



*The par 5, 13th hole is guarded by several of the 62 manicured bunkers on the course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

# The Coral Creek Club – A Hidden Treasure

BY Joel Jackson

Florida's history is full of stories of pirates and buccaneers roaming the state's coastal waters, especially the West Coast from Tampa Bay to the Florida Keys. One of the more prominent of these swashbucklers was Jose Gaspar, whose name lives on in the annual Gasparilla Festival in Tampa in late January or early February and in the namesakes: Gasparilla Island, Gasparilla Pass and Gasparilla Sound near the mouth of Charlotte Harbor.

You can't have pirate lore without having legends and rumors of buried treasures, and in some accounts of Gaspar's renegade lifestyle after he left the royal Spanish court, there

are tales of a trip made up Coral Creek to hide some of Gaspar's booty. Last May I ventured to Coral Creek and indeed I found a hidden treasure, the Coral Creek Club.

The mission and vision of the founders of the club were to provide a first-class private country-club experience for residents of the area. They have certainly succeeded in accomplishing their goal with an inviting clubhouse and a challenging golf course.

Whereas Gaspar's riches were stolen, the Coral Creek Club was created by the Tom Fazio Design Group as they laid out the golf holes, a string of emeralds in the piney woodlands

bordering the creek. Under the watchful eye of Fazio and on-site Design Associate Steve Masiak, the course incorporated plentiful natural areas into the routing to meld man and nature's creations together.

Back in the early 1990s I had the pleasure of working with Masiak as he oversaw the day-to-day construction of Disney's Osprey Ridge course, also a Fazio design. So, I was well aware of Masiak's attention to detail when it came to construction and making sure the land was shaped properly for players' challenges and for water movement and drainage. Ironically, superintendent Bob Wagner had also worked with Masiak previously during the construction of the World Woods courses near Brooksville. It's a small world after all!

Creating a gem of a golf course is one part of the story. The other part is guarding the treasure and that task falls to Wagner and the band of hearty souls who ply their skills under his watchful eye. Fifteen full-time and three part-time crew members tend the 140 acres of maintained turf on the 231-acre property.

Wagner says the course is the busiest in the fall, winter and spring like most Florida courses, but it never officially closes during the summer. However, as play dwindles in the heat, Wagner is then able to schedule his annual routine cultural practices like core aerifying and heavy verticutting. Summer is also the time for any special course-enhancement projects like expanding or creating new natural areas for example.

"We lean towards a more natural and native landscape pallet for the course and don't use showy annuals and ornamentals," Wagner said. "It's a golf course, not a garden. However, many of the aquatic plants used to buffer the shorelines and improve water quality put on a nice display when they bloom each year as well as the colorful efflorescence of the native muhly and fakahatchee grasses."

While riding the course with Bob I noticed the prominent contouring of the putting green surfaces, which looked challenging but also fun to putt.

"You have to know where to hit your approach shots to have the best putt at the hole on any given day," he explained. "We have used the same set-up man for the past nine years. He uses a digital level tool called the "smart level" to make sure we cut the pin position in a fair area that has no more than a one-to-two degree slope within a three- to four-foot area around the hole in all directions. Of course the cup cutter knows all these spots by heart now, but he still checks them to be sure."

As Wagner juggles his cultural practice schedule to minimize any golfer inconvenience, his program remains aggressive enough to ensure a healthy and playable turf that will meet member expectations.

"We will core-aerify the greens four times during the summer and then solid-tine them four times during the cooler months. We lightly verticut the greens weekly when the turf is actively growing and then use a Graden

## SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

**Originally From:**

Brooklyn, NY. Lived in Florida for 30 years.

**Family:** Wife Val-

erie, stepson Andrew. Valerie has been a great support system in all aspects of my life. She's always there for me. Andy is now 19 and a freshman at USE, and I have learned a lot from him as well, and last but not least Mom and Dad. The good Lord blessed me with some awfully wonderful, loving parents who put up with a lot of grief from me when I was growing up.



**BOB WAGNER**

Photo by Joel Jackson.

**Education:** AA from Lake City Golf Course Operations program. Class of '87 – Go Stolon!

**Employment:** 1981-84 crew member, Innisbrook Resort. 1985 & 1986 OJT student intern, Bardmoor CC; 1987-88 assistant superintendent Tampa Palms G&CC. 1988-89 assistant superintendent Bardmoor CC; Bardmoor Bayou Club; 1989-91 Golf Course Superintendent Wentworth GC; 1991-95 GCS at World Woods GC; 1995-2000 GCS at The Club at Eaglebrooke; 2000-present GCS at Coral Creek Club.

**Professional Affiliations & Offices Held:** Class A member of the GCSAA, FGCSA and Suncoast GCSA. Served in various positions on Suncoast board of directors, most recently as external vice-president to FGCSA Board.

**Work philosophy and advice:** Work hard. Accept challenges. Stay dedicated and educated. Develop strong working relationships with superiors, members and peers.

**Goals & Accomplishments:** Getting that college degree fresh out of high school. Fulfilled desire to experience a couple of course grow-ins. One as an assistant and one as a superintendent. One long-range goal is to retire early enough so I can go mow fairways for some young superintendent.

**Hobbies & Interests:** Fishing, golf, Mustang cars, music, especially the blues, and New York Rangers hockey. Working with my wife and her Rotary Club and with her Young Life Ministries. Member of the Murdock Baptist Church in Port Charlotte and I help with their landscape and grounds maintenance.



*Bordering the 1st hole are native plant beds created for out-of-play areas. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

set at a .625 inch depth in the late spring or early summer. Top dressing applications vary based on the cultural practice in effect and the desired results. Annual fertility rates on the TifEagle greens averages around 12 pound of nitrogen,

2.5 pounds of phosphorous and 17 pounds of potassium per year. “Tees are aerified three to four times a year and fairways and roughs twice a year. Tees and fairways are verticut at least once per year with the Graden

being used on the tees at the same green setting mentioned before. Fertility on the fairways and roughs average around 6.5 pounds of N, 1.0 pounds of P and 3.5 pounds of K with the tees being just slightly higher in nitrogen and potassium. Over the past two years we have been shifting our fertility program to more foliar versus granular applications. Right now it remains about a ratio of about 30 to 70 liquid to granular.”

No golf course is immune to potential pest invasions so Wagner takes preventive steps to minimize any effect they might have.

“We make two or three pre-emergent weed-control applications in the fall and spring and then clean up isolated weeds by spot spraying using 14-gallon electric sprayers as we monitor the course,” he said.

“We have had very consistent mole cricket and fire ant control using timed seasonal preventive applications of Top Choice. Since we are a sand-based golf



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**FUN FACTS**

**Vehicle:** Company's 2005 Ford F-150,  
**Personal:** 2008 Ford Shelby GT500

**I stay home to watch:**  
New York Ranger hockey

**The book I've been reading:**  
Nothing lately, should be reading the bible more.

**Favorite meal:** Sushi

**Prized possessions:** My family, if that's considered a "possession."

**Favorite performers:**  
J. Geils Band, U2, Bruce Springsteen, Johnny Cash, Woody Rowe and all Blues performers.

**Personal heroes:** The Lord Jesus, my mom and dad, my wife, John deMaine and Steve Masiak.

**Nobody knows that I:**  
Have a collection of Teddy Bears

**I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:** Spraying! Just ask my assistants, they'll tell you

**If I could do it over:**  
I probably wouldn't change a thing

**I'd give anything to meet:**  
Old Tom Morris

**The one thing I can't stand:**  
Negativity

**Words that best describe me:**  
Honest, hard working and humble

**My dream foursome would be:**  
Steve Hritsko, Tim Alles and Steve Masiak

**My best fish story:** Landing a nice bull dolphin fishing in the Keys with Jim Lyle and others. Earned the nickname "Bull Bob" that day.



*Bull Bob lands a big bull dolphin on a Keys fishing trip.*

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An aerial view reveals the close proximity of the course to Coral Creek, Gasparilla Sound and the Gulf of Mexico. Photo courtesy of the Coral Creek Club.

## CORAL CREEK CLUB

**Location:** Placida, Florida

**Ownership:** Coral Creek Club, LLC

**Playing policy:** Private

**Avg. rounds/year:** 10,000

**Holes:** 18, 7003 yards, par 71, Slope/Rating: 139 (Medal tees)

**Designed by:** Tom Fazio Golf Course Designers, constructed by: Quality Grassing

**Opened:** 2001

**Management Team:** Club President Michael Zmetrovich; General Manager Karen Conroy; Advisory Committee Chairman Steve Iovino; Head Golf Professional Ken Raynor; Executive Chef Myriam Glover and Golf Course Superintendent Bob Wagner

**Projects:** Conversion of out-of-play areas to native plantings.

**Acres under maintenance:** 140 of 231 total property acres

**Greens:** 5A, avg. size 6,300 sq. ft.; TifEagle w/2A of Tifdwarf collars. HOC 0.80" (winter) to 0.97" (summer). No overseeding. Green-speed goal: 11–11.5 normal play, 12–13.5 special



*Coral Creek Club Maintenance Staff events.*

**Tees:** 3.5A on course, 1.5A on practice tee. Tifway 419. HOC 0.5–0.57 inches. Overseeding: Practice range only. PhD Rye Blend @ 500 lbs/A.

**Fairways and Roughs:** 48A fairways, 45A roughs Tifway 419, HOC 0.5 inches on fwys and 1.25 – 2.0 inches on roughs. No overseeding.

**Bunkers:** 62 including practice range. Sand type: Originally 37-M, rebuilt bunkers and added GASH G-angle. Fairway bunkers raked with Toro Sand Pro. Greenside bunkers raked by hand.

**Waste or Native areas/beds:** 9A of "waste" bunkers composed of washed beach sand. Tine-harrow raked 1x/

week and Sand Pro raked 2x/week.

**Waterways/Lakes/Ponds:** Total 7, covering 24A, maintained by outside contractor. **Irrigation:** Re-use and surface combination. Pumping system: Flotronex/PSI VFD. Control System: Toro Osmac. 1,500 heads, type: 780, 750 and 1550.

**Watering restrictions:** Stay within consumptive use permit.

**Staff:** 15 full-time including superintendent and 3 part-time. 40 hrs per week. Key employees: First Assistant Superintendent Jason Reiswig, Second Assistant Jesus Galvan; Equipment Tech Jim Dilmore. Pest control and irrigation done by superintendent and/or assistants. **Communications:** Daily crew assignment or safety meetings. Weekly department head meetings. Annual member meeting and various Golf Advisory Committee meetings and other club functions. Newsletter and course update articles and notices.

course, nematodes can be an issue. We will be testing some of the newer products now that our NemaCur inventory has been depleted.

“In the fall we are always on the lookout for signs of Pythium blight and we implement a preventive greens-spraying program when conditions might favor the disease. Fairy ring can be troublesome during certain times of the year and we utilize a few of the newer more effective fungicides to help us with control.”

Wagner and company do an excellent job of managing the natural resources at the club as well, so much so that as members of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, one of his previous assistants compiled a wildlife Inventory of the property that totals more than 200 species if you add in the oysters and other mollusks, crustaceans and fish in Coral Creek. There are more than 129 species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles alone.

Can you say wildlife habitat?

Beyond the nuts and bolts of turf-grass management, no really successful superintendent has ever made it without help from others.

“I have been blessed with a group of folks who helped guide me in my personal and professional growth,” Wagner said. “They include Tony Taylor at Innsbrook, who encouraged me to get my golf operations degree at Lake City and the likes of Greg Plotner when he was at Tampa Palms,

# GOT DIVOTS?



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## Divot Recovery

Study by The University of Arkansas  
Celebration was the top rated vegetatively propagated Bermudagrass for divot recovery in a study by The University of Arkansas.

Nonlinear regression results for predicting bermudagrass variety recovery from injury. Varieties are sorted by average K value (fastest to slowest recovery). 48 cultivars were evaluated in this study. The below chart only includes the 22 varieties commercially available.

Variety	Propagation <sup>†</sup>	2003		2004	
		K <sup>‡</sup>	(SE)	K <sup>‡</sup>	(SE)
La Paloma	S	0.115	(0.0071)	0.96	0.201 (0.0125)
Yukon	S	0.122	(0.0078)	0.96	0.193 (0.0112)
SR 9554	S	0.130	(0.0011)	0.93	0.179 (0.0143)
Celebration	V	0.121	(0.0066)	0.97	0.177 (0.0107)
Arizona Common	S	0.119	(0.0117)	0.91	0.178 (0.0101)
Panama	S	0.122	(0.0100)	0.93	0.173 (0.0078)
NuMex Sahara	S	0.141	(0.0047)	0.99	0.152 (0.0114)
Princess 77	S	0.129	(0.0064)	0.98	0.160 (0.0155)
Sunstar	S	0.117	(0.0134)	0.88	0.170 (0.0124)
Transcontinental	S	0.114	(0.0075)	0.96	0.169 (0.0082)
Riviera	S	0.132	(0.0067)	0.96	0.151 (0.0108)
Mohawk	S	0.120	(0.0090)	0.94	0.159 (0.0091)
Sundevil	S	0.117	(0.0045)	0.99	0.148 (0.0087)
Southern Star	S	0.097	(0.0052)	0.97	0.162 (0.0074)
Aussie Green	V	0.108	(0.0049)	0.98	0.143 (0.0114)
GN-1	V	0.092	(0.0038)	0.98	0.158 (0.0101)
Patriot	V	0.125	(0.0073)	0.97	0.121 (0.0087)
Midlawn	V	0.114	(0.0059)	0.98	0.130 (0.0075)
MSChoice (Bulbseye)	V	0.111	(0.0083)	0.95	0.131 (0.0098)
Tifway	V	0.096	(0.0062)	0.96	0.139 (0.0072)
Ashmore	V	0.093	(0.0070)	0.95	0.119 (0.0068)
TiSport	V	0.074	(0.0072)	0.91	0.128 (0.0096)

<sup>†</sup> S = seeded, V = vegetative  
<sup>‡</sup> K values determine recovery percentage according to the formula:  
1 - exp(-K \* DAI), where DAI = days after injury. Higher K values indicate faster recovery from injury.

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*The par 3, 17th hole reflects the care taken to preserve the natural surroundings. Photo by Daniel Zelazek*

Larry Weber in his role as consultant at Wentworth GC and John Luper at the Bardmoor CC.

“Then there was Steve Masiak, whom we both know. ‘Maze’ taught me how to envision a golf course from the raw dirt to the finished product and a great deal about the golf industry in general. I also have to mention John deMaine,

a former member at Coral Creek who now lives in North Carolina. I learned so much about life and treating people with respect from him. We still stay in touch and I consider him one of my closest friends.

“With all the challenges facing our profession these days,” Bob added as we wrapped up the interview, “I can’t think

of anything I’d rather do than grow grass! God, I love grow-ins. At the end of each day I’m ready to go home and enjoy my family time, but every morning when I wake up I’m still excited and ready to go to work. Some day when I finally retire I hope I can get one of those fairway mowing jobs working for some young superintendent.”





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