No. 16 The Falls Hole
No. 18 Green in Foreground
The Falls C.C.
Photo by Daniel Zelazek
By Joel Jackson, CGCS

The next best thing to being a golf course superintendent and seeing the wildlife on your own golf course is being the editor of this magazine and getting to visit golf courses and see the diverse wildlife inhabiting our state’s golf links. The Falls Country Club has provided me (and the members) with two bird sighting not normally afforded most golfers.

A few years back we did a story on a flock of flamingoes that inhabited this southeastern Palm Beach County golf course. I got to see them while playing in one of the Palm Beach Chapter’s Future of Golf tournaments held annually to raise money for junior golf programs and for turf research. Superintendent Steve Pearson, CGCS jumped through all sorts of hoops to make the exotic tropical wading birds at home, but after a few years they moved on.

But this year a new rare visitor has taken up residence in the big lake fed by the namesake waterfalls: a female snow goose. Steve doesn’t know if she is a widow on the wing or a divorcee getting away to Palm Beach for the winter. Whatever her marital status, she is ruling the roost in the lake.

Steve comes down to the lake to feed her every day and she honks at him as if to com-
**The Falls Country Club**

**Location:** Lake Worth  
**Ownership:** Private, member owned, non-profit corporation  
**Playing policy:** Private. Members and guests only  
**Number of holes and USGA rating:** 18 holes; championship tees 6,800 yards, rating/slope 72.8/136  
**Designed by:** Joe Lee, opened for play 1987.  

**Management Team:**  
- Club President: Robert Rachesky  
- Green Chairman: Keith Jampolis  
- Club Manager: Dominic Zeoli  
- Head Golf Professional: Bill Levi  
- Golf Course Superintendent: Steve Pearson  

**Major Renovations/Ongoing Projects:** In the summer of 2000 we regrassed the greens, laser-leveled and regrassed the tees, and enlarged and reshaped the fairway bunkers. We have added a lot of new bulkheads around the lakes as time and resources permitted.  
**Total acreage under maintenance:** 135  
**Greens:** Tifdwarf average size 5,340 SF, 2.87 total acres, HOC .130 -.140 inches from November to May. Green Speeds: Nov - May 9.0 –10.0; medium speed in summer - not much play.  
**Tees:** Tifway 419, 2.23 total acres tee tops only, HOC .375 inches all year, no overseeding. We resodded the ladies tee on No. 5 with Celebration bermudagrass in 2004.  
**Fairways:** Tifway 419, 32 total acres, HOC .375 inches, no overseeding.  
**Roughs:** Tifway 419, 64 total acres HOC 2.0 inches most of the year, no overseeding.  
**Bunkers:** 76, 212,000 sq. ft., sand type: FS 100, machine-raked with Toro Sand Pro with cultivators and fan rakes and Cushman with steel plate rakes. Both machines can be set up with brushes only – beautiful job.  

**Native/Waste areas:** Three “no touch” native areas for wildlife cover. 60,000 sq. ft. of crushed concrete screenings for waste areas and about one acre of landscaped beds with perennial plant material.  
**Waterways:** 10 lakes covering 25 acres; maintained with grass carp exclusively, no chemicals added to the water. Lakebank grass growth controlled by spraying Rodeo every two months.  
**Irrigation:** Surface water from the lakes. PSI pump station with cla-valve controls. Toro Osmac satellites control system with Site Pro software. 688 heads on the course with variable spacing. Watering limited to our CUP issued by SFWMD. We are on a Florida Power Time-of-Use Program so irrigation times are limited to off-peak hours (9 p.m. to noon April to October, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. November to March.  
**Water Management/Conservation:** Watering times are adjusted daily.
based on weather data input and visual observations. We don’t water any more than we have to considering the amount of rainfall we get.

**Staff:** Total including superintendent is 15, not counting part time administrative assistant (20 hr/week) and a landscape foreman and two temporary helpers. Weekly budget per person 40 hours straight time and 3 hours overtime 6 months of the year.

**Key personnel:** Assistant Superintendent Malvir Gomez; Head Mechanic Leandro Sanchez; Assistant Mechanic Edgar Ardila; Pest Control Technician Steve Popp; Landscape Foreman Ernesto Barajas; Lead Trainer Vernance Paul and Admin Assistant Debbie Jacobs.

**Communications:** Crew meeting daily; club management meets every two weeks (Nov – March). Calendars and function sheets sent out weekly. Green committee meets twice per year, but I visit with the green chairman whenever he comes out to play. I make it a point to talk to all committee members whenever I see them around the clubhouse or out playing. I interact with a lot of members every day.

**Cultural Programs**

**Greens** – Aerify 4x year May to September with a variety of tine sizes. This year started hydro-aerifying monthly November to April. Verticut as needed in the summer. Fertilization depends on weather and growing conditions: Average 1 lb of Nitrogen and 1.5 lbs of Potassium per month from granular, fertigation and foliar spraying. Topdressing: Heavy topdressing following each of the four summer aerifications (May to September) and light dusting topdressings every 2-3 weeks during the winter season.

**Tees** – Aerify 3x during the summer months with topdressing; verticut heavily in August. Fertility 1 lb N and K per month, granular.

**Green Slopes** – Mowed and maintained the same as tees except we don’t verticut the slopes. We have player/caddy walkways from tee to fairway maintained the same way. Fairways – Aerify 3x in summer, heavily in August when closed. In past years we have verticut fairways (outside contractor), but did not this past year due to budget constraints and hurricane cleanup. We mow fairways at 3/8-inch all year, stripping September to May and multiple directions June to August. Fertility - bulk granular applications May and August (1 lb N & K). First week in October bulk granular (1.5 lbs N and 2.0 lbs K) with lots of slow release material. Liquid fertilizer Dec to Feb/Mar (8-0-8 and 24-0-0 with minors). Depending on turf conditions in Feb/Mar (seldom needed), bulk granular (1 lb N & K) with 50 percent slow release.

**Roughs** – Aerify 2x in summer, no verticutting. Try to scalp down to 1 inch HOC during August when closed. Same fertility program as fairways but never a Feb/March application.

**Pest Control/IPM** – Varies annually according to budget and mole cricket pressure. We try to plan on treating tees, green slopes and fairways for grubs and mole crickets for year-round control. A spring/early-summer application is made and then again in August/September after aerification. Roughs are done as needed. Nematodes: Greens are spot treated in the spring on the usual hot spots only. No other nematode treatments made on the course.

**Turf management challenges** – Non-USGA-spec greens can go through periods of disease pressure in August/September.

**Special events and Interesting/unusual facts:** We have hosted the Palm Beach GCSA’s Future of Golf tournament the past seven years. Our waterfalls are a unique feature. Hurricanes have taken their toll on our tree population: 1999 Irene – 125; 2004 Frances and Jeanne – 434; and 2005 Wilma – 313.
plain about the water temperature or some noisy neighbors. Her matter of fact demeanor has made her the natural leader of the waterfowl contingent in the lake and a flock of native mottled ducks follows her around all day.

Being in the city, The Falls’ wildlife population isn’t big on many of the larger critters that find homes on the outlying courses, but the bird inventory is something else. Pearson says, “We have an osprey that owns the place and is very territorial while fishing our lakes. We occasionally get a visit by a bald eagle also. We have the full complement of wading birds including blue, white, and green herons and various egrets. Then there are the coots, moorhens, anhingas and cormorants. Pelicans and seagulls also like to hang out here.

“Besides the mottled ducks that hang with Mother Goose, we have...
around 200 wood ducks that hang out in one of our ‘No Touch’ areas in the lake adjacent to the 11th tee. We have a wood duck nest box there and we produce several fledglings every year. That particular area also provides cover for a bunch of black crested night herons.”

Pearson says The Falls is also home to the normal array of native perching and songbirds commonly found in this part of the state, and they could be seen flying from tree to tree or hopping about in the roughs looking for a meal as we toured the course. But as prolific as the winged birds are at The Falls, there are other birdies that must be attended to.

The Falls Country Club is another Gentleman Joe Lee design and opened for play nineteen years ago. Pearson has been managing the turf here for the past 15 years, and perhaps the past two years have been the toughest to handle. They have been tough because hurricanes Frances, Jeanne in 2004 and Wilma in 2005 destroyed more than 700 trees outright and the lingering effects on the surviving trees have been a constant concern as they struggle to re-establish and flourish again.

Don’t misunderstand, the course looked wonderful as we toured the grounds in late February. The telltale sign of staked up trees told the story of the storms’ impact and many trees, like others around the state, had been defoliated to some degree and were in the process of coming back. Only those who intimately know the course and

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what it looked like before the storms could appreciate the blows dealt by the hurricanes. It was evident that Pearson felt the shock and awe of how the course had changed in overall appearance as he pointed out various areas that had lost key trees and limbs that changed the familiar appearance of the course.

The club made a significant investment in restoring many trees lost in the 2004 season only to have many of the large specimen trees uprooted again by Wilma in 2005. But Pearson and staff are back at it and keeping an eye on which trees are making it and which ones may have to be removed. The point is that The Falls is not alone in having to deal with the damage that has changed the appearance of many courses.

Of course behind every dark cloud is a silver lining. Many trees that had perhaps been placed inappropriately and were causing turf shade problems were also victims of the storms and now once-bare-and-thin areas are again growing healthy turf. Clubs have been given a second chance in many locations to put a premium on turfgrass for golf instead of growing forests of trees to fall down in another storm and cost tons of clean-up money that spiraling insurance premiums no longer cover.

As Pearson and the club recover from the storm damage, he is looking forward to a possible major renovation of the greens complexes and course layout in general which may begin in
Vehicle: 2005 Ram 1500 quad cab
I stay home to watch: Sports – all of them, especially the Florida Gators.
The book I've been reading: Rules of Prey by John Sanford
Favorite meal: Steak – medium rare
Favorite performers: Johnny Mathis
Prized possessions: Opening-game ticket – Marlins vs. Dodgers, April 5, 1993
Personal Heroes: My son’s cardiac surgeon and his pediatric cardiologist, Dr. Grace Wolff
Nobody knows that I: Bake my own pies and cookies from scratch
I’m better than anyone else when it comes to: Coaching at third base
I’d give anything to meet: Nobody in particular. Met a lot of people in my career
My fantasy is: Play golf at Cypress Point
The one thing I can’t stand: Slow fast-food places
If I could change one thing about myself: Lose weight and keep it off
Most humbling experience: Realizing the importance of being a good parent
The words that best describe me: Organized. Sports nut. Impatient
My most irrational act: Buying a new car and then trading it in after one month. Couldn’t stand it.
My dream foursome would be: Arnold Palmer, Bobby Jones, my son and me.
My best fish story: Winning the 2005 FTGA Fishing Tournament with the biggest snook and biggest redfish.

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Steve Pearson, CGCS

Originally From: Michigan. Born in Detroit. Love all Detroit sports teams.

Family: Wife: Wendy (married 33 years). Children: Adrienne and Garrett. Two grandchildren: Morgan (4) and Colette (18 months)

Employment History: 1971 assistant superintendent, Fountains of Palm Beach; 1971-72 assistant superintendent, Johns Island Club; 1972 assistant superintendent Sheoah (now Winter Springs) GC; 1972-77 assistant superintendent, Fountains of Palm Beach, 45 holes (oversaw building of South Course and irrigation system installation; 1977-80 superintendent Mayacoo Lakes; 1980-81 superintendent Boca Lago CC; 1981-89 Superintendent Boca Grove G&TC; 1989-91 superintendent Woodfield CC; 1991 to present superintendent The Falls CC.


How did you get into the business? Played golf on high school and junior college teams. Majoring in architecture but higher math did me in. Worked one summer at the Fountains and decided to transfer to UF in Turf Management. Worked with Dr. G.C. Horn. Came back to the Fountains after college and worked for Felix Paguaga at the Fountains.

Mentors: G.C. Horn really got me enthusiastic about turf management on the technical and educational side. Felix Paguaga – my mentor in the beginning. I learned a lot about turf but more importantly I learned how to deal with members. I have also learned a lot from my peers in the industry. The friendships that I have developed over the years have been phenomenal. Everyone has helped me over the years. You can learn so much just by networking with other superintendents.

Goals/Accomplishments: I’m very proud to be recognized for my contributions to the industry with the Wreath of Grass and Presidents Awards. I’m also proud of our work with the Florida Turfgrass Association. It was difficult but rewarding to work on the Florida Turf Digest magazine and watch it grow over the years. One goal I’d like to see would be to oversee the eventual renovation of the greens to USGA specs and irrigation system upgrades and new aesthetics for the course.

Philosophy of work/advice: Not uncommon to others in the industry, I try to do the very best for my club with the resources provided. I think I am very efficient and organized. I believe in getting the most “bang for the buck.” My advice to prospective superintendents: Work hard. Be studious and sincere in your approach to being a superintendent. Be willing to be patient and learn how to be a better people manager. There is a lot more to being a superintendent than growing turfgrass. Listen, read and become involved with your superintendent organizations.

Personal memorable moments: Outside of golf – Coaching my daughter, Adrienne, in her younger days in slow-pitch softball and eventually being part of teams winning two national championships and seven state championships and lots of tournaments. Golf related – playing in Father/Son tournaments with my son Garrett and watching sporting events with him. He’s a sports nut just like I am. Playing Pebble Beach and hitting my tee shot in almost total darkness on the par 3, 17th hole to 18 inches. What a birdie! They had to kick us off the 18th hole that day.

Hobbies and interests: My wife is also a baseball nut. We really enjoyed watching all the Marlins’ divisional, National League championship and Worlds Series games in 2003 and 2007 in person. In general: Sports! Marlins baseball, golf, any UF Gators sports. Fishing. Listening to audio books and watching my grandchildren grow up.
2007. While the greens at The Falls had a soil-mix base, they did not have internal drainage and definitely were not built to USGA spec by any means. Not long ago Pearson rebuilt the practice green to USGA specifications and the difference in turf quality and density compared to the other greens is like night and day.

That's a good example of a club making a change on a test case basis to see how it will work in that location. Everyone should try it when considering greens reconstruction or regrassing. Do a test site and make comparisons first hand before jumping into something you may regret later. Pearson said, "The USGA profile allows the greens to breathe. It isn't unusual for our old greens to run into problems late in the summer during periods of heavy rain-

next year."

Pearson had already upgraded his irrigation pump station and control system in 2000. Most of the work was done in-house to install the Toro Site Pro system. Interestingly enough his old cla-valve system, the piping and heads have not had to replaced. Pearson says with the new computer controls he can stagger watering times and volumes so effectively he hasn't seen the need yet for a VFD pump.

Pearson said, "We have been lucky that the original system was installed properly. We have had maybe 1-2 leaks a year at most, and we seldom have to replace a head." Pearson thinks that the 4,000-gallon-per-minute pump that supplies the trademark waterfall feature on the 16th hole is part of the reason. He said, "All of the lakes are interconnected and the irrigation pump is on a small cove on the waterfall lake. I think the constant circulation prevents stagnation and algae formation which keeps junk from building up in the head and causing problems." He also cites the critical positioning and construction of the wet well for the pump intake that does not suck up any sediment to erode the pipes and heads.

And the aquatic weed control program in his lakes is very simple

Here’s an idea for a colorful, attractive alternative to plain old bridge railings that often serve as messy bird roosts. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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The 535-yard, par-5, 8th hole wraps around a lakeside bunker. Photo by Daniel Zelazek
– grass carp. He said, “We don’t put anything into our lakes for weed control except the fish. We spray the lake banks with Rodeo every couple of months to control the grass growth on the lake banks.” It works. The only thing you see in the lakes besides the bottom along the edges is the broad back of the carp at they forage in shallow water.

The irrigation water for The Falls is strictly surface water from rainfall and from an adjacent canal that Pearson can access if his lake levels fall too low. Pearson is on a Florida Power Non-Peak Hours plan so he irrigates during periods when the rates are lower.

If the course renovation project takes place next year, Pearson and the club are considering replacing the Tifdwarf with a new variety and the jury is still out on which one they may choose, but TifEagle is among the top candidates. As far as the remainder of the turf on the course, Pearson has been very pleased with the Tifway 419 and has harvested his own sprigs from the driving range to re-grass areas on the course in the past. The only variation he may consider is using Celebration bermudagrass on some shady tees. Pearson added, “We had a shade problem on the forward tee on hole #5 and we tried Celebration there and are liking what we see. Once we see how the new layout starts shaping up we may install more on any tees that look they will have shade issues.”

Pearson, like so many other superintendents I have interviewed recently, is taking a holistic approach to turf management. They are keeping a wary eye on the weather especially in the late summer and early fall when the heat and humidity and cloudy days can affect growing conditions. They are backing off fixed schedules for cultural practices and instead operate in a more prescription-management mode to avoid unnecessarily stressing the turfgrass. Pearson is lucky to be able to shut down the course in August, one of the most stressful periods in South Florida, to take advantage of very low play to get work done on the course to get ready for the fall season.

All work and no play would make Steve a dull fellow if I didn’t already know him from our joint work on the FTGA’s Florida Turf Digest magazine when Steve was the editor and his years of service on committee and boards for the Palm Beach GCSA, the Florida GCSA and the FTGA. He has been Mr. Volunteer for decades and even now he is on his second time around the Palm Beach GCSA board. He will reprise his role as president again next year. When asked why he was doing a second stint, he replied, “We have a great crop of younger folks coming along, but they needed a little more experience and seasoning before they felt ready to move into the officer rotation. The chapter needed someone to fill in the gap and I agreed.” He added with a grin, “I am the vice president this year and president

There are five bird species in this group on the 17th hole. Appearing in alphabetical order: Brown pelicans, cormorants, sea gull, snowy egret and white ibis. Photo by Joel Jackson.
next year. My seniority meant I didn’t have to spend two years as secretary and treasurer.”

Pearson is also an avid sportsman and sports fan. He is pretty fair golfer having played on high school and junior college teams. He is also a trophy-winning fisherman taking Biggest Snook and Redfish prizes at the 2005 FTGA Fishing Tournament in Bonita Springs. Before becoming Grandpa Pearson, he helped coach his daughter’s slow-pitch team to seven state titles and two national championships.

He and his wife Wendy are baseball nuts and enjoy going to Florida Marlins games. They were in hog heaven in 2003 and 2007 when the Marlins were in the World Championships. Pearson also bleeds University of Florida orange and blue as a 1971 graduate with his BS in agriculture specializing in turf management.

Good superintendents take pride and virtual ownership of their golf courses, and Pearson is no exception. The hard work and long hours of dealing with storm damage have paid off and while some of the old familiar views have changed, the joyful sights and sounds of birds and birdies are being seen and heard in paradise once again.