




 *Number 1, Par 4, 400 yard, Marsh Creek CC*  
*Photo by Daniel Zelazek*





Marsh Creek C.C.

# Take the Fork in the Road To the Middle of the Island

*By Joel Jackson*

I can't remember if it was New York Yankee baseball legends Casey Stengel or Yogi Berra who said, "If you come to a fork in the road, take it!" It doesn't really matter which one said it, I took the fork in the road in order to find the Marsh Creek Country Club just south of downtown St.

Augustine on Anastasia Island on Florida's northeast coast.

North of Ormond Beach, Highway A1A hugs Florida's east coast and, in this part of the state, few high-rise condos block the ocean view. The windswept palmettos, oaks and sabal palms are interspersed with scattered enclaves of single-family beach homes. It is a laid back atmosphere.

Four or five miles south of the historic city of St. Augustine, A1A veers right to stay along the beach and County Road 3 continues straight ahead, leading to the entrance of Marsh Creek, which is a country club community that opened its gates almost 20 years ago.

Marsh Creek is situated almost in the center of the widest part of Anastasia Island and oak





Much of the course winds through a riverine hardwood forest seen here on the 195 yard, par-3, 7th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Communication is the key as the signage at the first tee guides golfers to a pleasant golfing experience. Photo by Joel Jackson.

forest on the eastern side of the community transitions into an extensive network of tidal creeks and sloughs that cut through almost 10 square miles of marsh habitat on the western side of the island along the Matanzas River, the name given to the Intracoastal Waterway in this area. It is in this setting that Roger Osteen and Greg Barbour built Marsh Creek back in 1987 and they still enjoy taking an active role in the operation and success of the club which has 380 golfing members and 900 members overall.

In such a location one might expect to find wildlife in abundance, and head superintendent Andy McGuire, CGCS said, "We have deer, osprey, great horned owls, rosette spoonbills, red-tailed hawks, mallard ducks, cattle egrets, snowy egrets. We also get visits from bald eagles from time to

time, which causes lots of excitement when they are sighted. Besides McGuire's inventory a wide variety of typical perching songbirds and other small mammals inhabit the area and the Anastasia State Recreation Area is just up the road a mile or so.

McGuire has been at Marsh Creek since 1998 and he enjoys the camaraderie of the members almost as much as the teamwork of his own crew that has a very low turnover rate. Says McGuire, "One of the key missions of our owners and staff is to find ways to improve membership satisfaction. For example, one of the most unusual yet rewarding parts of my job has been the periodic member bus trips and outings to sporting events in Jacksonville and even the dog races. As a golf course superintendent I never thought I'd be a tour guide or trip planner, but these outings give me a chance to inter-

act with our members on a one-on-one social basis away from the golf course. We get to know each other as people and not just in the context of golf — even though that is our common bond."

Head golf professional Cary Splane also commented on the friendly atmosphere at Marsh Creek, "This is a great members' course. You get the sense that they really enjoy being here and they are proud of the golf course and the club. There is a laid-back ambience here and maybe it's the relaxed beach setting. There just don't seem to be a lot of hidden agendas or pressures. Oh sure, there are a few complaints from time to time, but they usually relate to pace of play on a busy day. I very seldom ever hear a complaint related to course conditions."

McGuire chimed in, "Most of the time the golfers look out for us. If they see or hear something they let us know about it. They want things to go smoothly and so do we. We're only here because of and for them. You learn what the hot button issues are and you stay ahead of them. It's really pretty simple."

Of course it's "simple" when you work hard, communicate with others, strive to be a team player and make sure you know the business. McGuire tries to do all of those things and his longevity at Marsh Creek has enabled him to learn how to manage the challenges on growing turf in this particular environment.

McGuire listed some of the idiosyncrasies that come with the property, "Since we are in a marsh environment, we tend to have heavy or fine soils, so we have to manage our irrigation closely. We are in a coastal area with salt water all around us and we use reclaimed water, so we have to monitor





*The lake guarding the 375-yard 12th hole is one of 13 bodies of water on the course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*



*The 431-yard 10th hole runs along the Matanzas River marsh and is the number-one handicap hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

and manage our sodium levels to keep the turf healthy. During this past hurricane season and at other times when we have endured tropical force winds, we can get salt spray from the Atlantic drift over onto the course which will “burn” or “brown-out” the turf temporarily. And last but not least, we have 18-year-old greens and an aging irrigation system.”

The overriding issue of high sodium levels in the soil and irrigation water has become a lit-

tle more manageable according to McGuire through the use of SoluCal and slow-release Polyon-coated potassium. The last two items have been addressed recently with the installation of new Flowtronex pump station and Toro Osmac controls and plans are on the table for a greens renovation project in the near future. McGuire would like also to address sprinkler-head spacing and locations to improve the irrigation coverage. He can’t wait to install some new grass on the greens to improve the putting sur-

faces. He reports the grass of choice is a Tifdwarf variety from the Randy Jones turf farm, which reportedly has been performing very well at other courses.

They say that behind every cloud is a silver lining and in this case the heavy soils at Marsh Creek don’t leach nutrients readily, so McGuire uses lower nitrogen rates annually in the 6-8 pound range on greens and 4-5 pounds on fairways. But moisture levels can also be harder to



# Course Facts



*Marsh Creek Country Club Maintenance Staff.*

## Marsh Creek Country Club

**Location:** St. Augustine

**Ownership:** Parc Group – Roger Osteen and Greg Barbour

**Playing policy:** Private

**Number of holes:** 18. 6,883 yards. par 72.

**Course Rating/Slope:** 73.4/144

**Designed by:** Mark McCumber. Constructed by McCumber Golf.

**Opened:** 1987

**Management Team:** John Hewins, club manager; Hugh Peters, board of governors; Cary Splane, head golf professional; Marianne Messler, membership; Sandy Mills, food and beverage manager; Joe Abdulghani, head chef; Julie Ronan, events; Andy Maguire, golf course superintendent

**Planned projects:** 1) Greens renovation (Summer 2005). Regrassing with Tifdwarf from Randy Jones

Grassing; 2) Bunker touch-up with new 37-M sand; 3) Laser level par-3 tees and the driving range tee.

**Total acreage under maintenance:** 105.

**Greens:** Tifdwarf bermudagrass; avg. size, 5,000 sq.ft.; total, 2.4 acres; HOC, .125-.140 in summer and .100-.140 in winter; Overseeding, Cypress Poa trivialis; Green speed goals: 8.0-10.0 depending on events.

**Tees:** Tifway II bermudagrass; 3.5 acres; HOC, .400-.500; Overseeding, Paragon ryegrass @ 600 lbs/acre.

**Fairways:** Tifway II bermudagrass; 28 acres; HOC, .400-.500; Overseeding, Paragon ryegrass @ 400 lbs/acre

**Roughs:** Tifway II bermudagrass; HOC, 1.50-2.00; No overseeding; Increase HOC through busy season into fall to help offset cart traffic damage.

**Bunkers:** 28, sand type: 37-M. Hand rake small greenside bunkers. Machine rake others with Toro 2020 Sand Pro.

**Waste/native areas:** One small bunker subject to tidal dampness. It is filled with crushed red coquina and maintained with the Sand Pro. The coquina makes it quite playable even when wet. All beds and under-tree areas are mulched with a hardwood mulch rather than pine straw. We find it holds up longer than the straw.

**Waterways/Lakes:** 13 lakes and ponds maintained by outside contractor under the home owners association. The front nine waterways have tidal connections and the back nine are used for drainage/runoff control.

**Irrigation:** Source, reclaimed water. New Flowtronex VFD pump station installed in 2004. Toro Osmac/hydraulic controls. 70-ft. spacing on mostly Toro 670 heads. Our fertigation systems is mainly used for applying wetting agents during dry spells.

**Water management/conservation:** Since we are on reclaimed water we are not under restrictions. We are on a Florida Power & Light non-peak time-of-use plan for energy efficiency.

**Staff:** Total including superintendent, 13 full time, 4 part time. Scheduled 40 hrs straight time with overtime as needed. We do not have a formal OJT program, but we have employed OJT turf students from Daytona Beach CC and Lake City CC in the past.

**Leadership:** Assistant Superintendent/Pest Control/Irrigation Matt Glaser, Equipment Technician Paul Kane; Irrigation/Pest Control Technician Steve Forrester

**Communications:** Morning crew meeting to start the day. Monthly safety meetings. Weekly department head staff meetings. Monthly executive committee meetings with all the chairman at the club. Bi-monthly meeting with the Men's Golf Association. Quarterly Board of Governors meeting.

**Management Challenges:** High sodium levels in the soil and reclaimed water. 18-year old greens and an aging irrigation system.

manage during dry spells, so the fertigation system is used to apply wetting agents more often than liquid fertilizer.

Longevity at Marsh Creek — or at any club, for that matter — gives a superintendent a feel for the golf course in times of stress. You have to work the land to understand it. McGuire says, "I've been here long enough to know the 12-14 spots where the mole crickets are going to pop-up each year. On holes 8 and 9, which have sandier soil than the others, we will have to watch out for some local-

ized nematode damage. And then there will be our regular irrigation hot spots that show up during dry weather periods."

It was a foggy, misty February day when I visited Marsh, so I asked McGuire about the micro-environment and weather in North Florida and how it affected his course management routines. He said, "Well, in the winter it can get overcast, wet, cold and windy. January and February are the worst months for sure. Being close to the ocean does have a moderating effect in the summer. We only have

three or four weeks when it gets truly hot. We are generally 8-10 degrees cooler than, say, along the I-95 corridor approximately six miles to the west. Fall and spring are no problem and the weather is just great. When we get some powerful northeaster storms and the winds get over 30 mph, we can get some foliar burn from the salt spray.

McGuire also deals with some shade issues on the par-3, 7th hole. He said, "The hole has a great look with a creek in front and guarded by the oak trees, but we have to go in and root prune the trees

## Superintendent Facts

### Andy Maguire



Andy Maguire, CGCS

**Originally from:** Salem, Mass. Grew up in Boca Raton.

**Family:** Wife of 10 years, Kristi. Two daughters,

Sierra (7) and Samantha (4)

**Education:** B.S. in landscape and horticulture from Florida A&M.

**Employment history:** 1998-Present Marsh Creek C.C., superintendent; 1996-98 Matanzas Woods GC, superintendent; 1995-96 Matanzas Woods, assistant superintendent; 1995 Falcon's Fire G.C., spray & irrigation Tech; 1992-95 Summerbrooke GC, crew member up to assistant superintendent; 1985 – 1991 worked summers as a crew member at Boca Grove G.C., Myacoo CC, Breakers West CC, and Wycliff CC.

**Professional affiliations and awards:** GCSAA, FGCSA and North Florida GCSA. Earned CGCS status in March 2004. Served in all offices of the North Florida GCSA from 1999 to 2004, president in 2004.

**How did you get into the business?** I started working on courses in the summers while in high school and fell in love with the business. Every superin-

tendent I worked for involved me to some degree which fed my passion for the industry.

**Mentors:** My dad would have to be number one. He taught me a good solid work ethic at a young age. Then all the superintendents who helped me learn the business: Steve Pearson, Steve Schroeder, John Baute, Craig Foley, Al Sims, Alan Steichen and Brigid Braun.

**Goals:** To have a long and prosperous career in the golf business.

**Work philosophy:** Always work hard and love what you do. Be a team player. Work well with all the staff and managers in all the other departments.

**Memorable moments:** The firestorms of 1998 that hit the Matanzas Woods GC in Palm Coast. We lost all the trees on 11 holes on the course. It was quite an experience for my first superintendent's job.

**Hobbies/Interests:** Family, sports and golf, although I'm not very good. I love FSU football.



*Crushed coquina is used successfully in this fairway waste bunker that can get wet when the moon is full and the tide is high. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

because they are encroaching into the green and the shifting shade patterns keep the turf weaker than it should be. We had to do some storm damage thin-

ning and we've been able to open it up for some sunshine and air circulation."

When dealing with course management issues, McGuire's best tool is communication starting with daily morning crew meetings all the way to formal monthly and quarterly club association and committee meetings. He says, "We didn't always do the morning meetings with the crew, but it just makes sense. Number one we greet everybody and say 'Good Morning', then we can discuss the schedule for the day, talk about second jobs after the course prep, announce upcoming events, check attendance and get crew feedback on jobs."

McGuire has learned how to work with people and turfgrass from a host of mentors in the business including former bosses Steve Pearson, Steve Schroeder, John Baute, Craig Foley, Al Sims, Alan Steichen and Brigid Braun. He got one of his first career-humbling experiences as a rookie superintendent at the Matanzas Woods G.C. in Palm Coast.

It was 1998, the year of the fire storms and the trees on 11 holes were destroyed. "We were halfway through a Men's Day event when the first alarms went out," he said, "We had no idea what was happening. The wind changed direction and before long you could literally hear it coming as it jumped across the tree tops. It was an amazing experience for my first superintendent's position. You may find it hard to find a silver lining in that



*Hardwood mulch is used under all the trees on the course and seems to last longer than pine-needle mulch. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

scenario, but McGuire said, "With the course closed to clean up all the tree debris, we ended up having the best stand of overseeding I've ever seen."





Homeowners enjoy the view of the 498-yard 3rd hole in the foreground and the par-3, 4th hole in the background. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Since then McGuire says the birth of his two daughters and being a dad are his most humbling experiences. “I feel lucky to have learned at a relatively early age that happiness is the key to life. It’s not all about the money. If you work hard and strive to be a team player and help out the other department heads and staff at your club, everyone will be happier in their work. What’s better than that? My goal is to have a long prosperous career in the industry.”

McGuire started out as a business major in college, but he had already developed a fairly severe case of “green thumb” working outdoor landscape jobs in high school and on golf courses while attending college. While working his way up from crew member to spray tech to assistant superintendent at the Summerbrooke G.C. in Tallahassee, he switched his major to a B.S. in landscape and horticulture and graduated from Florida A&M University.

McGuire describes himself as a “hands-on” type of superintendent who doesn’t mind hand mowing greens or jumping into the hole to make irrigation repairs. He said, “I understand I am a manager and the person who has to understand the big picture, but in this business I depend on my crew to make me and the course to look good. I don’t think it’s a bad thing for them to realize that I am willing to tackle the dirty work to get the job done. I can’t expect them to be team players if I don’t lead by example.”

Marsh Creek appears to be a positive example of what a good members’ club should be — a gathering of friendly people enjoying good golf and each other with a “Don’t Worry. Be Happy” attitude.

## Fun Facts



Andy Maguire with a former resident of Marsh Creek. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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

**1. Car:** 2003 Toyota Tundra 4x4

- 2. The last good movie I saw:** “Friday Night Lights”
- 3. I stay home to watch:** FSU Football
- 4. The book I’ve been reading:** Keeper of the Green
- 5. Favorite meal:** Ribeye steak, baked potato and salad
- 6. Favorite performers:** All types of music, but I especially like sports talk radio
- 7. Prized possessions:** My two daughters Sierra and Samantha
- 8. Personal Heroes:** My mom, dad and wife Kristi. She never complains about the demands of my profession.
- 9. Nobody knows that I:** Dislike the Florida Gators
- 10. I’m better than anyone else when it comes to:** I’ll take the Fifth Amendment on that one.
- 11. I’d give anything to meet:** Bobby Bowden
- 13. My fantasy is:** It came true – The Boston Red Sox won the World Series
- 14. The one thing I can’t stand:** Complacency
- 15. If I could change one thing about myself:** I’d be more patient
- 16. My most irrational act:** Whenever I lose my patience
- 17. My most humbling experience:** The birth of my daughters
- 18. The words that best describe me:** A highly motivated, ambitious team player.