



 *Hole No. 2 Lemon Bay Golf Club, Englewood*
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



LEMON BAY GOLF CLUB

A Course That Scores a Couple of Eagles

By Joel Jackson

Every course has a story to tell and Lemon Bay is a book with several chapters. In many ways it could be called a rags-to-riches story.

There's the course-history chapter that takes an 1890s lemon grove and transforms it into a public golf course in 1981 only to fall into disrepair and be rescued by the members in 1989. The member-owners became so successful that they had to expand and incorporate the Long Marsh

Golf Club at Rotunda to serve the long waiting list for membership.

There's a chapter on the superintendent Chip Copeman, who guided the transformation of the golf course from a weed-infested wreck to a beautifully manicured gem of a golf course. Copeman graduated from the school of hard knocks and is a throwback to the days of the apprentice learning his trade at the side of a master craftsman. Now he's the vice president of the Suncoast Chapter and is a firm supporter of con-

tinuing education. His annual trips to the Masters Tournament in Augusta were part of his inspiration to excel in his profession.

Lemon Bay is a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Certainly another tale worth telling filled with creative ideas on how to accomplish that goal and be a better steward of the area's natural resources. When there's a pair of bald eagles living in an eight-acre preserve in the middle of your golf course, it pays to be a good environmental steward because first, it's the right

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Gator left, great egret right, and one of Lemon Bay's 18 lakes in the middle guard the fifth green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Chip Copeman



Chip Copeman

Originally from: Orlando

Family: Married to wife Lisa for 11 years. Son Kevin, daughter Lindsay

Education: Practical experience in the early years.

Accredited turf management seminars and continuing education at GCSAA, FTGA and FGCSA events.

Employment history:
1982-87 crew member

Myakka Pines GC; 1987-91 assistant superintendent, Plantation G&CC; 1991 to present superintendent/director of turf maintenance at Lemon Bay and Long Marsh courses.

Professional affiliations and awards: Member of GCSAA and FTGA. Currently vice president of the Suncoast GCSA chapter. Served on the board since 2000.

How did you get into the business? My dad got me started in golf at the age of 9 at the Winter Pines GC in Winter Park. My mother worked in the snack bar and we got to play golf for free. At age 12 I was a range rat and picked up range balls after school. I was in and around golf for most of my life and I knew I had a passion for the game and industry.

Mentors: My dad obviously who got me started playing the game. Pat McClain, superintendent at Myakka Pines, who gave me my first maintenance job and the opportunity to learn all the jobs on a golf course to begin my steps to becoming a superintendent some day. In 1987 I went to work for Eddie Fatica at the Plantation G&CC and within 30 days he promoted me to assistant superintendent.

Goals: Maintain the natural integrity of the golf course and continue my education and the crew's education on environmental issues. Create and maintain a close relationship with the surrounding community, with regard to their environmental concerns.

Accomplishments: Getting Lemon Bay and Long Marsh certified in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Lemon Bay was the 25th course in the state and 115th in the world to be certified. In May 2003, Long Marsh became the 60th in Florida and 438th in the world to attain certification.

Work philosophy: Choose goals. Prepare plans to achieve those goals. Have the discipline to follow your plan and your goals will be met. Always remember, there's more than one way to get downtown. Some roads just take a little longer to get there.

Advice: Be involved in your local, state and GCSAA associations. Stay informed and have the right answers. Never guess or pretend to know the answer.

Memorable moments: (1) My wedding day, 12-12-92, beautiful blue sky and cool weather on Boca Grande Island. (2) The death of my good friend Tom Crawford. (3) When I started at Lemon Bay we didn't have power in the maintenance building. We had to run a small generator, but it was so small we would first brew a pot of coffee and then turn on the lights to check the fuel and oil levels on the equipment after the coffee was made.

Hobbies/Interests, community, church involvement: (1) Golf, hunting, fishing, and wood working; (2) Consult and help with Lemon Bay High School sports fields; (3) Christian faith believer

Lemon Bay Wildlife Inventory

MAMMALS

Armadillo
Bobcat
Gray fox
Red fox
Skunk
Rabbit
Raccoon
Palmetto rat

REPTILES

Alligator
Chameleons
Coral Snakes
Indigo Snakes
Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnakes
Gopher Tortoise
Leatherback turtles

FISH

Bream
Catfish
Largemouth bass

BIRDS

Anhinga
Bald Eagle
Blue Heron
Blue Jay
Cardinal
Coots
Crow
Dove
Gallinules
Grackles
Glossy Ibis
Great Blue Heron
Great White Egret
Green Heron
Hawks (several varieties)
Kingfisher
Limpkin
Louisiana Heron
Moorhens
Night Heron
Owls (several varieties)
Roseate Spoonbill
Sandhill Crane
Scrub Jay
Snowy Egret
Terns
Tri-colored Heron
White Ibis
Woodpeckers
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Lemon Bay Golf Club



Lemon Bay Golf Club

Location: Englewood

Ownership: Members

Playing policy: Private (October-April); Semi-Private (May-September)

Number of holes: 18; 6,180 yards; Par 71; **Course Rating** 69.9/Slope 126.

Designed by: Jim Petrides. Opened in 1981.

Management: Club President Bonnie Tyler; Club Manager Peter Hodson; Green Chairman Joe Anderson; Head Golf Professional Missy Eldridge; Director of Turf Maintenance Chip Copeman.

Major renovations: Greens, tees and bunker redesign/renovation by Chip Powell in 1997.

Ongoing vegetation plan: Adding trees and native plants.

Total acreage under maintenance: 90

Greens: TifDwarf, Avg. Size = 5,000 sq. ft., Total = 3 acres; HOC = 5/32 inch summer, 1/8 inch winter;

Overseeding: Princeville blend @ 10 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. Green speed goals: 8.0 summer, 9.0 winter.

Tees: Turf - Tifway 419 Bermudagrass, 4.0 acres; HOC: 5/8 inch; No overseeding.

Fairways: Turf - 419 Tifway Bermudagrass, 35 acres; HOC: 5/8 inch. No overseeding.

Bunkers: 35 = 1.21 acres; Sand type: 38 Special; machine raked with Toro Sand Pro, hand rake edges.

Native areas: 8-acre eagle preserve in the center of the course. Buck Creek and Lemon Creek run through the course from the Lemon Bay waterway. We have 3.5 acres of pine-straw ground cover in the large pine-tree areas in the roughs.

Waterways/Lakes: 18 lakes/ponds. Aquatic weed control done by outside contractor.

Irrigation: Reclaimed water; VFD Flotronex pump station; Toro Osmac radio controlled/computerized control system; Heads on 70-ft. spacing; Fertigation: 1,650-gallon tank. No watering restrictions.

Total staff including superintendent: 12 full time and 1 part time. 40 hours straight time and 4 hours overtime per week.

Leadership: Assistant Superintendent Bruce Crocker; Equipment Technician Bob Himmelhauer; Pest Control Technician Mike Sharpe; Administrative assistance by club's Executive Secretary Cindy Claude.

Communications: Monthly crew/safety meeting. Bimonthly green committee meetings. Quarterly newsletter.

Cultural Programs: Aerification - Greens 4x/year; Tees, fairways, and roughs 3x/year. Verticut fairways 1x/year. Fertilization - Greens every 14-21 days @ 0.5 lb N/1000 sq. ft; Tees, fairways and roughs 6x/year @ 1.0 lb. N/1000 sq. ft. Light fertigation of supplemental nutrients to greens November to February. Periodic light greens topdressing as needed.

Management Challenges: Green speed, nematodes, and pine tree decline.

Environment: Fully certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. We have a nesting pair of eagles in our preserve area and we are fortunate to see young eagles fledged each spring. We maintain a 20 foot "no spray zone" around all lakes and ponds. Daily visual scouting and monitoring of pest problems and threshold levels to assess the actual locations and need to apply pesticides.

thing to do, and second because there are laws that protect our national symbol. Certification became a natural way to go and Lemon Bay got help from local high school students - an idea anyone can borrow to help with the process.

Every course has its unique set of operational challenges, such as soil, drainage, turf management, landscape and weather - which is another chapter in the Lemon Bay story. Seasons come and go, each one bringing different growing conditions. After years of drought, Lemon Bay endured 48 inches of rain from June to September in 2003. The normal average is 52 inches per year.

Chapter One: History

The Lemon Bay Golf Club is located just off State Road 775, which snakes its way south on the mainland from Englewood to Placida on Florida's southwest coast. West of the course lie mangroves, Lemon Bay and Don Pedro Island. To the east lie the Rotunda and Port Charlotte communities and the pine and palmetto scrubland flats of southwest Florida.

In 1981 the course rose from the overgrown acres of a pioneer lemon grove. It was designed by Jim Petrides, who had also designed the nearby Rotunda community golf course. It opened and operated as a public golf course for many years but, for whatever reason, the course conditions declined and it became an eyesore. The irrigation system was in a shambles. Smutgrass grew everywhere and nematodes devoured the turf, creating large bare areas on the course. In 1989 a group of members bought the course and began to turn it around.

It took man working with nature and some good agronomy from three to five years to get the course looking respectable, but at the end of the five years they had been so successful they had to cap the membership. A seven-to-ten-year waiting list ensued. The nearby Long Marsh Golf Club, located two miles away in Rotunda, came on the market and the Lemon Bay members group bought it to serve the waiting list.

Chapter Two: The Superintendent

Born in Orlando, Chip Copeman was around golf courses and landscaping for most of his childhood and early adult life. His mother Pat worked at the Winter Pines Golf Club in the snack bar. This gave him access to the course and his dad started him playing the game at the age of nine. Copeman became a "range rat" who worked picking up range balls after school and in return had the run of the golf course. Thus began a lifelong love affair with the game. He currently maintains a six handicap.

After working at a variety of landscape jobs, Copeman knew golf was his passion. In 1982 he

took a job on the crew at the Myakka Pines G.C. in Englewood under superintendent Pat McClain. Copeman was a sponge as he soaked up all he could learn under McClain's tutelage, and in turn McClain let him learn all the jobs on the course. Copeman set his sights on becoming a superintendent. After five years at Myakka Pines, he went to work for Eddie Fatica at the Plantation Golf and Country Club. Copeman's apprenticeship was about to get a big boost. After only 30 days of watching Copeman in action, Fatica promoted him to assistant superintendent.

Copeman says, "Eddie took all the course management skills I had learned on the job and molded me into the kind of superintendent it takes to be successful in this business." Four years later, Copeman assumed his first superintendent's job at Lemon Bay. He's been here for 13 years, a testament not only to his agronomy skills but to his character as a manager and a leader. Copeman's responsibilities include overseeing both the Lemon Bay and Long Marsh courses. Copeman acknowledges that he couldn't be successful without two critical elements at Lemon Bay.

"I'm a firm believer that you're only as good as your resources, but I'm also a believer in not having excuses like 'our budget is too small' or 'I don't have enough people or the right kind of equipment.' I try to do the best we can with what we have. In this age of technology and new products, I don't forget about the old ways of doing things. We're not too proud to hand-pull a weed or hand-rake pine needles or roll up our sleeves to do whatever it takes to get the job done. I don't want to hear *why* you can't get a job done. I want you to tell me *how* you got it done. That kind of attitude takes a supportive staff and we have a good one at both of our locations.

"The other element of course is the people who provide those needed resources... the owners and members. This can be a fickle business, as you know. I never thought I'd be here for 13 years, based on the way it goes at some clubs. I have to publicly thank our membership. They have shown the greatest respect for me and my knowledge of the golf course. I can tell you the respect is mutual. I can go to them about anything and I do go well in advance to discuss issues, situations and needs so they know what to expect. This relationship wouldn't be as solid as it is without the guidance and mentoring I have received from Peter Hodson, the general manager. Peter has been involved with the club since 1989, first as a consultant and now full time since 1999.

"Some superintendents fail two or three years after a big effort because the club doesn't match the resources to their demands or expectations. The superintendent has to be able to clearly identify and present and defend what it takes to provide the desired

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Long Marsh GC



Long Marsh GC Crew

Ownership: Members

Playing Policy: Semi-private all year

Number of holes: 18, 7,160 yards, par 72,

Slope/Rating: 74/127

Designed by Ted McCanlis; constructed by M.G.I.

Opened: 1999

Management Team: Same as Lemon Bay and includes Head Golf Professional Ted Green. Golf Course Superintendent Mike Troxell reports to Chip Copeman.

Acreage under maintenance: 115

Greens: Tifdwarf; Avg. Size 5,000 sq. ft., Acres: 4;

HOC: 5/32 inch summer, 1/8 inch winter.

Overseeding: 10 lbs/1000 sq. ft. Princeville seed mixture. Green speed goals: 8.0 summer, 9.0 winter.

Tees: Tifway 419, Acres: 5; HOC = 5/8 inch.

Overseeding: Perennial Ryegrass @ 400 lbs/A.

Fairways: Tifway 419, Acres: 45; HOC = 5/8 inch.

Overseeding: Perennial ryegrass @ 300 lbs/A.

Roughs: Tifway 319, Acres: 60; HOC = 1.5 inch.

No overseeding.

Bunkers: 13, Sand type: 38 Special; Machine-raked with Toro Sand Pro, Hand-rake lips.

Waterways: 16 lakes/ponds. Aquatic weed maintenance by outside contractor.

Irrigation: Lakes and Canals; Pumping System: Flotronex VFD; Control System: Toro LTC.

SWFWMD watering restrictions apply when in force. Converting to reclaimed water source in the near future.

Staff: Total including superintendent: 9. Scheduled 40 hrs straight time and 4 hours overtime per week. Superintendent Mike Troxell, Equipment Technician Andy Easley, Pest Control Technician Ray Terrazas.

Environment: Long Marsh is a fully certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.



Trimmed-back mangroves (by permit) provide a gap for the tee shot over Lemon Creek on the par 3, 15th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

results. All you can do is give the best you can for the size of the budget. To do that you need to surround yourself with good people. They don't always walk through the door. Sometimes you have to mold them from the people you have and those you can hire to work in this business. Then you have to motivate them.

"I believe in teaching employees something new as often as possible. It makes them more effective and it shows you have an interest in them. They may leave and take that skill with them, but they know who made them more valuable. I always encourage my superintendents to share what's been given to them, the tricks of the trade, to pass it on to others. My journey through the ranks has been a great learning experience from being on the bottom rung and working my way up. I know what I can expect from others. I've learned to assess their strengths and weaknesses and harness them to be productive employees. Like I always say, 'There's more than one way to get downtown. Some roads just take longer to get there.'"

Copeman also believes that his golfing ability gives him an edge when it comes to evaluating playing conditions and credibility when he explains what needs to be done to achieve those conditions.

Chapter Three: The Sanctuary

One of the roads followed at Lemon Bay was the path of becoming a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, which they accomplished in 1998 and renewed in 2003. Their sister course, Long Marsh, is also certified, becoming the 60th course in Florida to achieve that distinction.

Having an eight-acre eagle preserve in the middle of your golf course is like hanging out a sign saying, "Hey Look At Me!" and the eagle watchers do watch. Copeman is mindful of nesting season and keeps projects to a minimum in the area to avoid disturbing the eagles. His diligence has paid off as eagle watchers report seeing eaglets fledged each spring. Mother Nature unfortunately disturbed them more when a recent storm damaged their primary nest. The eagles have been constructing a temporary home in a pine tree on one of the fairways. Everyone is anxious to see if they will repair the old nest.

The Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association is supporting Audubon International's five-year campaign (50-in-5) to get 50 percent of the nation's courses enrolled in the Cooperative Sanctuary Program. It is a natural fit for courses to work with an environmentally focused organization that recognizes golf courses can be a tremendous asset to wildlife and natural resources. More members are joining all the time, but why the slow pace? It can't be the dues; they're only \$150 a year. The biggest fear is that it will take more time. Time that superintend-



View of the dogleg third hole from the green. Lemon Bay rewards good shot selections, not sheer length off the tee. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

ents don't feel they have. Copeman found an answer at Lemon Bay that saved him time and provided a great learning experience for area high school students.

Copeman said, "Danny Claude, the son of the club's executive secretary Cindy Claude, was an honor student looking for an extra-credit project he could do for one of his classes. I put him to work installing and monitoring nesting boxes and taking water samples. He worked with me and we went over the reports

and results and he got school credit for the environmental work.

"I bought the wood for the birdhouses and took it and the instructions to the Lemon Bay High School and the shop class built our birdhouses. We got nesting boxes and the kids got class credit for the project and the knowledge that this golf course was doing something for the environment and they helped. The high school swim team joined an "Adopt a Shore" program and they help keep the shorelines cleaned up.

There are kids out there who hunger to do something for the environment. Why not enlist them to help with the ACSP on your course and relieve some of the workload off the staff?

"We put ID placards on each golf car so the members can identify the many species of birds that inhabit the course while they play, and we have bird counts on Men's and Ladies' days. As part of our certification, we have an ongoing program of adding native trees, shrubs and beneficial vegetation along the banks of our lakes. We

Fun Facts



Chip Copeman believes environmental awareness is a way of life at Lemon Bay. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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

1. **Car:** 1998 Conversion Van
2. **The last good movie I saw:** Patriot
3. **I stay home to watch:** NFL football
4. **The book I've been reading:** The Bible
5. **Favorite meal:** Lobster, salad and bread
6. **Favorite performers:** Elvis Presley
7. **Prized possessions:** My son and daughter
8. **Personal Heroes:** My mom and dad
9. **Nobody knows that I:** Am shy
10. **If I could do it over:** I wouldn't change a thing
11. **I'd give anything to meet:** President Bush
13. **My fantasy is:** Play golf at Augusta National
14. **The one thing I can't stand:** When people say, "Oh, I forgot!"
15. **If I could change one thing about myself:**
Putting the Lord first in my life at an earlier age
17. **My most humbling experience:** Watching my son and daughter raising up their first- and second-place junior-golf trophies. It was like passing the torch.
18. **The words that best describe me:** Motivated, dedicated, responsible



An overcast, dewy dawn on the well-bunkered sixth hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

also maintain a 20-foot no-spray buffer around our water hazards.

“We carefully select sites for new trees so they don’t create a future shade problem. We are experiencing some pine-tree-decline problems, so we have hired Emerald Green to use their injection program to save them. We also expanded the pine straw areas around the trees to restore their native habitat and avoid competition with the turf.”

Chapter Four: Maintaining the Course

In 1991 USGA Agronomist John Foy rode the course with the newly hired Copeman and declared, “This is the worst golf course in the state.” A year later his comment was, “This is the probably the fastest turn around of conditions I’ve ever seen.” Copeman took it as a great compliment.

Copeman began his renovation of the course by photo documentation of the problems and provided a historical record of how the course improved over time. One of the early problems was eradicating the prolific smutgrass. A household sponge mop with a wringer proved to be more useful than the rope-wick-type applicators. It took persistence but it paid off. The next obstacle was to improve the single-row irrigation system so grass could be grown on the huge bare areas in the roughs.

Nematodes plagued the course for many years and they were fought with the usual array of products. Copeman says the results of the Curfew application last year were excellent. Overseeding is the only other challenge of consequence. Lemon Bay is not overseeded; the Long

Marsh course is. Copeman says, “Our location next to the bay helps to moderate the winter temperatures and we can get away with not having to overseed. Certainly it helps in the spring when transition takes place. We don’t have to worry about balancing the overseeding with the native bermudagrass, like we do at Long Marsh. When we do get a prolonged cold, gloomy spell in the winter, we have to watch our traffic during the poor growing conditions.”

So we come to the end of the story. There are no magic potions or silver bullets at Lemon Bay. It is just hard-working people going about their jobs conscientiously in harmony with each other and with nature. Wouldn’t it be great if this story could be told over and over at more golf courses?