



FGCSA Director of Communications Joel Jackson, right, accepts one of three GCSAA Distinguished Service Awards presented in Atlanta by President Mike Wallace, CGCS. Photo by Bruce Matthews.

### Distinguished Service

## GCSAA Honors Florida's Consummate Professional

Joel Jackson, CGCS was in a bind. Actually it was a triple bind.

He had just learned of his selection for a 2003 GCSAA Distinguished Service Award, but after a few moments of basking in the glow of the highest award his profession can bestow, the pit of his stomach began to get heavy.

The weight hung there and the award was presented Feb. 12 at the opening session of the International Golf Course Conference and Show in Atlanta. The DSA presentation followed the 2002 Wreath of Grass Award from the Florida Turfgrass Association by a few months.

"While I treasure the recent awards I have been given," said the FGCSA's director of communication of his season of heavy iron, "the biggest accomplishment or reward has to be perfect strangers coming up to me at meetings and conferences and telling me that they enjoy my columns and articles or that those writings helped them personally with a prob-

lem at work."

And then the pit of his stomach began to feel heavy again. His skin glistened like a New England pond in January and his heart, which has seen more bypasses than the city Los Angeles, began to pound.

Those who know him well can recognize his angst; they can probably visualize the gravity of his situation settling in: Joel Jackson is the editor of the *Florida Green* - the publication that should give the largest coverage to his accomplishment. - and therefore Joel Jackson was going to have to write something good about himself. Or, worse, he would have to ask somebody else to write something good about himself. Or even worse, he would have to abandon the journalistic principles he had absorbed in the past decade and ignore a very important news story.

Jackson, the consummate professional, trudged his way through weekly rounds of meetings, interviews, telephone calls, and deadlines in the course of his job, but the three-headed

## Personal Information

**Originally from:** Tampa

**Family:** Wife Susie (married June 1965), daughter Jennifer - creative director for Ensemble Productions, Los Angeles (past credits - film "Supernova," HBO Miniseries "Band of Brothers")

### Education

Plant High School, Tampa  
University of South Florida, Tampa; BA geology 1964 (charter freshman 1960)  
Southern Mill Creek Turf Boot Camp, Tampa, 1975

### Employment

U.S. Coast Guard officer, 1965-68  
University of South Florida, graduate teaching assistant, 1968-71  
Orange County Schools, eighth grade science teacher, 1971-73  
Golf course architect Bill Dietsch, Miami, field rep, 1972-74  
Lake Buena Vista Club, Walt Disney World, golf course crew, foreman, assistant superintendent, superintendent 1974-88  
Isleworth Country Club, Windermere, golf course superintendent 1988-91  
Osprey Ridge and Magnolia golf courses, Walt Disney World, golf

course superintendent 1991-97  
FGCSA director of communications, 1998-present

### Professional Affiliations

Central Florida GCSA - all offices (president 1985-86)  
Florida GCSA - all offices (president 1989); Distinguished Service Award 1992

Florida Turfgrass Association - Publications, public relations, and conference committees; Wreath of Grass Award 2002

GCSAA - Certified Golf Course Superintendent 1985 (Retired 2003); Nominating, conference and show, publications, and government relations committees; 2003 Distinguished Service Award

USGA - Florida Region Greens Section committee

International Network of Golf Agriculture Institute of Florida

### Unique Privilege

**The Disney Years** - Got to meet and chat with Bob Hope, Joe Thiesman, Byant Gumbel, John Denver, Terry Bradshaw, Michael Jordan, Michael Eisner and lots of good hard-working people.

monster - the *Florida Green* deadline - loomed ever larger as it grew nearer.

As editor, he had led his publication to the GCSAA's top award 10 times in 11 years on the basis of high journalistic principles, which include thoroughness in reporting the news of his franchise. What was he going to do?

"I've decided to run the GCSAA news release along with the official photo of the presentation," Jackson said when his publisher asked how he was going to handle the situation. That would never do, said the publisher, who made other arrangements.

This is a brief profile of the man as seen by an outsider. The facts of his resume are known to most *Florida Green* readers and the highlights are listed here. But what kind of a man earns these kinds of honors? In the end, I come back to the phrase used earlier: he is the consummate professional.

It's not about technical skill and knowledge. It's about taking those things to the phrase we have all come to hate: the next level, which is the heart and attitude with which you apply those skills and knowledge.

"My standing goal always

was to be the best superintendent I could be," he said.

The same could be said about any task he has undertaken. Whether it's as a golf course superintendent, a teacher, a director of communication, a reporter, a naval officer or a day laborer - and Joel Jackson has been all of the above - he would strive to be the best he could be - the consummate professional.

I first met Joel in the fall of 1988 when part-time *Golfweek* columnist Mark Jarrell persuaded me to come talk to the FGCSA board about leaving my job as executive editor of *Golfweek* to become publisher of the *Florida Green*.

Jackson was vice president at the time, publications chairman and the object of Dan Jones's affection to be editor-in-waiting while Dan and his wife, Irene, wound down to retirement. But I don't remember Joel in those first meetings. He did nothing to call attention to himself - a trait, I have learned, that certainly helps define his character.

Of course he probably was absorbed in his job at the time. He had just taken on the responsibility of growing bentgrass greens year-around in Central Florida for none other than Arnold Palmer.

But that was only the beginning. In the next 18 months, while trying to keep a delicate cool-season grass alive in Florida's brutal summer sunshine, Jackson also

- became editor of the *Florida Green*;
- became president of the Florida GCSA;
- underwent double bypass surgery (his first of three or four cardiac procedures);
- was host to the GCSAA International Golf Course Conference and Show's first-ever visit to Florida.

Oh yes. I think that was about the year that daughter Jennifer entered high school. If not, she was an eighth-grader, which is even worse!

Near the back of this issue is a column by Jim Walker about a mythical "S-Man," a superintendent who is expected to accomplish impossible tasks before breakfast. Those mythical tasks in Walker's cheek pale in comparison to the real-life challenges Jackson faced in 1989-90... and overcame.

But the man not only survived, he thrived even though the bentgrass path was far from smooth and

Jackson ended up returning to Disney in 1991. Still that job with Palmer was the scene of one the highlights of his career.

"Arnold Palmer was playing golf with the CEO of the Nestle Corp. and told me, 'This is the way I always wanted the course to be,'" was the first thing Jackson said in listing his personal memorable moments.

Other highlights included making three treks to Augusta National to learn the secrets of preparing for the Masters. "We watched the evolution of golf course maintenance on the most coveted course in the game," he said.

In 1992, Jackson was awarded the FGCSA's Distinguished Service Award. It was well earned and an honor that most would consider the pinnacle of a career. Joel Jackson was just getting started.

He began writing articles for other publications in addition to the *Florida Green*, and he began attending meetings with regulators, legislative hearings and other organizations in the golf and turfgrass industries. He began writing letters to newspapers, lawmakers, bureaucrats and

golf officials.

Soon Joel Jackson the information-seeker became Joel Jackson the sought-after spokesman for the golf-course-maintenance industry in Florida.

As the physical demands of the job and the stress of maintaining high-profile golf courses increased, another heart procedure convinced Jackson to "retire" so he could begin the career he had been preparing for his entire professional life: communicating the needs of the golf industry to its participants and the people who would regulate it.

He began work as the FGCSA's director of communications in 1998.

"I have always believed in communicating up and down the chain of command to keep everyone informed of what is expected and what is going on," he said. "Now my goals are aimed at taking the message of the golf industry to the legislators, regulators and general public."

Jackson now writes regularly not only for the *Florida*

*Green*, but also for the national publication *Golfdom*, and for his hometown golf publication, *Central Florida Golfer* - defending the industry, challenging its regulators and patiently explaining the complexity of managing vast environmental systems.

When he writes and speaks for internal audiences, however, he preaches professionalism. Listen to the advice he would give the future generation of golf course superintendents:

"If you are bound and determined to become a superintendent, then supplement your agronomic and technical education with business and communication courses, including writing. I guarantee you that dealing with people - owners, committees, general managers, golfers, and your own staff - will be your most difficult task.

"You will have numerous sources for turf-problem solving, including your peers, suppliers, and consultants, but your face-to-face interactions with the people who count at your club will require you to be a good communicator and leader.

Once on board, learn the



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business at your club. It is not sufficient to just run your department. If you understand how everything is connected and the revenues and expenses are in focus, you can make yourself more valuable and even a candidate for general manager if that is in your career path.

Ask questions. Admit mistakes. Always seek ways to improve and don't be shy about writing reports and memos that highlight your learning experiences from peer visits, at monthly chapter meetings and GCSAA conference and show experiences.

"It shows you are on the ball working to improve yourself and the conditions at your club."

From the man who walked the walk before he talked about it.

Larry Kieffer

## Darren J. Davis Wins Second Leo Feser Award

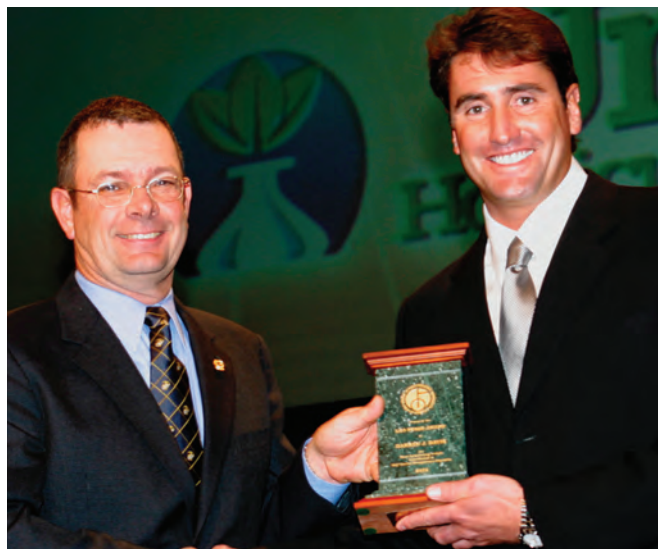
Darren J. Davis, director of golf course operations at Olde Florida

Golf Club, Naples, was presented with the 2002 Leo Feser Award Feb. 12 at the opening session of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's 74th International Golf Course Conference and Show in Atlanta. It was marked the second time Davis has won this award.

The Feser Award honors the best superintendent-authored article published in the association's monthly magazine, *Golf Course Management*. The winner receives an all-expenses-paid trip to the conference and show and will have his name engraved on a plaque for display at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan.

Davis was recognized for his two-part article, "An Olde Florida Course Made New," published in the January and February 2002 issues of GCM. The article discussed the increasing problem of off-type bermudagrass. Because playability was being compromised by the progression of the "off-types," Davis and his staff engineered an aggressive re-grassing project that has been well-received.

Davis is the only two-time winner of the Leo Feser Award. He previously received the award in 1997



Darren Davis, right, from the Olde Florida G.C. in Naples makes history as GCSAA President Mike Wallace presents him with his second GCSAA Leo Feser Award. Photo by Bruce Mathews.

for his article "Sowing the Seeds of Knowledge," published in the December 1996 issue of GCM.

"Darren Davis's article, 'An Olde Florida Course Made New,' is an excellent story that celebrates the

revitalization of the Olde Florida Golf Club," said Ricky D. Heine, CGCS, chairman of the GCSAA publications committee. "Darren is certainly a worthy recipient of GCSAA's Leo Feser Award."

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