

*First Hole  
Gainesville Golf & Country Club  
Photo by Daniel Zelazek*



GAINSVILLE GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

# Forty-four Years and Three Superintendents Later...

*By Joel Jackson*

Overlooking Payne's Prairie, the Gainesville G&CC clubhouse is a portal for wildlife to meander into the woodsy southwest suburbs of this Florida college town. Located west of I-75 and just off Williston Rd, this certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary's wildlife inventory runs from A to Z according to superin-

tendent Buddy Keene. "You name it we've got it," proclaims Keene, who has been managing the 120-acre golf course since 1995. Keene added, "We have had several articles in the local paper reporting our course as being environmentally friendly and we're proud of that fact."

"This morning two foxes came trotting past our maintenance area, and this time of year the white-tailed deer have been wandering

around the course lately feeding on the acorns. A few wild hogs have also been rooting for the acorns, but they haven't been a real problem so far. I saw a couple of bobcats a few weeks ago, and even a coyote behind No. 2 green. We also have a nice population of eastern bluebirds taking advantage of the nesting boxes that we installed. We also see a fair amount of wild turkey wandering around the grounds. Once I

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picked up a baby alligator in one of our ponds and the momma gator wasn't too happy with me. I put junior down and made a strategic and hasty retreat. It was a little hairy there for a moment."

Keene, an avid outdoorsman, replaced the late, legendary Jeff Hayden in 1995 as only the third superintendent in the 44-year history of the course. Hayden took over for Charles Brasington, the original pro-superintendent in 1988, and groomed Keene as his replacement. Says Keene, "Jeff was an excellent mentor, a good friend, and almost like a big brother or father figure to me." The longevity of these superintendents has provided a stable yet progressive atmosphere at the club for getting things done and providing good playing conditions for the members over the years.

Recently, the club hosted three professional golf events, two of which were televised: the Nike Tour and subsequently the Buy.com Tour for developing PGA Tour players. Keene said, "I'd like to host another event like that. I love that kind of pressure to perform. I respond better to pressure. Tell me what you want and I can do it. I don't like it when I have to guess or wonder what you want."

The location of the Gainesville G&CC has its own built-in demands for growing high-quality turfgrass that meets the expectations of avid golfers. The mature trees in the

area cast long shadows and require Keene and company to find ways to manage the shade, a natural enemy to healthy turfgrass. The mostly clay-like soils drain slowly, and so an ongoing drainage program is in place to solve wet spots that crop up around the low-lying areas on the course. And the last major challenge is from isolated but vigorous populations of nematodes in the few sandy fairway areas and on the sand-based greens.

Because of the proximity of the Payne's Prairie Preserve, Keene takes a very proactive IPM approach on the course. Says Keene, "We have recorded lance nematode counts of over 1200 per cc of soil in some green samples, and so we have worked with the university nematologists over the years to find ways to control them. I generally try to grow the turf out of the stress and have used NemaCur sparingly only when they don't respond to extra fertility and watering. We have used some of the NeoTec product on the greens and have noticed some better transitions in the spring on otherwise weak greens."

In his overall pest-management program, Keene treats all curative applications of chemicals with a spot-treatment approach. The only large-scale applications are with Barricade and Ronstar pre-emergent herbicides applied in the fall and spring to prevent ryegrass or crabgrass and goosegrass germination, thus reducing



*A flawless putting green; the perfect place to practice. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

the total amount of herbicides needing to be applied to the course.

But pest problems take a back seat to dealing with shade issues. People revere trees, those majestic wind-whispering giants that dwarf our homes and sometimes our golf courses. In the right locations, trees can accent and define a hole and create a myriad decisions in strategically playing a hole. But, should the designer tuck a green into a shady glen or a short-sighted green committee plant trees which seem innocent until they grow and spread, the golf turf and playing conditions will eventually suffer.

It is a simple rule of nature - turfgrass

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needs and thrives on sunlight. It does not do well in shade and when you mow it down to 1/8-inch putting-green height, it is sheer folly to expect anything except thin turf, algae and bare ground.

Superintendents and agronomists have been trying to educate golfers about this undeniable fact, but the love of trees is difficult to overcome.

It is belatedly satisfying to finally hear golfers admit that turf managers were right after all when a tree is either removed or aggressively pruned to allow sunlight to reach the turf and the grass rebounds and fills in the bare spots and becomes a playable putting surface once again. Such is the ongoing discussion at many golf courses around the country and superintendents like Keene patiently seek the understanding of the golfers as they deal with shaded turf areas.

Two of Keene's toughest challenges are a couple of tees that get very little sunlight during certain times of the year. Keene said, "We have sodded one of the tees with zoysiagrass, which tolerates shade better than bermudagrass, and it has done better. It still gets a little thin, but it is easier to bring back. The biggest problem is that the bermudagrass can't compete with the overseeded ryegrass and we end up with big bare areas in the spring during transition. We will likely plant zoysia on the other tee as well and see how it does."

On the couple of greens impacted by shade, Keene has been able to either prune or remove the trees causing the most shade problems, but it is an ongoing issue as the limbs grow back and fill in or other trees grow taller and spread.

The Gainesville G&CC turfgrass palette is an interesting mix of old and new. Most of the fairways are mainly Ormond bermuda-



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Early morning shadows across the 10th green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

grass, one of the oldest varieties used on golf courses. There are a couple of Tifway 419 and Greg Norman GN1 fairways as well. The greens are 11-year old Tifdwarf with some of the typical off-type patches in them.

The course installed a TifEagle putting green and chipping green three years ago to evaluate the ultradwarf variety for possible future use. Keene says that the differences in manage-

ment practices between Tifdwarf and TifEagle makes for extra work in having different mowing and verticutting heights and schedules. Clubs really need to do their homework on these new varieties. There were a lot of problems cropping up on ultradwarfs during this rainy summer.

On holes 1-18 however, Keene has established a workable routine that keeps the greens in great shape. Keene says, "We aerify three

times a year in March, June and August and in the summer growing season we verticut three or four times, and during spring transition we verticut lightly on a weekly basis until the bermudagrass fills in. We topdress every couple of weeks during the summer, which allows us to keep the speeds faster without having to mow too low. We must be doing something right as our most recent soil tests came back showing a percolation rate

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## Fun Facts

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

1. **Car:** Dodge Ram 4x4 off road. "Can't dodge it? Ram it!"
2. **The last good movie I saw:** "Unforgiven"
3. **I stay home to watch:** The Weather Channel,

Fox News, and The O'Reilly Factor

4. **The book I've been reading:** *The Art of War*
5. **Favorite meal:** Steak and lobster
6. **Favorite performers:** Toby Keith, Hank Williams, Jr., and George Wallace, the comedian

7. **Prized possessions:** My dog "Bear" and my dad's military gun collection
8. **Personal Heroes:** My dad, John Wayne for what his movie characters stood for, and Charles Bronson
9. **Nobody knows that I:** Work out three times a week with former Gator star center Zac Zedalis.
10. **I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:** Seeing through the B.S.
11. **If I could do it over:** I would have played college football
12. **I'd give anything to meet:** John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, George Bush, Toby Keith and Hank Williams, Jr.
13. **My Fantasy is:** To race trucks across the desert
14. **The one thing I can't stand:** Incompetent individuals
15. **If I could change one thing about myself:** I would be more patient
16. **My most irrational act:** Can't think of any. I like to think things out before acting
17. **My most humbling experience:** Playing golf
18. **The words that best describe me:** Stubborn, honest, loyal, dedicated, relentless, caring, fun-loving



Buddy says, "Don't worry, boss. The greens aren't brown; that's just the new seed on the ground."



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Practice made easy. A shag bag for collecting balls hangs from a hook on the edge of the practice green. Photo by Joel Jackson.

of 23.6 inches per hour. Tees and fairways are aerified in the spring and late fall and we verticut the fairways once a year.”

To communicate the maintenance schedule and progress of projects and course conditions, Keene writes several articles in the club’s monthly newsletter. One article is usually just the timing and dates of major maintenance activities and what to expect condition-wise so there are no surprises. The other article is on the what, why and how things are done on the course.

Keene also posts key information on bulletin boards in the clubhouse in case people miss the information in the newsletter. Not content with only the written word, Keene makes it a point to visit the clubhouse during lunchtime to be around and be available for questions. He also makes sure he is seen on the course and visits with the regular golfers.

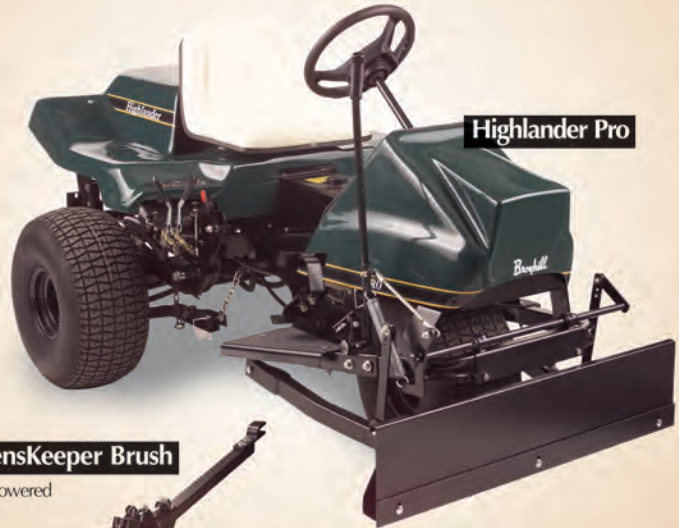
Keene says, “I try to give the members information in advance and let them know directly what’s going on. It has helped to dispel rumors and questions and keep them informed about the progress on the golf course. I think every superintendent should at least write a regular report or article and if there are no newsletters then at least make regular postings on a bulletin board at the clubhouse. The main thing is to stay in contact with your members.”

One of the key tools on a modern golf course is the irrigation system and Keene has two things going for him. One is James Wiley, a 40-year veteran and irrigation technician. Keene says, “James has seen it all and can do it all. We take very good care of our irrigation system.”

And second is a radio-controlled irrigation system that was installed in 1998. Keene continued, “We edge all the heads once a month

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*If members don't pick up a scorecard at the pro shop, they can get one at the mail box on the first tee. Photo by Joel Jackson.*



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## Charles "Buddy" Keene

**Originally from:** Clermont

**Family:** Single

**Education:** Manatee Community College (business and real estate courses); 1995 Lake City Community College - AS degree in golf course operations

**Employment history:** 1984-88 all crew positions River Wilderness GC; 1988-93 Manatee County Parks and Recreation Dept on municipal courses and athletic fields; 1993 to present Gainesville



G&CC as crew member, assistant superintendent and superintendent since 1995.

**Professional affiliations and awards:** FTGA 1995 to present - board member and Event Committee chairman, Membership Committee co-chair; FGCSA since 1995, current board member and Education chairman; GCSAA since 1995, currently working on certified superintendent status.

**How did you get into the business:** Took a job at the River Wilderness Club out of high school.

**Mentors:** Mike Miles and Tim Cann hired me at River Wilderness and taught me a lot. Gary McDougall with Manatee County encouraged me to go to Lake City and get my degree. Without his advice and encouragement I wouldn't be here today. Last but not least, Jeff Hayden. He did so much for me and others too.

**Goals:** My immediate goal is to complete my CGCS certification. I'd also like to learn how to pilot a helicopter.

**Philosophy of work/Advice:** Always be honest with people that way you won't have to worry about what you told someone. Give people your best and more than they expect. Don't take your work home with you. Learn to relax and let it go. You can't please

everyone. Be yourself. Give back to your profession. Join and participate. Support research. Do something.

**Memorable moments:** I sent a new employee out to mow the clean-up ring on the greens. I showed him how to operate the mower and told him to mow greens 1-18. I set him up with a vehicle, trailer and extra gas and sent him to No. 1. I stopped by a few minutes later and he was doing a fine job. Three hours later he showed up at the shop really sweating and looking for more gas. His trailer was piled high with clippings. I said, "Boy you sure cut a lot of grass, and you're looking for more gas? Aren't you done?" He said, no, he was only on No. 8 and there were more than 18 greens. I began to get worried then, and we went out to see what he was mowing. Not only had he done the clean-up ring, he was also mowing all the tees. It looked pretty bad for two weeks, but I had to laugh. It was my fault for not making sure he really knew what to do, and I learned a valuable lesson about assuming things.

**Hobbies/Interests:** Wide variety of things I like to do: Hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, scuba diving and spear fishing, travel, and oh yeah, some golf. I am a member of Ducks Unlimited, which is a conservation organization.

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## Gainesville Golf & Country Club

**Location:** Gainesville

**Ownership:** Members

**Playing policy:** Private

**The Numbers:** 18 holes, 6,938 yards, Par 72.

**Course Rating** 73.5/Slope 135.

**Designed by:** George Cobb. Opened in 1963.

**Management:** Club President John Galm; Club Manager Dana Saad; Green Chairman Dale Smith; Golf Course Superintendent Charles "Buddy" Keene.

**Major renovations:** All greens and some tees redesigned by McCumber Golf in 1992. New Hunter irrigation system in 1998. Ongoing projects: Drainage, drainage, drainage. Future projects: New maintenance facility hopefully.

**Total acreage under maintenance:** 120

**Greens:** TifDwarf. Avg. Size: 6,222 sq.ft. Total: 3 acres. HOC: .150" - .185" depending on season and weather. Overseeding: Poa trivialis @ 9-12 lbs/1,000 sq. ft. Green speed goals: 9-9.5. TifEagle putting and chipping greens for evaluation.

**Tees:** Ormond/Tifway 419 Bermudagrass - 2.5

acres. HOC: .500". Overseeding: 3-way Ryegrass blend @ 400 lbs/Acre.

**Fairways:** Ormond/419 Tifway/GN-1 Bermudagrass - 32 acres. HOC: .500". Overseeding 3-way Ryegrass blend @ 400 lbs/Acre.

**Roughs:** Ormond Bermudagrass - 90 acres. HOC: 1.25" - 1.50". Overseeded only when hosting Nike and Buy.com tour events.

**Bunkers:** 60, 1.21 acres. Sand type: Standard 37M. Machine raked 2x week with Toro Sand Pro. Hand raked as needed rest of the time.

**Native areas:** 70 acres of native forest and wetlands bordering golf course. Clubhouse overlooks Payne's Prairie Reserve. Five crushed coquina shell waste areas (.25 acres) in dense shade areas under trees.

**Waterways/Lakes:** Five lakes, 3.22 acres. Aquatic weeds spot treated as needed by outside contractor.

**Irrigation:** VFD pump station. Source: 3 deep wells permitted by St. Johns River Water Management District. Hunter Legacy radio controlled/computerized control system. 675 Hunter heads-85'-95' spacing. Fertigation system. Watering restrictions: No

watering between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Variances allowed per EPA/Product label directions.

**Total staff including superintendent:** 14 full time and 2 part-time. 600 hours per week. 50 hours overtime. Sometimes it's not enough. Project work done in the winter when the grass growth slows down a little.

**Leadership:** First Assistant Superintendent Lloyd Brown; Second Assistant Adam Strosser; Equipment Technician T. J. Poore; Irrigation Technician James Wiley - 40 year veteran; Administrative Assistant Diane Delzell. Equipment operators Ralph Durant and Willie Cobb - 30-year veterans.

**Communications:** Monthly club newsletter article - original articles as well as sharing from USGA Green Section and trade magazines. Monthly Green committee and staff meetings. Interact daily with members in grill room and on the course.

**Environment:** Fully certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Wildlife inventory ranges from armadillos to waterfowl. You name it. We have it.



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Walking golfers can repair their divots on the course by picking up a handy clip-on sand bottle at the 1st and 10th tees. Photo by Joel Jackson.

and every Monday we check the operation of the heads and zones. We can't do them all in one day, but every Monday we are working our way through the course to make sure everything is operating properly."

The day that I rode the course for this story interview, the winter overseeding had just been put down within the past 48 hours. Keene said, "We only seed tees, greens and fairways. We did overseed the roughs three times when we hosted the pro tournaments. We don't bury the seed under a lot of sand. Our verticutting program going into the fall keeps the turf canopy open for good seed-to-soil contact and we do topdress a week before we seed."

Other than the golden brown color on the greens from the seed, the course was neat and clean in appearance, a testament to the hard work, organization and dedication of the crew. Two other crew members had 30 years with the club and several others were going on ten years.

The staff is made up of 14 fulltime and two part-time people including the superintendent. One half the crew works three hours overtime on Saturdays and Sundays. Keene's office assistant, Diane Delzell, works from 6 a.m. until noon and he says she has been a god-send in helping with phone calls and paperwork. He wished every superintend could have someone like her to ease the administrative load. The other part-timer does edging, trimming and mowing work on the course and gets about 25 hours a week. Keene says sometimes there's just so much to do and not enough people to cover all the bases.

The Gainesville G&CC's stable work environment over the history of the club has allowed superintendents to operate at a good comfort level that has allowed them in return to provide the club members with excellent playing conditions. After 44 years of success, what's next?

Keene says, "The club has talked

*Most of the fairways are mainly Ormond bermudagrass, one of the oldest varieties used on golf courses. There are a couple of Tifway 419 and Greg Norman GN1 fairways as well. The greens are 11-year old Tifdwarf with some of the typical off-type patches in them.*

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*Plenty of sunshine and plenty of bunkers at the 11th and 15th double green complex. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

about a possible upgrade of our maintenance facility. That would be good investment when you consider all the changes in environmental and OSHA regulations that have come along since 1960. As our equipment gets more sophisticated and expensive, our need to store it and service it properly also increases.”

Keene and his staff challenge themselves each year to improve some aspect of the golf course. It keeps them sharp and prevents falling

into a boring routine. Says Keene, “The golf course may look the same to the casual observer, but it is a living, growing thing that changes all the time. Sometimes it’s just normal growth and maturity, and other times it is a reaction from weather stresses placed on the turf by Mother Nature. Our job is to diagnose the situation and react to the conditions.”

Sometimes clubs don’t fully realize the importance and benefit of having a long tenured

superintendent who has learned the in and outs of a piece of property. It takes time to learn all its wet and dry spots and how the turf responds to local weather trends and how to predict and how to modify practices to keep the turf as playable as possible under the situation. Superintendents like Keene and others truly appreciate clubs that learn to trust and respect their knowledge and abilities to manage the golf course, the most important asset of a club.

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A good healthy stand of *Poa trivialis* takes root on the 2nd green. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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