



 *Jake Gaither GC*  
*Hole Number 3*  
*Photo by Daniel Zelazek*





TEE TIME IN TALLAHASSEE

# Twenty-Seven Holes of Municipal Golf

*By Joel Jackson, CGCS*

## Location. Location. Location.

Tallahassee is an island of golf opportunity located at the point where the state's peninsula takes a left turn into the panhandle. With the exception of the state capitol, which has about a baker's dozen courses in the metropolitan area, golf courses are few and far between from the Gainesville/Lake City area until you get to Panama City and points west.

The good news about operating a golf course in northwest Florida is that there haven't been any watering restrictions during the last drought period. The bad news is that just about every weather front passes through the area so there can be too much cloudy weather and plenty of cold snaps. But Mother Nature is fickle everywhere. FGCSA Coastal Plains Chapter President Jeff Heggen told me during my interview visit in January, "Today marks the third frost this week. Last winter we only had two all year."

Heggen oversees the maintenance on the two city golf courses; the 18-hole Hilaman Park G.C. and the 9-hole Jake Gaither G.C. Both are located on some hilly terrain which provides great views of the course and interesting golf shots. The courses also serve as part of the city's flood control system for storm-water runoff and retention. During unusually heavy rain events, several holes on the Gaither course can become impassable and the course has to shut down. We'll talk about water-quality issues a little later.



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The City of Tallahassee has been in the municipal golf business since 1956 with the opening of the Jake Gaither Golf Course, which was named in honor of the legendary head football coach of the Florida A & M Rattlers. In 1981, the city purchased the Winewood G.C., also in south Tallahassee, and began making affordable and accessible golf a serious part of its parks and recreation program.

Traditional golf course business and turf management practices don't always easily blend into the policies and procedures and perceptions of how government must conduct its business when it operates with taxpayer's money. Even job titles and descriptions can become awkward when trying to compare apples with apples.

For example, in the golf world Jeff Heggen would be called a golf course superintendent, but in city terminology he's the supervisor of golf maintenance. Jeff's boss Bill Zimmer would be considered a director of golf over multi-course facilities, but in government-speak, he's called the superintendent of golf courses. And Jeff has "foremen" instead of "assistant superintendents." Regardless of the job titles, the duties are all familiar to the golf world.

While parks and recreation facilities play a big role in the lives of the citizens of any city, the budget allocations to these departments are often very conservative, so municipal golf course superintendents are some of the most frugal and innovative managers in the world when it comes to stretching the dollars to the maximum. Superintendents like Heggen might like to have more frills and eye candy (landscaping, etc.) but they opt for healthy turf and good playing conditions instead.

Heggen says, "We'd all like to dress up the course with annual and ornamental beds for the atmosphere, but all those things take more labor hours and maintenance dollars. The bottom line is good greens, tees and fairways first. Our goal is to make incremental improvements over time as warranted by increased revenues and customer response. We are constantly balancing cultural practices and pest control applications with considerations for the disruption of play."

Even though municipal budgets can be tight, Heggen says there's always a bright side to every situation, "Disposable income might be limited, but we have an ace in the hole when it comes to other resources. We have an engineering department for construction emergencies and the rest of the Parks and Recreation landscape equipment, like mowers and manpower, can be tapped for duty if any of our equipment is out of service or we get behind in our schedule due to weather events and storm damage."

Another positive aspect to being part of the city administration is ongoing employee training. Heggen says, "Sometimes the human resources training timetable isn't in sync with our special golf events preparation or turf maintenance plans, but that's not a big problem.

"While we have our regular staff and crew meetings for daily and seasonal operations, the job and personnel evaluation programs help to make us stay on top of our training and coaching responsibilities. Documentation, accountability and follow-up are the keys to success. The city does require continuing education credits for foremen level and up, so we have internal programs and well as industry topics to complete to maintain our progress in the system."

The last awkward topic is purchasing. It takes getting used to the government bid process method of purchasing because of the time lag in processing price quotes and getting approvals versus the booking of contract services for specific dates for minimal disruption to the course for the customers like contract verticutting or aerification and bulk fertilizer applications or Chipco Choice slit injections.

Heggen says, "It can be cumbersome at times, but you learn to really plan ahead and work with vendors on possible date changes if the paperwork isn't processed on time. Once you've gone through the process a few times you get used to what it takes to make it work for your maintenance programs. For example, I try to create a flexible range of acceptable fertilizer formulations that will be good for the turf and still allow the vendors and purchasing agents to submit and consider bids. A superintendent always has to learn how to adapt to get things done."

Heggen's adaptability was put to the test when he came on board in 1998 as a consultant to help finish the renovation to the Jake Gaither course. Soon afterward he was promoted to supervisor (superintendent) and was involved in the renovation of the Hilaman Park course. Jeff was no stranger to Tallahassee: his mother was a former city councilwoman and mayor, and Jeff got his AA from Tallahassee Community College (1980) and took various business management classes at Florida State University.

Heggen was set on being a business major, but found his way to golf when he moved to Ft. Lauderdale with his mother in 1982 and began doing odd jobs on a course called Holiday Springs. He worked on the crew from morning to early afternoon and then he picked up range balls in the late afternoon, and then hit balls or played golf till sundown. His handicap went from 17 to 4 in eight months. Now Heggen tries to play at least twice a month but he admits to teeing it up only nine times last year. About his game he says, "The good news is my game never changes. I'm obviously not a 4 handicap any more, but I always shoot 85-86 when I play.

It's weird and at the same time wonderful to be working here. I learned to play golf on this course with my dad when it was called Winewood, and now I'm back taking care of it. Life is strange."

Heggen's golf maintenance journey began in Ft. Lauderdale, but he got off track a little when he came back to Tallahassee in the early 1990s and began working for George Unglaub, who owned several Gulf Oil - now BP

stations - in Tallahassee.

Heggen says, "I was headed for a management career with Mr. Unglaub's company, when my promotion hit a snag. I took on some part-time work at the Hilaman Park course about that time, and in the process of discussing future options with Mike Osley, the superintendent back then, I learned about the program in golf operations at Lake City. I had worked hard for Mr. Unglaub and he appreciated my efforts so much, that he paid my tuition to pursue my AS degree. I continued to work for him on weekends during my schooling. I will always be grateful for his help and support."

Heggen spent one year at Hilaman Park as an assistant (foreman) after graduation from Lake City, and then he moved to the St. Marco G.C. in Alpharetta, GA for two years before joining the International Golf Management's team at the Rolling Hills C.C. in Longwood. The Rolling Hills club, infamous for running through management companies like a dose of salts, did not renew its contract with IGM, and Heggen took on the role as troubleshooter for IGM and spent time at courses in Apopka, Melbourne and Valdosta, GA in 1996-97.

Heggen says living out of a suitcase got old after a while, and he discussed possible options with IGM. About this time Heggen was getting married and becoming an instant dad with three stepsons, so he wanted something a little more stable. IGM just didn't have any permanent openings at the time and Heggen amicably parted company with IGM, when the Jake Gaither renovation job became available with the city. Who says you can never go back?

Heggen said, "I've enjoyed being part of this great profession and a career with a variety of experiences, and I really enjoy where I'm working now. The city is supportive of the golf courses and has made a commitment to have good quality golf for our citizens. Randy Trousdell, director of the parks and recreation has been with the department for 30 years, and he has seen the progress we have made and he has been a great help and influence in making it possible. I would be content to make my career in the department as well."

But Heggen has lots to do and a long way to go before collecting his gold watch. Right now he is focusing on water quality issues on the golf courses and took the Water Quality Management and Lake and Aquatic Plant Management seminars at the GCSAA Conference last February in Atlanta.

Heggen explained, "We only have two lakes (14 acres) and they are on the Hilaman Park course, but those lakes serve a twofold purpose. They are holding ponds for surface runoff from the surrounding residential and commercial areas and they are our irrigation lakes. We use surface water for irrigation and only supplement with well water when the lakes get too low.

Consequently, whatever has washed into the storm drains is what we are putting on the turf. The good news is that, according to regular water sampling, the water leaving the golf



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*View from behind the 154-yard, par-3 12th hole. The tree-lined 15th fairway is on the left. Photo by Daneil Zelazek.*

course property is in better shape than the water coming in, and we want to improve those numbers. We are investigating lake aeration systems and ways to further minimize any impacts from our maintenance operations utilizing aquatic plants and best management practices.

The availability and quality of irrigation water is always one of the key components in turf management, but so are soil conditions and shade. Heggen said, "During the renovation of the courses I got to see what was under the grass I was growing. On the 15th hole you could follow one of the irrigation ditch lines and identify five different soil types. So we have a mix of materials to deal with from sandy loam to red clay. The fairways are aerified at least two times a year and the tees three times.

Along the southern and eastern boundaries of the course are tall apartment buildings and mature trees, the five holes on the golf course immediately adjacent to them have to be managed to avert stress from low sunlight levels, especially from fall to spring when the sun is lower in the sky. Heggen uses walk mow-

ers on the affected greens to reduce the mechanical wear factor and they have thinned the canopies of all the trees on the golf course property.

With an average of three employees per nine holes and a tight budget, Heggen keeps a close watch on the fertility program. "We keep the turf on the lean and mean side, but always thick and healthy. We can't afford to have growth spurts and excess clippings to clean up. We do a lot of foliar feeding and supplement with granular fertilizers monthly on the greens. We also use greens grade Milorganite at 3/4 lb/1,000 sq ft during overseeding and transition."

Heggen describes his pest-control programs as reactive as opposed to preventive. "We treat only in response to observable problems. I have budgeted to treat about 50 acres a year with Chipco Choice on all 27 holes. We generally have to do the tee and green complexes each year, but since you can often get good residual control with the product the remaining acres are treated based on monitoring and map-

ping of problem areas. No product ever gives 100 percent control, so we might follow up on hot spots with Orthene plus Impede during full-moon cycles."

Full moons and moonlight lead us back to the municipal golf courses' reason for existence: to serve the public's desire to play golf. No segment of the golf playing population is as gung-ho for the game than John Q. Public. Heggen said, "Our official first tee time is 7 a.m., but I have seen folks teeing it up just after 6 a.m. They would go over to the tennis courts along No. 1 fairway and turn on the court lights so they could get a head start on the field. To aid and abet the earlybirds, we have street lights that illuminate No. 1 green and No. 2 fairway. We had to put a lock on the tennis court lights, but you've got to admire their determination for the game."

Heggen is also pleased that the recent renovation of the course in 1999 by architect Chip Powell provided Tallahassee golfers with a great public layout. "On a 6,400-yard golf course, Powell did a great job of giving us at





*Variable pin placements and the elevation change on the 164-yard, par-3 8th hole make for fun and challenging golf. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

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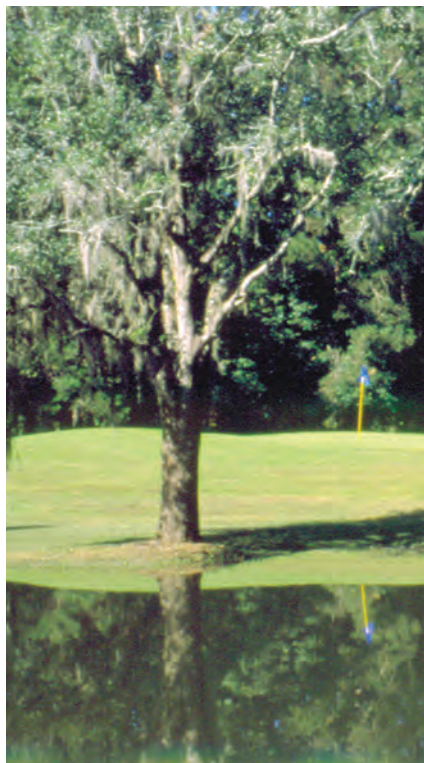
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View from behind the first hole on the Jake Gaither golf course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

least two pin locations on every green that could challenge the best golfers while not increasing the maintenance costs to maintain the course. Our goal is consistent green speed from the first hole till the last putt drops on #18. We strive for daily green speeds of 8.0 to 8.5, but are able to go to 10 plus when needed for college tournaments or any other special event."

The biggest event of the year for Tallahassee's Parks and Recreation Department is The 11th Annual 5G's Tournament in April. The event was renamed this year as the Charles Billings' 5G Tournament in memory of the late City Commissioner Charles Billings. 5G's stands for Greater, Gaither Golf and Games Gathering. In a press release before his death, City Commissioner Charles Billings said this year's event was being dedicated to promoting golf for juniors and women of all ages. Billings went on to say that, "The 5G's is one of the largest and most integrated golf events in the country, and a great way to attract players from all over the Big Bend area who are eager to test their skills on the redesigned greens and newly irrigated fairways on the Gaither Golf Course."

Congratulations to city of Tallahassee, Jeff Heggen and his staff for providing a great place for the people to enjoy affordable and accessible public golf.



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## Hilaman Park G.C.



*Maintenance Staff: Standing from the left: Forman Conrad Norton, Wiley Lewis and Mike Etheridge at Jake Gaither G.C., and at Hilaman Park G.C., Dwight Watson, Skip Norton, Brian Kelley, Kenneth Copeland, Foreman Rick Collins and (seated) Edward Gardner. Not pictured Mechanic Kirk Brewer. Photo by Jeff Heggen.*

### Tallahassee

**Ownership:** City of Tallahassee

**Playing policy:** Hilaman Park G.C. (HP) - Public. 18 holes, 6,333 yards, par 72.

Course/Slope Rating - 70.5/123. Jake Gaither G.C. (JG) - Public. 9 holes, 3,109 yards, par 36. Course/Slope rating - 67/110.

**Designed by:** Hilaman Park - Edward Lawrence Packard, opened in 1971. Opened as Winewood G.C.. Purchased by City of Tallahassee in 1981. Jake Gaither G.C was designed and built in 1956 by the Parks and Recreation Dept of Tallahassee.

**Management:** Randy Trousdell director of parks and recreation; HP - William "Bill" Zimmer superintendent of golf courses (director of golf); JG - golf professional, Alan James; Jeff Heggen, supervisor (superintendent) of golf maintenance for both courses.

### Major renovations/Ongoing projects:

Complete renovation of the Gaither course by Frank Burandt and Postelwait Construction in 1998. Renovation of tees, greens and bunker

complexes on the Hilaman Park course by Chip Powell and Highland Golf in 1999. Converted greens from Tifgreen 328 to Tifdwarf.

**Total acreage under maintenance both courses:** 121 acres (HP = 80; JG = 41)

**Greens:** HP = 5,650 sq.ft. = 2.5 acres. JG = 5,662 sq.ft. = 1.2 acres. Tifdwarf. HOC: .160 in. summer - .170 in. winter. Overseeding: Sabre II Poa trivialis @ a total of 8 lbs/1,000 sq.ft. Green speed goals: 8.0 - 8.5.

**Tees:** HP = 3.5 acres. JG = 1.5 acres. Tifway 419 bermudagrass. HOC: .60 in. - .75 in. Overseeding: Tri-Pro Ryegrass blend @ 300 lbs/acre.

**Fairways:** HP = 46 acres. JG = 22 acres. Tifway 419 bermudagrass. HOC: .60 in. - .75 in. Overseeding: Tri-Pro rye blend @ 250 lbs/acre.

**Roughs:** HP = 28 acres. JG = 16 acres. Tifway 419 bermudagrass. HOC: 1.0 - 1.5 in.. No overseeding.

**Bunkers:** HP = 35. JG = 11. All machine raked with Toro 3020 and Toro 5000 with spring rake attachment.

**Waterways/Lakes:** HP = 2 lakes, 14 acres. JG has no lakes. The lakes at Hilaman Park are part of the municipal residential storm water runoff retention and drainage system.

**Irrigation:** HP: Twin Flowtronex VFD 75 hp @ 1600 gpm pumps. Source: Surface water with deep well supplement. Rainbird Maxi V with Freedom system. Individual head control on greens and tees. Dual head, double row coverage on fairways. No coverage in roughs. JG: Twin Flowtronex 30 hp @ 500 gpm pumps in two separate pump stations. Source: Deep well. Rain Bird Par Plus controls.

**Total staff including superintendent:** HP = 8, JG = 3. 40 hours per week. No overtime. Two part time from May through September at 25 hours per week.

**Leadership:** Foremen (assistant superintendents) Rick Collins at Hilaman Park; Conrad Norton at Jake Gaither (14 years); Kirk Brewer, mechanic

**Communications:** Weekly GCM staff and safety meetings; biweekly department head meetings; monthly green committee meetings; Monthly club newsletter articles.





View from the 11th green across the lake to the 14th hole. Color coded flags: red (front), white (middle), and blue (back) help golfers with yardage and pin locations. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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## Fun Facts



*Jeff Heggen aka Beverage Cart Boy*

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

1. Car: 1995 GMC Sierra - It came with my wife. She got a new van.
2. The last good movie I saw: Signs.
3. I stay home to watch: CSI and Junkyard Wars.
4. The book I've been reading: Everything You Know Is Wrong.
5. Favorite meal: Steak, fries and hot bread.
6. Favorite performers: Faith Hill and Wayne Brady.
7. Prized possession: Letter of encouragement from Bart Starr after knee surgery took me out of football.
8. Personal heroes: My mother (former mayor of Tallahassee) and Vince Lombardi.
9. Nobody knows that: I listen to NPR radio while I drive.
10. I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Finding something positive even in a bad position or a terrible person.
11. If I could do it over: I would have been a better student.
12. I'd give anything to meet: Whoever it was that was smart enough to build the Great Pyramids.
13. My fantasy is: Play in the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas.
14. The one thing I can't stand is: People who know they are wrong but won't admit it.
15. If I could change one thing about myself: Take better care of my health.
16. My most irrational act: Putting my fist through a wall - enough said.
17. The words that best describe me: Personable, dependable.

## Jeff Heggen

**Originally from:** Wasau, Wisconsin

**Family:** Wife Ruth; stepsons Brett and Robert (15-year old twins) and Matt age 11.

**Education:** AA degree, Tallahassee Community College (1980); AS degree, golf course operations from Lake City Community College (1992). Various management classes, Florida State University.

**Employment history:** 1992-93 assistant superintendent, Hilaman Park GC; 1994-95 St. Marco GC, Alpharetta, GA; 1996-97 roving superintendent for IGM - Rolling Hills GC, Errol Estates, Melbourne and Valdosta. 1998 - Present superintendent Hilaman Park GC.

**Professional affiliations and awards:** GCSAA - 11 years. FGCSA - 6 years. President Coastal Plains Chapter for the past two years.

**Mentors:** Mark Hoban, CGCS was the first superintendent I interned for. He taught me to balance between work and personal life. He also taught me that you don't have to change jobs every five years to have a successful career. Mike Osley, CGCS was

the first superintendent I worked for after Lake City. He influenced my style of management in relation to working with the staff.

**Entry into the business:** In 1982 I moved to Ft. Lauderdale and got a job on the crew at the Holiday Springs GC. I don't know if it's even still around today, but I found out that this was the greatest kind of work in the world, being outside and working in golf. I've been hooked ever since. After some research, I enrolled in Lake City and here I am. I have to give a lot of credit to Mr. George Unglaub who owns a bunch of BP gas stations in the Tallahassee area. He helped me with my tuition to Lake City and gave me a job with a flexible schedule so I could attend classes and also earn my keep.

**Advice/Goals:** As I get older I realize how wrong I was about what was important. My professional goals were just that - mine! Trying to make my staff achieve those goals caused many problems for all of us. I now better understand that if this is to be my career for life, we can accomplish a lot more if everyone around me is happy at what they are

doing. I try to create an atmosphere where the staff wants to come to work and enjoy the day. Life is too short to be unhappy especially since we must all work for the better part of our lives. My goal is to work and retire with the parks and recreation department. We have a good supportive organization and I hope to be able to help keep improving it for the people of Tallahassee.

**Memorable moments:** When I was 13, I met Coach Gaither from Florida A&M at a party and I got to meet four or five NFL stars including Rattler alumni and Dallas Cowboys star, Bullet Bob Hayes. While in the School of Business at FSU, I got to attend the grand opening of Disney's Epcot theme park. I found myself riding the elevator with Frank Borman and Mary Cunningham of Eastern Airlines. As a business major at the time I thought that was pretty cool hanging with the heavy hitters.

**Hobbies/Interests:** I help coach sports teams my stepsons are on. Right now Brett and Robert act as assistant coaches with me for Matt's soccer team. I do play a little golf and shoot in the mid 80s.