When I learned that The Loxahatchee Club had been selected by the Palm Beach GCSA as their representative course for this issue, a floodgate of memories opened up. My dad grew up in Jupiter and we spent many family vacations and holidays with my grandparents at their home on Riverside Drive along the north fork of the Loxahatchee River. In the early 1900s dad’s family followed Uncle Charlie south to Jupiter from Camden, NJ, and Uncle Charlie used to haul mail and kids to school in his boat, which was the most efficient transportation of that time.

We spent many hours, day and night, on the river – fishing, boating to the inlet, swimming and exploring the sand pine woods and scrub oak wilds that later became Tequesta. We used to travel up the headwaters to the home of the reclusive Trapper Nelson who kept a wildlife menagerie on his secluded property. Not a visit to Jupiter went by that scrub jays didn’t congregate by the back steps of grandpa’s house to take raw peanuts from our open hands. Yes, lots of great memories of Jupiter and the river, but now it’s time to tell the story of The Loxahatchee Club.

Loxahatchee is a Seminole Indian word meaning turtle river. The main branch of the river intersects the Intracoastal Waterway in north Palm Beach County near the Jupiter Inlet at a point closest to the Gulf Stream. Following the river’s main course inland, you wind your way northwest up into Martin County into Jonathan Dickinson State Park and then turn southwest as the channel...
finally disappears in the Loxahatchee Slough along the eastern edge of the Everglades.

Back in the early-to-mid-1980s, golf legend Jack Nicklaus was well into his golf course design career, and he teamed with Canadian developer Gordon Gray to create what is now The Loxahatchee Club a few miles east of the southwest fork of the Loxahatchee River, east of the Florida Turnpike and just south of the Indiantown Road. On the Nicklaus Design Web site, The Bear says about Loxahatchee, “the course was designed as a ‘members course,’ with flavorings of the old Scottish game mingled with the finest characteristics of modern American golf.”

In fact, the rough mounds and sandy transitional bunkers planted with native grasses were the beginnings of the changes in modern golf design which uses less irrigated acreage and intensely managed turfgrass.

The course was renovated in 2004 and greens were planted in TifEagle ultradwarf bermudagrass, while the rest of the course was converted from Tifway 419 to Seaside1 seashore paspalum. In May of 2007, James Sprankle III, cgc took over the reins at this Nicklaus Signature Golf Course after six years at the Ibis Golf & Country Club (another Nicklaus design) just down the road. In fact, Sprankle has been associated with the Nicklaus course design and management team for many years during his career with some of that time spent overseeing courses in Mexico, Indonesia and the Philippines.

Sprankle talked about his career path that led him to his current post, “After graduation and several years as an assistant, I came into contact with John Hamilton, who at the time was the Asian agronomist for Nicklaus Design.

“I expressed interest in traveling and very soon after speaking with John I was in Indonesia at age 25 growing in two golf courses in two different locations.

“I have to say that this was the start for me and being exposed to the Nicklaus organization at a young age really molded me. Their commitment to their projects, professionalism and attention to detail has solidified my relationship with the organization through the years. I owe a lot to the entire architect and agronomy arms of the Nicklaus and Dye organization.

“A few who have influenced me and have trusted me with their vision are Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Lee Schmidt, Brian Curley, Greg Letsche, Chris Cochran, John Cope and Troy Vincent.

And the agronomists who have been there to assist me with situations and offer some much-needed conversation at some very remote locations are Ed Etchels, John Scott, Jay Sporl and Dave McIntosh.

“I would be remiss not to mention

The use of sandy waste (transitional) bunkers and native grasses on the par-3, 12th hole was a proactive design change pioneered by Nicklaus and others in the 1980s to create dramatic views and protect the environment. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.
During his years overseas Sprankle developed his keep-it-simple and stick-to-the-basics management style out of necessity, since it was very difficult, sometimes impossible or downright too expensive to import chemicals, fertilizers, materials and even equipment into foreign countries.

With all the products available at his fingertips here in the U.S., Sprankle maintains the 100-acre property at Loxahatchee with 24 people compared to the 200-member staff he had in the Phillipinnes. Hand labor had to make up for the lack of technology.

He learned to adapt to the culture where he was. In a sense we are all currently faced with adapting to a changing culture which is demanding more conservation of our resources. “I sometimes struggle finding a way to balance golfer expectations with the message we keep getting from regulators, which is basically ‘Do more with less.’

“American golfers just need to play the game,” he offered. “In Scotland and Ireland, it’s all about playing and enjoying the game. The lushness of the golf courses is not the main focus. It’s all about playing the game.”

To the credit of the Loxahatchee members, that appears to be exactly what they do. As we drove around the course, it was pretty much a tie between the members or Sprankle as to who waved and called out first. While it is a full-service country club, golf is the main activity, and the members truly seem to enjoy not only the golf course, but the genuine friendly atmosphere of one another’s company. That warmth and friendliness permeate the organization and make for great working conditions for Sprankle and his staff.

General Manager and Chief Operating Officer Kevin Carroll is involved with the Club Managers Association of America and has worked closely with the GCSAA on education and organization issues. He had strong
Superintendent Facts

James R. Sprankle III, c gc s

Originally From: Born in Alaska but moved to south Florida while still in diapers. Lived in Jupiter since 1980.
Family: Married to Patricia with three children: Madison (6), Emily (7), and Zak (11).
Education: A.S. Degree in Golf Operations from Lake City Community College, 1989
Professional Affiliations: Member of the GCSAA (22 years) and Palm Beach GCSA. Became a GCSAA certified golf course superintendent in 2001.

How did you get into the business?
I worked in the bag room at Indian Creek, a public golf course in Jupiter right out of high school. The owner, Sonny Smith, owned a fertilizer and chemical distributorship and soon had me mowing greens in the morning and delivering products in the afternoons. I enjoyed the maintenance aspects so I soon applied to LCCC with the help of Darryl Rejko, the superintendent at the time.

Work philosophy and advice to prospective or new superintendents:
Choose to work for a quality organization. I truly believe this overshadows location and notoriety. Don’t chase money. With hard work and a good reputation, money will come to you. Don’t over think. Keep it simple. Attention to detail is the key to success.

Hobbies & Interests: Boating, snowboarding and kids’ sports.

words of praise for Sprankle’s business, communication and leadership skills. Not coincidentally, those are the same skills GCSAA is trying to focus on as it markets and brands “Class A” and “Certified” superintendents as professionals committed to growth and development.

Along with his business card, Carroll also shared The Loxahatchee Club’s mission statement and components of “The Loxahatchee Club Experience,” which embodies keywords like: Welcoming, Friendly, Personality, Enthusiasm, Respect, Helpful, Clean, Secure, Teamwork, Quality and Tradition.

Over the years, I have observed that clubs that are successful – not only in appearance, but also in productivity and morale – are those that have clear, written commitments and plans to guide all phases of the operation. Once again it goes back creating positive working conditions.

Working conditions for a golf course superintendent also mean turf conditions, since that is one of key measurements of success in our business. To be successful, Sprankle says superintendents need to get a handle on and fight for the Big Three in maintenance: labor, fertilizer and chemicals.

“Every course is different, but those three line items will be key factors in your budget. You have to have the people to mow and go, and enough fertilizer to keep the turf healthy, and finally the products necessary to combat weeds, disease and insects.”

Note: I would add a fourth key element and that would be water. But the availability and quality of the irrigation water is not always within the superintendent’s or even club’s direct control. However, the superintendent is the one who must manage the resource for the greatest benefit.

“We only receive 550,000 gallons of reclaimed water per day from the local utility,” Sprankle said. “That amount was even cut back 20 percent in 2008 during restrictions. We set irrigation run times based on visual and weather-station feedback. To make our irrigation as effective as possible, we apply wetting agents to tees and greens monthly and to fairways monthly from October to May (dry season). We hand-water greens six days per week and, on the seventh day, we flush them with 1 inch of irrigation to move the salts from the reclaimed water out of the root zone.”

Sprankle’s cultural practices and nutrient management programs have entailed a search for a balance that produces acceptable playing conditions while protecting the environment. The installation of TifEagle and SeaIsle1 have allowed him to reduce the amount of nitrogen on the course.

“The greens receive about 5 pounds of N per year, most of which is through weekly applications of a Milliken foliar program, Crytogro and Primo at 3 ounces per acre,” he said. “We will apply some granular as I am not a proponent of starving the greens to achieve speed. We also apply Anderson’s 0-0-28 every three weeks to supply needed potassium.”

“The tees are sprayed with a foliar mix twice a month and the fairways once a month. In addition the tees receive a Milorganite application in the

Superintendent Jim Sprankle can’t say enough about the friendly engaged membership at The Loxahatchee Club. Green Chairman Richard Herlehy, left, agreed to “take one for the team” and pose with Sprankle. He graciously obliged during his round of golf.
spring and fall at a rate of a half-pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. The fairways have one pound of Milorgantie applied in October and May. The roughs receive one pound of nitrogen in the spring and fall via applications of sludge.”

So with 5 pounds of N on the greens and 2 pounds of N in the fairways and roughs, The Loxahatchee Club is well within the nutrient-management recommendations in the Florida Golf BMP manual. That is one of the benefits of using the new grass varieties that require less nitrogen.

But healthy turfgrass requires some TLC besides feeding. Judicious cultural practices can ensure successful playing conditions.

“We make up our maintenance schedule a year in advance, so we can plan our turf maintenance needs around the club’s seasonal events,” Sprankle said. “However, we are not a slave to the printed schedule. We keep

The par-3, 5th hole is guarded by one of 13 lakes on the course. Part circle heads, taller grass along the shore and aquatic plants guard the lake’s water quality. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

The nematicide revolution everyone’s been waiting for!

“It’s safe, simple and it works!”

Chris Cartin
Superintendent,
Tuscawilla Country Club and past President CFGCSA

Neo-Tec® S.O.

No need to wait any longer, the results are in. NEO-TEC S.O. is friendly to the environment and doesn’t damage soil microbes. NEO-TEC S.O. is an emulsifiable concentrate ready to go in the spray tank without any special additives, and tank mixes well with most soil focused applications. Effective, safe and easy to use.

Manufactured by:
Brandt Consolidated, Inc.
Kym Wood 321 228 4480
Jacqueline O’Steen 813 240 5099
Katherine Williams 863 446 2089

Now distributed by:
PROSOURCE ONE
Belle Glade 561 992 4004
Boynton Beach 561 737 1200
Ellenton 941 722 4554
Fort Pierce 772 466 6607
Homestead 305 247 1521
Immokalee 239 657 8374
Plant City 813 754 3882
Plymouth 407 886 4744
Wauchula 863 773 4543

Neo-Tec S.O. is a FIFRA exempt pesticide.
an eye on the weather and growing conditions and adjust accordingly. TifEagle and seashore paspalum need a firm hand, but you also need to know when to back off.

“On the greens we schedule half-inch, hollow-tine core aerifications in May and September and we do a Graden half-inch verticut in July just prior to a solid tine aerification. We hydroject monthly, skipping the aerification months and verticut as needed May through September. We spiked the greens, apply gypsum to offset the bicarbonates build-up from the reclaimed water, and lightly topdress (dust with dry green sand) from December to April, and the greens are brushed three times a week with the walk mowers.

“The tees, fairways and roughs are aerified three times a year. The cores are allowed to dry and then dragged to separate soil and organic material and then the debris is cleaned up with a sweeper. We slice the fairways and roughs in the off months and they are cleaned up with a follow up mowing.”

As far as pest control programs, “We employ a preventive fungicide program on the greens from April to October, and we apply grub-control products to greens, tees, fairways usually around June. Since seashore paspalum doesn’t tolerate many of the conventional herbicides used on bermudagrass, we apply Barricade to the roughs in October and January and Dimension in March and June to prevent weed emergence as much as possible.

(Continues on Page 22)
Senior maintenance staff members from left: Second Assistant Nathan Wallace, First Assistant Charlie Rimpela, Equipment Technician Juan Martinez, and Golf Course Superintendent Jim Sprankle III, CGCS. Sprankle hopes the Loxahatchee experience will give his assistants a boost for their first head superintendent opportunity.

In the foreground is a nursery plot of seeded SeaSpray Paspalum being evaluated for possible use in the future. Newly planted TifEagle nursery greens are growing-in in the background.

Loxahatchee superintendent Jim Sprankle, CGCS puts his finger on the fine line maintained between the TifEagle greens and Sealsle 1 paspalum collar. Photo by Joel Jackson.

The Loxahatchee Club has pervious cart-paths made of concrete screenings. While they are considered a “low maintenance” item, they do require periodic maintenance and repair, especially after a very heavy rain.
“And last – but not least – is the ongoing program to remove residual bermudagrass areas in the paspalum. We spray it, cut it out and resod as needed each summer.”

The mechanics and realities of turf maintenance are often dictated by the club’s physical setting and fiscal resources, but most of the time it is the attitude of the superintendent that is the deciding factor. That attitude is a product of formal education and life experiences. Jim Sprankle has had his share of both and he humbly summed up his career to date.

He said, “One of my greatest satisfactions comes from the nearly 15 assistants who I have worked with who are now successful superintendents around the world. I would like to feel I had a hand in their success. My younger brother Jason is a successful superintendent at the Turtle Creek Club in Tequesta, which makes me very proud.

And now Sprankle is home again working near the river I knew as a boy.

A few who have influenced me and have trusted me with their vision are Jack Nicklaus, Pete Dye, Lee Schmidt, Brian Curley, Greg Letsche, Chris Cochran, John Cope and Troy Vincent. And the agronomists who have been there to assist me with situations and offer some much-needed conversation at some very remote locations are Ed Etchels, John Scott, Jay Sporl and Dave Mcintosh.
CONGRATULATIONS
to Jim Sprankle III, CGCS and his club for being selected by the Palm Beach GCSA as the featured cover for the Winter 2009 Florida Green.

From all of us who proudly supply and service The Loxahatchee Club:

Aeration Technology, Inc. • Steve Shea • 954-529-5548
Golf Agronomics Supply & Handling • John Swaner • 954-650-9584
Golf Ventures • Bill Lanthier • 772-486-1701
Kilpatrick Turf • Kent Turner • 561-436-4162
Palmdale Oil Company • Mallory Cheatham • 561-722-1892
Pro Plus Golf Services • Chris Miller • 561-719-5613
ShowTurf • Jerry Freeman • 561-732-8905
Superior Golf Concepts • John Copeland • 561-744-6536
Upstart Products • Ted Owen • 321-269-9370