



CORAL OAKS GOLF CLUB

The People's Choice

History is a fascinating window to look through, and I really enjoy doing background searches on our cover story courses. The Coral Oaks story is a perfect example of interesting tidbits and anecdotes that go unheralded until it becomes story time once again.

Coral Oaks is the municipal golf course for the city of Cape Coral and opened in 1988. The Arthur Hills course wasn't built until 30 years after the city was founded by the Gulf American Corporation. Prior to 1958 Cape Coral was mainly a hunting and fishing camp on Redfish Point on the Caloosahatchee River.

In 1963 Cape Coral covered 103 square miles with a population of 2,850. The land is mainly a peninsula bounded on the east and south by the Caloosahatchee River and on the west by Matlacha Pass which leads to San Carlos Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

Reaching the 2nd green is a 401 yard journey on this tree lined par 4 hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

There were 80 miles of roads, 1,300 buildings, a public yacht club and one golf course. Before the Cape Coral Bridge was built, it was a 20-mile trip to Fort Myers just across the river.

By 2009, thanks in part to the building boom of the 1980s and '90s, Cape Coral is the third-largest city by area (120 sq. mi) and ninth largest by population at 162,852. It contains parks and eco-preserves, more than 400 miles of navigable waterways, and seven golf courses in the city limits. While Cape Coral sports a large retiree population, in the 1990s young families and professionals began moving in as well. Cape Coral is also the home of the largest number of burrowing owls in the state.

According to an article by Larry

Kieffer in the *The Florida Green* 20 years ago, one of the most remarkable facts is that the Coral Oaks Golf Club cost the city and its taxpayers just \$10 to build. That was the token cost for the land donated by the developer. The actual construction cost was financed through municipal bonds which were retired from golf course operating revenues.

Today, we find the city's golf course hosting around 63,000 rounds per year. Unlike many courses that see winter feasts and summer famines, superintendent Jim Foster, CGCS says the course usually averages more than 100 rounds per day year-around.

Foster added, "Of course in the dog days of summer the tee times are more concentrated in the morning and twilight special hours."

CORAL OAKS GOLF CLUB

Location: Cape Coral, Florida

Ownership: City of Cape Coral

Playing policy: Public; 63,000 avg rounds per year

No. of holes: 18 holes, 6,623 yards, par 72, 135/72.3 slope/rating

Designed by Arthur Hills, constructed by Ryan Incorporated Eastern

Opened: 1988

Management Team:

Club Manager & Head Golf Professional Allen Manguson; Director of Parks & Recreation Steve Pohlman;

Assistant Golf Professional Fred Cook; Pro Shop Manager Stan Geer; Food & Beverage Manager Doreen Ferrara and Course Superintendent Jim Foster, CGCS.

Major projects: Extensive tree canopy and root pruning and cart path improvements.

Acreage under maintenance: 82

Total property acres: 124

Greens: 2.7 acres, avg 5,500 sq.ft., TifEagle. HOC .120, no overseeding. Green speed goal: 10-plus

Tees: 3.5 acres. Celebration. HOC .5 inches; overseeding par 3s only. rye blend @ 300 lbs/acre.



Coral Oaks Golf Club Maintenance Staff

Fairways and Roughs: Fwys 27 acres, Roughs 50 acres, Tifway 419, HOC .5 in. on fwys and 1.5 in. on roughs; overseeding rye blend @ 300 lbs/acre.

Bunkers: 37. Sand type: GASH G-angle. Raked with Toro 3040 w/spring rake attachment.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: Total 10, covering 17.3 acres. Maintained by outside contractor.

Irrigation: source: Surface water (Azza canal). Pumping system: PSI Flowtronics. Irrigation; Control System:

Rainbird Stratus II. 567 heads.

Staff: 10 full time including superintendent. 40 hrs ST per week with 1.5 hours OT. No part time employees.

Key employees: Assistant Superintendent Dennis Nelson, Equipment Tech Ted Trantina, Pest Control Tech Jerry McKay, Irrigation Tech John Young; admin assistance from Sharon Smith in the clubhouse.

Communications: Weekly crew and staff meetings. Golf Advisory Board meetings quarterly. Monthly e-mail newsletter articles.

Foster has a staff of 10 including himself, to groom the course daily and perform those routine and seasonal cultural chores like aerifying, verticutting, top dressing and fertilizing.

"I definitely fall into the category of 'working superintendent,'" Foster says,

"and I will be on the daily schedule for set-up service, cutting cups or mowing greens on any given day. When you pull out the equipment technician, pest control operator and irrigation technician performing their specialized functions, there are only six or seven

people to groom the course ahead of play each day. When you do the math, each person must care for about 15 acres of golf course per day."

This past year Foster contracted out the greens aerification, while doing the tees and fairways in-house.

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Don't forget to fill your divots on the 168-yard, par-3 6th tee. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

"We try to do a thorough greens aeration three times per year and the tees, fairways and roughs twice per year," he explained. "By using a contractor they can bring in a whole raft of equipment and personnel and get the job done on a closed day set aside for the project.

The Beauty is in the Blades but the ACTION IS IN THE ROOTS

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SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

JIM FOSTER, CGCS

Originally From: Des Moines, Iowa

Family: Two sons: Zack (32) and Kyle (25). Currently dating Schellee.

Education: Turf certificate from University of Massachusetts in 1984

Employment: May 2005-present, Superintendent Coral Oaks GC; 1995-2005, Superintendent with Valley Crest at various sites in Michigan and Florida; 1990-95 Grow-in superintendent Autumn Ridge GC, Ft. Wayne, IN; 1985-95 superintendent Lake James GC, Angola, IN.

Professional Affiliations & Offices

Held: Member & current president of the Calusa GCSA. 25-year member of the GCSAA. CGCS since 1992. Past board member of the Hoosier Trufgrass Assn.

Work philosophy and advice: Know your property and the conditions. Nothing worse than having someone else point out a problem. I make it a point to ask our golfers how the course is treating them and thank them for coming out.

Goals & Accomplishments: I earned my CGCS in 1992 and have been active ever since. I have been involved in two complete grow-ins. Probably the best times of my career. Nothing more rewarding than to see everything come together.

Hobbies & Interests: I play drums and enjoy going to natural history museums.



Jim Foster, CGCS. Photo by Joel Jackson.

"While the contractor is doing the greens, we will maximize the maintenance by aerifying tees, fairways and roughs or we might be applying fertilizer and/or Curfew while the course is closed. To complete our aerifications and verticutting programs

we will work on the tees, fairways and roughs a few holes at a time ahead of play so we can punch the holes and then clean up before the golfers get there."

Coral Oaks installed TifEagle greens back in 2001 and Foster does a light verticut biweekly from April to October

to manage the thatch growth. In keeping with recommended golf course nutrient best management practices, Foster annually applies around 8-10 lbs. of nitrogen to the greens and 3.5-4 lbs. to the fairways and roughs.

With lots of traffic on the course thinning out some areas and inviting weeds to encroach, Foster tries to make 2-3 pre-emergent herbicide applications: Ronstar in February, Barricade in May and sometimes Echelon in August.

"For insect pests like mole crickets and nematodes, we try to alternate yearly applications of Chipco Choice and Curfew," Foster said. "Then we scout and monitor for activity and make spot treatments as needed."

Foster holds weekly staff meetings to keep his crew on point and he also attends quarterly Golf Advisory Board meetings. The advisory board is made up of Foster, the presidents of the Men's and Women's Golf Associations, citizens who are usually golfers, a city council member and the director of Park & Recreation, who acts as liaison between the city and the course.

Foster writes a monthly article for the club's email newsletter.

"I focus on what's happening on the course," he said, "what the players are seeing out there and what we are doing to address it. Also, the newsletter is a good way to educate the golfers about what, why and when we do certain things like overseeding, aerifying, etc."

His "hot topic" at the time I visited in early April was dealing with Poa annua (annual bluegrass) plants on the course.

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Coming off the worst winter in more than 50 years, the normal conditions for overseeding and establishment of the ryegrass were out the window. The cold, wet winter didn't help the overseeding establish and sent the bermudagrass into dormancy. Later when the weather went from winter to summer in just a few weeks, the more heat- and drought-sensitive *Poa annua* started checking out rapidly and turning brown. The consolation was that once the warm weather kicked, in the bermudagrass began to fill in.

During our ride through of the course, Foster pointed out a bald eagle that had adopted one of the course's two osprey nesting poles as its own new home. I was able to take several photos of the eagle as it took off and landed several times putting on a nice show for the camera. In a follow-up e-mail, Foster said the eagles produced two fledglings. One fell out of the nest and was injured. The Clinic for the Restoration of



From 13th green looking back to No. 12. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



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FUN FACTS

Vehicle: 2001 Toyota Tacoma

The last good movie I saw: The remake of The Taking of Pelham 123

I stay home to watch: Music concerts and shows on the Discovery Channel.

Favorite meal: Ribeye steak rare with sauteed mushrooms, baked potato and veggies

Prized possessions: My health

Favorite performer: Frank Zappa

Personal heroes: My father and anyone that has served in the military

Nobody knows that I: Used to weigh 150 lbs and 50 of that was hair

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Not losing my cool

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

I'd give anything to meet: Old Tom Morris

My fantasy is: To sit on the top of the pyramid of Ghiza

The one thing I can't stand: Is people trying to snow you

The words that best describe me: Centered

My dream foursome would be: Alice Cooper, Graham Nash & Steven Sills

My best fish story: Who has time to fish?



And the beat goes on.

Wildlife (CROW) located on Sanibel Island was contacted and they picked up the eaglet and are nursing it back to health. Foster also said that CROW rehabs about 4,000 critters a year.

The critter count at Coral Oaks includes bountiful birdlife from the perching songbirds to waterfowl and wading birds. The lakes and ponds are also home to the usual suspects like alligators and turtles and smaller amphibians and reptiles. Furry critters tend to be of the smaller variety like squirrels, raccoons, possum and an occasional fox.

Foster hails from the heartland of the USA, Des Moines, Iowa.

He is a second generation superintendent following in the

footsteps of his dad, Dale Foster, whose career spanned 54 years. Foster might eclipse that record. He said, "I started in the business when I was eight years old. I knew from an early age that this was the career path for me. Being around the business for so many years I've had the opportunity to know many superintendents. However, it took me years to get a first name. I wasn't known as Jim, but rather as Dale's little boy."

How did Foster's career path get from Iowa to Florida?

"It was pretty simple," he said, "We moved to Indiana when I was in junior high school. I worked on golf courses in the area and one of my superintendents was a UMass,



A bald eagle commandeered one of the two osprey nesting poles on the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Stockbridge School graduate and highly recommended their program, so that's where I went to college. After school I worked in Indiana and Michigan and after I took a job with Valley Crest and I did some work in Florida. The rest, as they say, is history.

"I've always been a working superintendent. Sometimes my crew will ask me why I get out there and do what I do. I simply ask them, 'Why should you guys have all the fun?'"

The other folks having fun seemed to be the golfers smiling and hailing Jim as we rode the course that April day. He seemed to know them all by name which seemed amazing to me for a course doing 63,000 rounds a year. There must be a lot of regulars, which would seem to definitely make Coral Oaks the people's choic.