



12th Hole Royal Golf Course Photo by Daniel Zelazek



Heritage Palms Golf Club

A Tale of Two Palms

By Joel Jackson

The name Heritage Palms intrigued me from the very first time I set foot on the property in November of 1998, but I didn't do any investigative reporting at the time to inquire what the name signified. It wasn't until I became immersed in doing this cover story that it finally dawned on me, and only because of the names of the two 18-hole golf courses, Royal and Sabal.

If you know anything about Ft. Myers at all, you know that the road from downtown to Thomas Edison's home and museum is lined with royal palms. I even remember that from trips we took down from our home in Tampa. That was back when you took a ferry to Sanibel

Island. And the sabal palm is the state tree of Florida. I'd say there's a lot of heritage in those two palms. Six years later the courses are maturing and this golf community is building its own heritage for the history books.

Conveniently located just a few miles west of Interstate 75 and only 5-6 miles northwest of the Ft. Myers Southwest International Airport, the U.S. Homes and Lennar Homes single-family home and condominium golf community is rapidly approaching sellout. A testament to its prime location and amenities is that most of the developer's corporate executives have homes there.

Superintendent Greg Kriesch has been at Heritage Palms since February 1998,

eight months before it opened. It was his first grow-in experience and one that he enjoyed for the full satisfaction of helping to create a fully functioning and attractive golf course from out of the wilderness southeast of downtown Ft. Myers.

Says Kriesch, "I give S&S Management a lot of credit for the ability we have to manage the course conditions and keep the course open even during our rainy season. They believe in drainage. Lots of well-designed courses have catch basins to collect surface runoff, but S&S had us installing extra fingers leading to all the basins to get the water into the basins and off the course as quickly as possible. I can honestly say we have never been closed due to a heavy rainstorm. Sure, we may be on cart

Heritage Palms Golf & Country Club



Location: Fort Myers

Ownership: U.S. Homes/Lennar

Playing policy: Semi-Private

Number of holes: 36 holes. Royal Course: 6,756 yards. Par 72. Course Rating 72.8/Slope 134; Sabal Course: 6837 yards. Par 72. Course rating 73.4/139.
Designed by: Gordon Lewis. Opened 18 holes October 1998, 27 holes by December 1998, 36 holes as of October 2000.

Management: Club Manager Davis Negip; Project Manager Steve Benson; Head Golf Professional Bob Kelly; Food & Beverage Director Don Martin; Director of Tennis Mike Lawver; Fitness and Activities Director Venus Beck; Ladies Golf Association President Gloria Collins; Men's Golf Association President Frank Gilbert and Golf Course Superintendent Greg Kriesch.

Major renovations: None. On-going program of adding additional drainage to enhance playability and modification to original course landscaping beds.

Total acreage under maintenance: 207 acres for 36 holes and common grounds areas.

Greens: TifDwarf. Avg. Size, 6,878 sq.ft. Total 6

acres. HOC .150 in. summer; .10 in. winter.

Overseeding: Winterplay Poa Trivialis @ 10 lbs/1,000 sq.ft. Green speed goals: 8.0 summer, 9.0 winter.

Tees: Tifway 419 bermudagrass, 8.0 acres (GN1 on Royal No. 3, Sabal No. 14 and driving range tee). HOC .435 in. Overseeding: Champion GQ perennial ryegrass @ 650 lbs/A.

Fairways: Turf, Tifway 419 bermudagrass; Royal 27 acres, Sabal 32 acres. HOC .500 in. No overseeding.

Roughs: Turf Tifway 419 bermudagrass; Royal 63 acres, Sabal 60 acres. No overseeding.

Bunkers: Royal 88, Sabal 76. Machine raked with Cushman Groom Master.

Native/waste areas: 10 acres of coquina waste areas/cart paths). 181 acres of wetlands and preserve areas.

Waterways/Lakes: 43 lakes/ponds, 143 acres. Aquatic weed control done by Aquatic Systems, Inc.

Irrigation: Source: Surface water with 3 recharge wells. Soon to connect to reclaimed water. Flotronex PSI pump station. 8-75hp vertical turbines @ 6,000 gpm. We also supply irrigation water to residential

areas. Controls: Toro Network LTC Site Pro. Toro 750/780 heads on 70-ft triangular spacing.

Fertigation: Neptune two-head pump @ 160 gph. Two 1,500-gallon tanks. One 500-gallon wetting-agent tank.

Watering restrictions/Conservation: Percentage reduction using computer control system. We also do lots of hand watering, monitor head adjustments closely, use soil probes to check soil moisture levels. Increased use of wetting agents and amendments. We can only recharge lakes from wells on a 1:1 ratio to our use, so we conserve.

Total staff including superintendent: 53 full time which includes landscape crew. No budgeted overtime.

Leadership: Assistant Superintendent Royal Course Brandon Parker; Assistant Superintendent Kevin Bush; Landscape Manager Jeff Kinsey; Equipment Manager Robert Finch; pest control technicians Jared Shanks, Zeb Hall and Israel Chavez. irrigation technicians Colin Foster, Evan Touchette and Andrew Snyder.

Communications: Weekly staff meetings of all department heads, general manager and project manager. Monthly meetings with Men's Golf Association. Assistants hold biweekly safety/operational meetings with respective crews.

Cultural Programs: Aggressive aerification, top dressing, verticutting, grooming program. See cover story.

Management Challenges: Traffic control and compaction – 95,000 rounds per year not including walkers. Common bermudagrass contamination.

Wildlife Inventory: Bald eagles (2 adults, 2 fledglings), turkey, osprey, hawks, wood storks, herons, ibis, anhinga, woodpeckers, alligators, snakes, turtles, and other small song and perching birds.



This crushed coquina waste area serves as a connector that must cross the fairway between the paved sections of concrete path at the green and tee. Photo by Joel Jackson.

paths only, but the only time we have any significant standing water is when we have so much rain that all the retention ponds are so full that the water just can't move anywhere."

Besides the teamwork during the construction and grow-in Kriesch couldn't say enough about the entire management team that oversees the development and golf operations. Key players in this team approach are General Manager David Negip and Head Golf Professional Bobby Kelly. Kriesch said, "David has helped me become a better manager by setting a good example as a leader who is considerate, listens, asks questions, remains calm and is fair and consistent."

"Besides being a fellow department head and colleague, Bobby is a good friend. He understands my need for time to get maintenance done on the course and I understand his need to get people out on the golf course. We work together on schedules and timing to make it happen for the ultimate satisfaction of our members and customers."

The 36-hole complex hosted 95,000 rounds of golf last year and Kriesch says continuous additional drainage projects and traffic control are two ongoing projects to keep the effects of all that traffic from detracting from the playing conditions.

He said, "It takes two guys over an hour a day to go through the course and set up and move our temporary ropes and stakes to divert traffic from wearing-out areas around the course. It is a constant job because they get knocked down or moved by the golfers in the course of the day."

Another tool in the arsenal for combating compaction from all that traffic is Kriesch's aeration program. It is an almost nonstop assault to provide the best root zone possible all year long to give the greens a fighting chance and a good playing surface, but Kriesch is also a realist:

"We don't punish the golfers, but we try to take care of the turf too. We concentrate our more

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Cordgrass beds like this one on Royal No. 4 offers a visual contrast to the expanse of bermudagrass, offers wildlife cover and is a wise alternative to trying to grow healthy turf in the shade of a tree. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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Fun Facts



Greg had a little fun with a member who wanted to know how hard it was to maintain the turf on all those floating greens. He later confessed they were artificial turf. Photo by Joel Jackson

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

1. **Car:** 2002 Honda Odyssey
2. **The last good movie I saw:** Seabiscuit
3. **I stay home to watch:** Hockey, NASCAR racing,

Golf

4. **The book I've been reading:** Trade magazines
5. **Favorite meal:** Any seafood
6. **Favorite performer:** Tom Hanks
7. **Prized possessions:** Photo of me with Michael

Jordan and his NBA rookie card

8. **Personal Heroes:** My dad. He is always remains calm no how bad the situation. The emergency personnel involved in 9/11.

9. **Nobody knows that I:** Am a great cook

10. **I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:** Shoring

11. **If I could do it over:** I would have never started smoking

12. **I'd give anything to meet:** Selma Hayek

13. **My fantasy is:** Own my own golf course and restaurant with Selma tending bar.

14. **The one thing I can't stand:** People who think they are better than anyone else. Stuck up, snobby people.

15. **If I could change one thing about myself:** I would have more hair

16. **My most irrational act:** Ducking for a sprinkler while riding a bike and busting my two front teeth on the handlebars.

17. **My most humbling experience:** Cutting the umbilical cord at the birth of my first son.

18. **The words that best describe me:** Laid back



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aggressive coring during the hotter times of the year when there are fewer players. We have a new machine and we keep it rotating back and forth between the courses. As soon as we're done on one it's time to do the other.

"We religiously core-aerify the greens four times during the summer, twice with 1/2-inch tines and twice with 5/8-inch tines. We will add another six to eight solid-tine aerifications with 5/16-inch by 12-inch tines going 6 to 10 inches deep. I'd love to get a Hydroject (a high pressure water-jet aerifier) that we could use in play during the winter since it doesn't disrupt the surface very much at all."

As a companion procedure to the aerifying and providing smoothness and thatch control on the greens, Kriesch topdresses lightly every other week from November to April. Verticutting is done six to eight times during the warm season.

Fairways and roughs are aerified four times with a pull-behind unit with 3/4-inch closed spoons. Known high-traffic areas are aerified six to eight more times during the summer to give them a chance to get healthy and ready for the increased traffic in the fall and winter.

Just as high-traffic areas are identified



Long morning shadows highlight the par-4, 12th hole on the Sable Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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Landscape Manager Jeff Kinsey oversees a 20-person crew taking care of more than 40 acres of common grounds areas and landscaped areas on the golf courses. Photo by Joel Jackson.

and mapped for special treatment in the off season, so are slow-draining, heavy-soil areas and pest infestations of weeds and insects. Kreisich says that scouting and mapping have been essential tools for efficient management of pesticide use, saving budget dollars for labor and purchases.

“We generally budget for about 30 acres worth of treatment for mole-cricket control each year. We always do all the tees because they are one of the focal points on each hole and under constant stress from traffic. We don’t need extra damage from mole crickets to deal with. With the rest of the course, we rely on our scouting and mapping of known active areas to direct where we apply the products. We know the crickets generally reappear in the same places each year, so if you map those areas you can go right to them and treat and move on. There is no justification for blanket treatment of a fairway or rough that doesn’t need it.”

In fact Kreisich says that 90 percent of all spraying and treatments at Heritage Palms is done on a “spot treatment as needed” basis. The only exceptions being pre-emergent herbicide applications to non-overseeded areas in the fall for *Poa annua* and volunteer ryegrass control and all other areas in the spring for the germination of warm-sea-



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Greg Kriesch



Greg Kriesch, left, and General Manager David Negip. Photo by Joel Jackson

Originally from: Shelby Township, Mich.

Family: Wife Samantha; sons Kevin, Ryan and Jeremy

Education: Lake City Community College, A.S. in golf course operations, 1990.

Employment history: 1985-87 Irrigation and IPM technician, Del Tura C.C., North Ft. Myers ; 1988 Lake City OJT internship, Burnt Store Marina G.C., Punta Gorda ; 1989 Lake City OJT internship, Long Cove Club, Hilton Head, SC ; 1990-91 assistant superintendent, Cape Coral Golf & Tennis Resort, Cape Coral; 1991-95 assistant superintendent, Imperial G.C., Naples; 1995-98 superintendent Palmetto Pines C.C., Cape Coral; 1998-present superintendent Heritage Palms G&CC, Fort Myers.

Professional affiliations and awards: Member of GCSAA since 1987; Everglades GCSA 1991-96; Calusa GCSA 1996-present. Calusa board member since 2001 and chapter president for 2003-04.

Mentors/Career Influence: My mother and father for instilling the moral that whatever you do, make sure you are happy; money is not everything. Above all be honest. I'm indebted to everyone I have worked for in this wonderful industry: Bob Yates who brought me into the golf business; Bob Sanderson for influencing me to attend college; Kent Stier, Scott Hamm, Roy Bates, Jerry Redden, Dave Smith and Joe Fenner and many others I have worked with; all have in some way helped me along the way.

Goals: Become certified as a CGCS and our course in the ACSF. Be the best father and husband I can be for my family. Get my bachelors degree, probably in business administration. When I retire some day, I would like to purchase a motor home and travel the U.S. and Canada.

Accomplishments: College degree; became a Class A superintendent; completed a new course grow-in, a very rewarding experience; just being happy in what I do and enjoying the people I meet in this profession. Once in a great while when things aren't going my way, I wonder what else I would do. I haven't come up with anything yet.

Work philosophy: Be honest. Work hard. Always

leave work at work and put your family first. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. The only people who don't make mistakes are those who don't try anything. Don't be hesitant to ask for help when faced with issues you are unsure of. You can ask a co-worker or another superintendent or other industry professional. There are hundreds of people out there who are more than happy to help.

Memorable/humorous moments: The birth of my two sons and cutting the umbilical cords. I was the one crying like a baby. Meeting Michael Jordan while I was interning at Long Cove on Hilton Head Island, SC.

On my honeymoon in Colorado with Samantha, my wonderful Florida cracker wife, who had never seen snow before we stopped to take a photo of a field of unblemished snow. I told her to take a running head start and jump out into the snow so no footprints could be seen. The snow was waist deep and she ended up face first, which I sort of knew might happen to a rookie.

Hobbies/Interests: Assistant coach San Carlos Scorpions Soccer League since 2002 and assistant coach San Carlos Little League since 2003. Ice hockey (I am from Michigan) – season ticket holder of the Florida Everblades. Doing yard work. Playing cribbage with Samantha on weekends. Spending time with family and friends. Fishing when I can find the time.



The immaculately manicured entrance next to the 6th green on the Royal Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



A large serpentine bunker complex guards the 4th hole on the Sabal Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



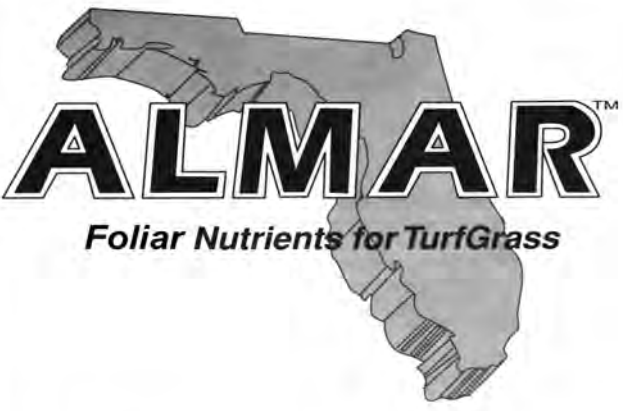
Replacing seasonal annuals in the tee beds with flowering native perennial plants like these Crown of Thorns, Firecracker and Fire bush plants saves money in labor and materials and doesn't sacrifice color and appeal. Photo by Joel Jackson.

son weeds like crabgrass and goosegrass.

"We are making three applications a year," Kriesch said. "We used to do only two, but we found that in January and February the fall application was wearing off and unsightly *Poa Annua* and ryegrass clumps were popping up. Now we treat in

the fall, after the first of the year and in the spring using Barricade. For post-emergent applications to control these winter grasses in bermudagrass, we have experimented with the new products like TransXit, Revolver and Monument, and Monument seems to work best for us."

Speaking of overseeding, Kriesch has been contemplating some possible changes to the



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Manager Becomes First Lady



Samantha Kriesch, association manager, Calusa GCSA

Five years after assuming the role as the association manager in 1999, Samantha Kriesch also finds herself the First Lady of the Calusa chapter thanks to hubby Greg's current presidency. She says that combination has its pros and cons.

"Well as Association Manager it's pretty easy to get a hold of the Chapter president when I need him," she says, "but as husband and wife, we have to sometimes work at keeping association business and family time balanced."

With an AS degree in administrative sciences and computers and her two sons in school, Samantha was looking for work she could do at home. When the chapter began to get very active and pursue GCSAA affiliation, it became clear that busy superintendents in a very golf-competitive region could use some help with the administrative paperwork that comes with being

an active and progressive chapter. It has been a good fit.

Her primary duties are putting together the chapter newsletter, handling member applications, keeping the association checkbook in order and serving as administrative liaison between the FGCSA and GCSAA when member rosters and paperwork is due. Currently she is organizing the first directory for the 160-member chapter and proudly announced that the chapter's new Web site, www.calusagcsa.com, is making its debut.

The best part of the job says Samantha is meeting a lot of wonderful people, "Now I have a face to go with a name when members call with questions." The best part for the Calusa chapter is that the members have a dedicated person like Samantha to help with the administrative workload that comes with a volunteer association.

program.

"Currently we do the greens, collars and approaches, the par-3 tees and the driving-range tee.

Next year we will likely add all the rest of the tee tops to give us a good growing surface all winter. My dilemma is the greens; whether to overseed or

not. It's a case of battling possible transition problems in the spring when we do oversee versus the possible damage from all that traffic if we don't

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overseed. I'm concerned about the survival of the turf if we have any long severe cold snaps in the fall and winter.

"The reason for the dilemma is that in the late spring we start to have what is known as reciprocal play and our members can go play some of the private clubs in the area that are not accessible during the season. Many of these courses with lower rounds and less traffic have elected not to overseed anymore. When our members go play them and come back they don't always understand that we are dealing with transition issues while those courses aren't. All they see are greens with thin spots. It isn't fair to compare apples and oranges, but it happens. I just don't know how our greens would react to our 95,000 rounds of golf if we didn't have that overseeding insurance. If someone can guarantee me a mild winter in writing next year maybe we could try it."

One turf management challenge that came with the property is patches of common bermudagrass in the fairways. Kriesch, like other superintendents, doesn't have any easy solutions.

"Even superintendents who have gone through painstaking eradication efforts are finding common bermudagrass coming back. The members don't really pay much attention to these patch-

es except in the spring when the prolific seed heads get their attention. I might try spraying these locations without overspraying the surrounding 419 and if we can weaken it enough maybe the 419 will take over. The main thing is I don't want to create a big eyesore."

EDITOR'S NOTE: I can sympathize with Kriesch. No matter what you decide to do, it's going to be noticeable. If you spray common bermudagrass with Round Up, it will turn yellow and die (after repeated applications), so you will have yellow and brown spots all over your fairways and roughs. When you think you have it killed off then you cut it out and re-sod it and you have that obvious patch until it blends in. Be warned: sometimes the sod never blends in even though it's also supposedly the same variety. This is one issue that needs member understanding before it's undertaken. Do a test area and show them what they will be dealing with before you go whole hog on this project.

One project looming on the horizon that Kriesch is looking forward to is making Heritage Palms a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. He said, "I have done the site assessment and I hope this summer we can really get rolling on it. I put an

...making sure that heritage of Heritage Palms is well founded for the residents and golfers

article in the club newsletter and the member response for volunteers was phenomenal from doing wildlife inventories to installing nest boxes and feeders. Their enthusiasm is heartening. I know a lot of superintendents might like to get involved in the ACSF, but they think all the work will fall on them. By simply asking I found out I already had a group ready and willing to help. I guess I shouldn't be too surprised. The last two years we have done what I call a Woody Walk, where we tour the golf course and I point out the difference species of plants and animals on the course. Those tours are always well received."

Kriesch has other projects waiting in the wings like becoming a certified golf course superintendent and working on his bachelor's degree, but for now he's content in making sure that the heritage of Heritage Palms is well founded for the residents and golfers who venture past those signature palm trees at the entrance.



Assistant superintendents Kevin Bush (left), Sabal Course, and Brandon Parker, Royal Course, take on extra responsibility as more and more calls and meetings take up more of the superintendent's daily routine. Photo by Joel Jackson.