The Tale of The Pearl

By Shelly Fay

Back in 1994, the directors of the Treasure Coast GCSA often met after work to grab a bite, share a cold one, and talk about association business. That year the guys were stirred up because Paul Harvey had just finished a broadcast that was not very flattering to golf courses.

Tim Cann, president at the time, had previously been involved with the Suncoast Scramble and remembered how much fun they had planning and hosting the tournament. He suggested the TCGCSA host a similar fundraising event. Collectively, the TCGCSA board — Cann, Craig Weyandt, Dick Gray, Bill Lanthier, David Cheeseman, Roger Welker, David Oliver, Jack Orr, Steve Sill, Chris Leahy, Brad Fick, and Tom Benefield — decided it was time for golf course superintendents to get serious about letting people know the truth about golf and the environment. In Gray's words, they needed some “green ink.” They proposed a golf tournament to raise funds for teaching environmental awareness and showing that golf courses are good for the environment.

The first event, dubbed the “First Annual Wildlife Charity Golf Tournament,” was held at Loblolly Pines GC in Hobe Sound May 21, 1994. The flyer read, “So often our industry is criticized for its perceived negative impact on the environment. This is an excellent opportunity for us to make a positive impact.”

The first tournament raised more than $10,000 for the Treasure Coast Wildlife Hospital.

Needing a catchier name, Gray proposed “Blue Pearl,” remembering a NASA photo where the Earth looked like a pearl in a sea of blue. So in 1995, the Blue Pearl was born.

In its 16-year history, the Blue Pearl has raised more than a quarter-million dollars. The goal was, “By funding environmental and ecological awareness programs in grade schools throughout the Treasure Coast, we can inform and educate not only students, but teachers, administrators, and parents. We can foster and nurture an age of children who grow up knowing the benefits of a healthy environment and the benefits golf courses offer to people, wildlife,
and the environment."

Below is a partial list of environmental programs and projects the Blue Pearl has supported over the years:

- $20,000 to help Pelican Island Elementary School in Vero Beach purchase adjacent lots to protect as Scrub Jay habitat
- $8,500 to sponsor four years of the Indian River Lagoon Envirothon
- Over $34,000 since 1996 for the South Fork High School turf program. South Fork High School has a three-hole golf course on campus. Students are encouraged to work hard to earn acceptance into the golf program. Several South Fork students have graduated from the turf program and are now working in the golf industry.
- Over $5,000 to Audubon International as grant money for schools across the country looking for funding for environmental projects

Many individual schools have received grants for environmental programs, including:

- Hobe Sound Elementary School built a native plant nursery/slat house, designed and installed butterfly and hummingbird gardens, provided school-wide subscriptions for National Geographic magazine, and purchased environmentally themed books for the school library.
- Hidden Oaks Elementary constructed an outdoor classroom
- Crystal Lake Elementary built a nature trail
- Palm City Elementary purchased 30 sets of computer programs on oceans and rainforests, and created a landscape habitat area
- Sea Wind Elementary School created a butterfly garden
- Stuart Middle School installed a butterfly garden and purchased a dolphin topiary
- Citrus Elementary School planted vegetable gardens and developed a Tree Program
- Martin County School District Plant Nursery purchased native plant liners to encourage use of native plants on school grounds

In July, the TCGCSA donated $12,500 to the Hobe Sound Nature Center which lost its building to hurricanes in 2004, and in August, new exhibits were opened to the public to promote environmental awareness for people of all ages. In addition to on- and off-site environmental programs that reach more than 60,000 students a year, there are many programs for the public, including turtle walks, summer camps, evening forums, scrub habitat tours, and more.

Originally intended solely for environmental awareness, the Blue Pearl has diversified recently due to the increasing need for financial support for disaster relief. Donations have included money for 9/11 victims, support for superintendents affected by Hurricane Katrina, as well as other benevolent funding needs. They also came to the aid of the Challenger School in Stuart with a $5,000 donation to help build a handicapped-accessible playground.

I have been fortunate to have been involved with the Blue Pearl, almost from its beginning. I have seen first-hand how generous the TCGCSA and the Blue Pearl sponsors have been over the years. Craig Weyandt, superintendent at the Moorings Country Club in Vero Beach recently said, “I can still hear the passion in Dick’s voice when we came up with the concept for the Blue Pearl. He said that it was up to each of us to polish the pearl, take care of it. After all, we are only tenants here, visitors, guests. It is not ours to abuse.”

Since the Blue Pearl’s beginning, there have been eight presidents of the TCGCSA and each one has taken on the responsibility of “polishing the pearl.”

Cann, now in his second term as president, said, “Even though boards have changed over the last 16 years, the original message of the Blue Pearl has stayed alive. This year's contribution to the Hobe Sound Nature Center is a perfect example of what the Blue Pearl fundraising is intended for. We are especially thankful to every participant, vendor, and volunteer that continues to be generous year after year even in these tough financial times.”

Recently Gray reminded me that the original goal was to have a String of Pearls across the country. “Can you imagine what we could do as an industry if every state hosted a Blue Pearl and the collective money raised went to fund environmental awareness and to also tell all the ways golf courses benefit the community and the environment? Man, wouldn't that be sweet?”

A String of Pearls across the country is doable. Florida could challenge other states if every chapter would host a Blue Pearl in 2011, or at least support a statewide Blue Pearl fund. Eleven FGCSA Chapters, eleven pearls on the string. Who’s up for a challenge?
Audubon International certifies golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses and the Audubon Signature Programs that demonstrate their commitment to the environment. These eco-friendly courses meet required standards for protecting water quality, conserving natural resources, and providing wildlife habitats. More information about the Audubon International programs can be found at www.auduboninternal.org. The following Florida courses have achieved certification as of July 12, 2010.

### CERTIFIED GOLD AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

- The Old Collier Golf Club, Naples
- WCI-Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club, Marco
- WCI-Old Palm, Palm Beach Gardens
- WCI-Pelican Preserve, Ft. Myers
- WCI-Raptor Bay Golf Club, Bonita Springs
- WCI-Tuscan Reserve Golf Club, Naples
- WCI-Venetian Golf & River Club, Venice
- Washington Reservation & Golf Learning Center, Cleveland

### CERTIFIED SILVER AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

- The Club at Mediterra, Naples
- Eagle Creek, Orlando
- Eagle Ridge Golf Club, Summerfield: Masters & Memorial Courses
- Juliette Falls, Dunnellon
- Old Corkscrew Golf Club, Estero
- St. James Bay Golf Course, Carrabelle
- Sarasota National Golf Club, Venice
- Shark’s Tooth Golf Club, Panama City
- The Aerie Golf Course, Naples
- Villages of Marion, The Villages: Nancy Lopez Legacy Country Club, Amberwood Nine, Briarwood Nine, Oakleigh Nine, Walnut Grove Nine
- Villages of Sumter Phase I (63 holes):
  - The Villages Belvedere Golf Course (Churchill Downs & Pimlico)
  - Sunset Pointe Golf Club (Heron & Pelican)
  - Palmer Legends Country Club (Cherry Hill, Laurel Valley & Riley Grove)
- Villages of Sumter Phase II:
- Villages of Sumter Phase III:
- Villages of Sumter Phase IV, The Villages
- WCI - Lost Key Golf Club, Perdido Key
CERTIFIED BRONZE AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

- Bonita Bay Club East, Naples
- Collier’s Reserve, Naples
- Indian River Club, Vero Beach
- Legacy Club at Alqua Lakes, Longwood
- PGA Golf Club, Port St. Lucie
- The Talon at TwinEagles, Naples
- West Bay Golf Club, Estero

CERTIFIED AUDUBON COOPERATIVE SANCTUARIES

- Aquarina Country Club, Melbourne Beach
- Arlington Ridge Golf Club, Leesburg
- Audubon Country Club, Naples
- Bent Creek Golf Course, Jacksonville (aka Golf Club of Jacksonville)
- Bonita Bay Club, Bonita Springs: Bay Island Course, Creekside Course, Marsh Course
- Black Diamond Ranch, Lecanto
- Broken Sound Club, Boca Raton
- Brooksville Country Club at Majestic Oaks, Brooksville
- Camp Creek Golf Club, Palm City Beach
- Card Sound Golf Club, Key Largo
- Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Club, Clearwater
- Copperleaf Golf Club, Bonita Springs
- Country Club of Florida, Village of Golf
- Country Club of Miami, Miami
- Country Club of Naples, Naples
- Crown Colony Golf & Country Club, Fort Myers
- Disney’s Oak Trail Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
- Doral Golf Resort and Spa, Miami
- Eglin Golf Club, Niceville
- Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott, Orlando
- Floridian, Stuart
- FoxFire Golf and Country Club, Naples
- Gainesville Country Club, Gainesville
- Golf Club of Jacksonville, Jacksonville
- Grand Harbor Club, Vero Beach
- Grande Pines Golf Club, Orlando
- Hammock Dunes Club, Palm Coast Creek Course, Links Course
- Harbour Ridge Yacht & Country Club, Palm City
- Harmony Golf Preserve, Harmony
- Hawk’s Landing Golf Course at Marriott’s Orlando World Center, Orlando
- Hawk’s Nest Golf Club, Vero Beach
- High Ridge Golf Course, Lantana
- Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club, Naples
- IGM – Arrowhead Golf Course, Naples
- IGM – The Habitat Golf Course, Malabar
- IGM – Sandridge Golf Club, Vero Beach
- IGM – Spessard Holland Golf Club, Melbourne Beach
- IGM – The Savannahs, Merritt Island
- Interlachen Country Club, Winter Park
- Ironwood Municipal Golf Course, Gainesville
- Isleworth Golf & Country Club, Wyndermere
- John’s Island Club – West Course, Vero Beach
- Lake Buena Vista Club, Lake Buena Vista
- Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club, Bradenton
- Laurel Oak Country Club, Sarasota
- Lemon Bay Golf Club, Englewood
- The Links at Boynton Beach, Boynton Beach
- Loblolly Pines Golf Club, Hobe Sound
- Magnolia Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
- Maple Leaf Golf and Country Club, Port Charlotte
- Mizner Country Club, Delray Beach
- The Moorings Country Club, Naples
- Naples Lakes Country Club, Naples
- Okeechobee Golf Course, West Palm Beach
- Old Marsh Golf Club, Palm Beach Gardens
- Olde Florida Golf Club, Naples
- Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club, Orchid
- Osprey Ridge Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
- Palencia Golf Club, St. Augustine
- Palm Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
- Palmetto Golf Course, Miami
- Pelican Marsh Golf Club, Naples
- Pelican’s Nest Golf Club, Bonita Springs
- Pelican Sound Golf & River Club, Estero
- Plantation Preserve Golf Course & Club, Plantation
- Quail Ridge Country Club, Boynton Beach
- Regatta Bay Golf and Country Club, Destin
- Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Golf Club, St. Petersburg
- The Rookery at Marco Island, Marco Island
- Royal Poinciana Golf Club, Naples
- The Sanctuary Golf Club, Sanibel Island
- Shadow Wood Country Club, Bonita Springs
- Shadow Wood Preserve Country Club, Fort Myers
- Southwinds Golf Course, Boca Raton
- Southwood Golf Club, Tallahassee
- Spring Run Golf Club, Bonita Springs
- The St. Andrews Club, Delray Beach
- St. Johns Golf and Country Club, St. Augustine
- Stonebridge Country Club, Naples
- Tampa Palms Golf & Country Club, Tampa
- The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club & Spa - Jupiter, Jupiter
- The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club at Grande Lakes, Orlando

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FALL 2010
GOLF BIRDIES
Scoring Birdies on the Naples Beach Club Golf Course

Even though I personally scored 18 birdies and a double eagle during the GC Horn Endowment Tournament at the 2010 Poa Annua Classic, our team’s final score was only minus-1 and not in the winners’ circle. I guess logging 18 different species in the middle of the day isn’t too bad. However, I was told I could not count the two duck hooks I also had during the round.

Assistant Superintendent Kristen Conover told me before the round to look out for bald eagles around the lake on No 7. Sure enough there were two in a tree near the 6th tee as we started our round on No. 8. Later in the day, as we played No. 6, there was the eagle again perched on a limb over the tee with a fish in its talons. As I was reaching for my camera, our lovely state bird – the Mockingbird – dive-bombed the eagle and it flew off, dropping the fish. The rest of the sightings for the day follow below.

American Crow
Anhinga
Bald Eagle
Collared Dove
Killdeer
Mockingbird
Mottled duck
Mourning Dove
Muscovy ducks with chicks
Osprey
Purple Martin
Red Bellied Woodpecker
Rose ringed Parakeet
Sea gulls
Snowy egret
Starlings
Swallowtail Kite
White Ibis (adult and juveniles)

The next day, playing in the Poa Scramble the eagle was sighted again, this time on the 5th hole near the lake eating another fish. The eagle action on both Friday and Saturday prompted me to share other raptor encounters on FGCSA member courses. See the raptor photos in the Stewardship section of this issue. Obviously golf courses – even in urban settings – are quite compatible as eagle habitat. See the photos at left I call Raptor Rapture.

By Joel Jackson.

Tom Burrows, Consulting Agronomist/Turfgrass Specialist Independent Consulting using “Brookside Laboratory”

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