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 turfgrass 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 Pelican’s 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’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 turfgrass 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 then 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 Westhohouse Communities, Inc.
• Hosting PGA Tour golf events. Bob hosted three concurrent televised Senior PGA Etta 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.

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, building, fly tying, cooking, golf, pro football and spending as much time in the keys as possible. (If you tell me that Bob has more fishing tackle than Bass Pro Shops!)

Chapter Round Up

Fall Focus: Education, Charities

Calusa
Our November meeting was rainout, 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 Betters and Brian Lee won our 2003 Superintendent-Professional-Supplier event at Heritage Palms G.C.

Central Florida
Congratulations to the team of Joey Brownberger, Chris Cartin, Jimmy Lawrence, Joe Ondo and Robert Parmar for winning the FGCSA Championship Team Trophy at Southern Dunes GC. The chapter hosted a FGCSA 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 at Southern Dunes GC. The chapter hosted a FGCSA 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 at Southern Dunes GC. The chapter will be holding its annual FTFGA Research Fundraiser at the Interlachen CC in January.

North Florida
We had one of our first 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 denomiators 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 FTFGA Regional Seminar in January for our chapter education session.
Paul Hamrick, a longtime member of the NFNGCSA was honored for his military service during the