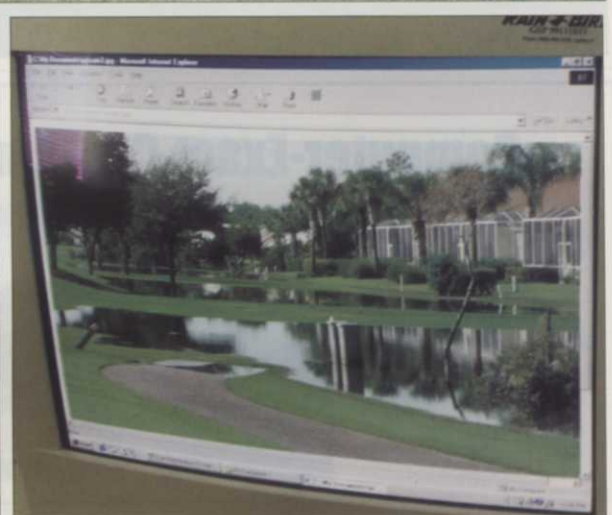
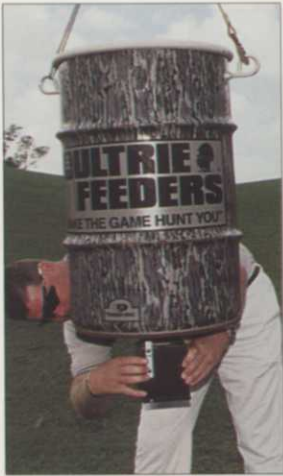
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Clockwise from upper left: Moultrie turkey feeder behind 11th green; flock of white ibis forages wetland; digital images document course conditions; another variation on traffic control; highly visible, color-coded yardage markers; bat box donated and installed by local resident. Photos by Joel Jackson



The Olde Hickory clubhouse overlooks the green on the par 5, 589 yard finishing hole. Architect Ron Garl flanked the green with angled railroad ties for a different look. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

*...not every inch of the golf course had to be manicured, potted and pruned to be beautiful... And (the members) have come to appreciate the... wildlife that shares the community because of the abundant natural areas.*

"The adage that there is never a dumb question is absolutely true," he said. "You are in a learning mode. Never be afraid to ask questions. Also, be open-minded to all options that come your way. I had to overcome the fear factor that if I got out of the golf business, it would be hard to get back in. My tenure with Smallwood only enhanced my value as a manager with a broader range of experience and knowledge."

Privately Stach told me that he delegates as much as he can to Nieder.

"There are a lot of ways to achieve the goals of a maintenance program. I believe in setting the goals and then letting Matt make the necessary decisions to achieve them rather than telling him what to do. That way he can learn more for himself and test his abilities with me there for guidance."

Whatever the chemistry formula is, it must be working. Stach says most of the crew has been there since the course opened and he says the members have even made it a point to tell him how they always see the crew working instead of sitting around in a bull session when the boss isn't around. In turn, the members donate to a Christmas fund for distribution to the staff. The club hosts an annual Christmas party for the employees and one of the members dresses up as Santa Claus and passes out gifts to the children. Stach also has several crew lunches throughout the year as a thank you for their consistent and loyal service.

Olde Hickory is perhaps one of the best examples of the blending of inevitable growth and development while still maintaining a strong link to the old native Florida wilderness.