

Bob Bittner, CGCS - A Man of Many Talents

By Mark Black, CGCS

Some time ago I was asked to write a short bio for Robert R. (Bob) Bittner, superintendent at The Club Pelican Bay here in Naples and recent FGCSA President's Award winner for the Everglades Chapter. I was asked to do this since Bob and I both hit town about the same time way back around 1980. At the time we were both straight out of college, both assistants, both green and both in our first positions of supervisory responsibility. Bob worked for Roger Whitford at The Club Pelican Bay. I worked for Dan Hall at Imperial Golf Club. At the time, Roger and Dan were "seasoned" veterans in the turf-grass industry. As I write this, I realize Bob and I are now the "seasoned" veterans. Ouch! We are now referred to as "The Sod Fathers!" Ouch again!

Bob was born in Elyria, Ohio. He moved to Ft. Myers Beach in 1970 where he played football and finished up his last years of high school at Cypress Lakes. For those of you that don't know Bob, I can tell you he's a pretty big boy. If he weren't, we would still be stuck on that sand bar down in the 10,000 Islands. From high school, Bob went to McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La. where he received his bachelor of science degree in horticulture. While there, he met his future wife MaryJo Foreman. Following college Bob returned to Florida, married MaryJo and began his family of three children. They have two daughters Ashley 18, Lauren 17, and a son, Pierce, who is 10.

Bob began his professional career at The Club Pelican Bay in August of 1979. Pelican Bay was a

new Westinghouse Communities development project in Naples. The Club was designed by Arthur Hills. There was no doubt Pelican Bay set a new standard of excellence for golf maintenance in this area. In 1985, Roger decided to move on, and Bob was appointed the golf course superintendent.

In 1988, Bob was promoted to Westinghouse director of golf course operations for Southwest Florida. During this time he managed The Club while simultaneously growing in numerous courses throughout the area, including Pelican Nest Golf Club, Gateway Golf Club, Bay Colony and Pelican Marsh. While in this position,

Bob relocated his office to Pelicans Nest in Bonita Springs, where he stayed and grew in 27 holes designed by Tom Fazio. During this time he also designed and oversaw the construction of numerous maintenance facilities, set up shop and hired all required staff. To say he was busy was an understatement. Obviously, Bob has also been associated with two of the most famous golf course architects of our time, numerous high end golf courses and the demands of producing quality golf conditions on a regular basis.

In 1991, Pelican Bay was purchased by the members and Bob was asked to remain as the director of golf course operations. As we all know in this business, the period of transition from developer ownership to member ownership can, at best, be tricky and often dangerous for our occupation. That was almost 13 years ago and Bob is still there. Not only that, he is working with the same golf professional, John Carroll, who has been there from the beginning as well. I would have to say they have had as fine a superintendent/golf professional relationship as there is in the industry, which is very admirable.

Over the years, Bob has been involved professionally within his occupation. This includes being a GCSAA Member and certified golf course superintendent since 1992; a member of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Everglades Chapter of the FGCSA as a board member (1986-87), secretary/treasurer (1987-88) and vice president (1988-89). He served on the FTGA Special Events Committee 1995-98 and 2002 to present. He is also



Bob Bittner with his 2003 Presidents Award for Lifetime Service.

Bob's Mentors

Richard Bittner, my father, was very detail oriented and demanding person. He was a perfectionist.

Robert Ternes, my grandfather - A hard-working farmer who taught

me and my brother the meaning of a hard day's work.

Roger Whitford, CGCS - The man who taught me how to grow turf-grass and how to maintain an

upscale golf course.

Ross Obley - Former president of Westinghouse Communities Inc. He demanded The Club Pelican Bay be the best and gave us the support and

resources to do the job.

Dr. Max Brown and Wayne Wiemkin - Both spent many hours helping to determine The Club's soil and fertility requirements.

Bob's Mentors, cont'd

Wayne Ragsdale - Wadsworth Golf Construction, taught me more about golf construction than I needed to know.

Mark Black and Bob Shevlin - fellow rookie assistant superintendents and later superintendents. We grew up together. (Thanks Bob!)

Accomplishments and Goals:

- Managing several golf courses simultaneously for Westinghouse Communities, Inc.
- Hosting PGA Tour golf events.
- Bob hosted three concurrent televised Senior PGA Etna Challenge Tournaments from 1988 to 1990.
- "My present goal is to keep a good job until I choose to retire."

Greatest Satisfactions in this Business

- Knowing we are providing a superbly maintained golf course each and every day.
- Those rare "special" days when the golf course is absolutely perfect.
- Seeing ex-employees who have become outstanding individuals in the turfgrass industry and still being friends with most of them.

Greatest Challenges

Working with such a diverse maintenance team and trying to get employees to take pride in their work. Trying to get golfers to understand how much influence the weather has on the ability to manage fine turfgrass.

Work Philosophy

Work hard and be efficient each day but, don't take work home with you.

involved with the Coastal Conservation Association - Naples Chapter board of directors 1996 to present, and he was named Outstanding Volunteer for 2001 and 2003. He is also a U.S. Coast Guard licensed boat captain.

Bob Bittner has a lot going on. He is busy in his occupation and his family responsibilities. On a personal note I will tell you Bob Bittner is many things. He is a professional and a credit to our occupation. He is honest and trustworthy. He is

Advice

Be patient: Try to learn from everyone you work with. Everyone has something positive about them.

Most Memorable Moments

- During the first year of the Aetna Challenge, Brian Henning of the Senior Tour asked me about employees in Naples. He knew Naples was high end but he asked, "How much do you pay your employees? Your cup cutter is wearing a Rolex watch, a Polo shirt and expensive boots." He did not know that fellow superintendents were helping out during the event.
- Many years ago I got a call one evening regarding an irrigation break on the course. It was dark and Roger and I went out to investigate. We found the leak and while I was closing the isolation valves I forgot one thing... to put the truck in park. Luckily the doors were left open and I was able to hop in before it got too far away.
- At Christmas each year Santa and his two elves (I'll give you one guess as to Santa is) visit the maintenance complex and pass out gifts and encourage a good time. It's a fun time for us all.

Hobbies and Interest:

Fishing boating, rod building, fly tying, coating, golf, pro football and spending as much time in the keys as possible. (I will tell you that Bob has more fishing tackle than Bass Pro Shops!)

Community Involvement

Coaches Optimist Soccer Coastal Conservation, Naples Chapter

kindhearted and supportive. He is a knowledgeable golf course superintendent and respected as such. He is usually one of the first people I call on when I have a turf problem that has me stumped. He has never turned his back on me. I can count on him. I honestly don't know what better friend or support system I could have in this industry and I know I speak for many when I say this.

Congratulations Bob, you deserve to be recognized by your friends and peers with this award.

Chapter Round Up Fall Focus: Education, Charities

Calusa

Our November meeting was rained out, but we bounced back with our first annual Christmas Charity Tournament at the Kelly Greens G&CC Proceeds from the event went to the Lee County Abuse Counseling Center. We instituted a traveling trophy for the event and Cliff Anderson was the first winner.

We also got together in December for a Christmas Cruise on the Caloosahatchee River. The Heron's Glen team of Jerry Belyea, Charlie Better and Brian Lee won our 2003 Superintendent-Professional-Supplier event at Heritage Palms G.C.

Central Florida

Congratulations to the



NBC's Scoring Line Producer Tammy Proctor poses with members of the Central Florida GCSA at the PGA Father/Son Challenge.

team of Joey Brownsberger, Chris Cartin, Jimmy Lawrence, Joe Ondo and Robert Parmar for winning the FGCSA Championship Team Trophy at Southern Dunes GC. The chapter hosted a GCSAA Regional Seminar on employee safety, the second regional we hosted this year.

Chapter members put on their long johns and jackets to help NBC Sports televise the PGA Father/Son Challenge by acting as TV spotters and scorers at the chilly but perfect Champions Gate resort. The chapter will be holding its annual FTGA Research Fundraiser at the Interlachen CC in January.

Everglades

Congratulations to Rudy Geiger, Hole-in-the Wall GC, for becoming a certified golf course

superintendent. The chapter hosted a one-day GCSAA Seminar on water quality assessment and management facilitated by Dr. Ronnie Duncan and Mike Huck at the Naples Beach & Golf Club. Sixty attendees, superintendents and vendors, were present from throughout Central and South Florida. Education on water quality, water treatment options, cultural practices, and correctly reading water-sample information were presented. It was the first of many GCSAA seminars that the EGCSA hopes to hold in the Naples area.

We had great turnouts for



At the FGCSA Fall Board Meeting, the Everglades GCSA answered the call for turf research donations when Matt Taylor, left, presented a check for \$5,000 to FGCSA President Greg Pheneger

our Pro-Superintendent tournament (90) at Palmira GC in Naples, and our first-ever meeting at the Naples National Golf Club. The Children's Home Society will be the recipient of \$4,000 raised at our December golf outing at the LaPlaya GC. Odell Spainhour won the raffle grand prize of a classic 1969 Cadillac convertible. (See sidebar elsewhere in Spotlight)

North Florida

We had one of our best meetings ever this November with a presentation by Dr. Michael Healy and a panel discussion with Greg Tharp, Fred Klauk, Daron Murrell and Ron Hill entitled "Ultradwarfs vs. Tifdwarf: Has the jury reached a verdict?" The goal was to discuss common denominators and differences in managing both grass types. We will finish out the year with a December golf tournament at the San Jose CC and are looking forward to kicking off the New Year with an FTGA Regional Seminar in January for our chapter education session.

Paul Hamrick, a longtime member of the NFGCSA was honored for his military service during the