

# Making the Magic Happen

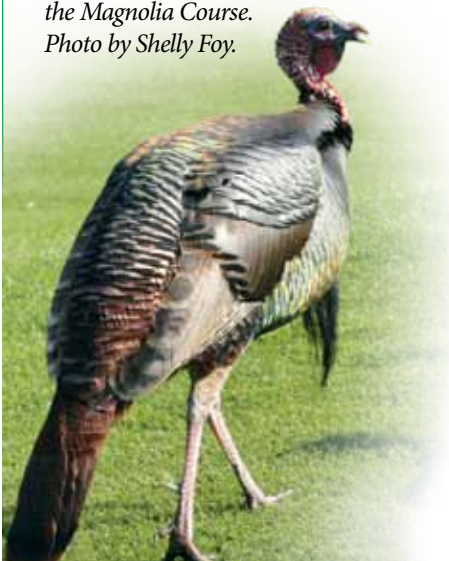
*On the Disney courses you can find solitude even in the middle of the busy resort. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

*By Shelly Foy*

The words “Disney” and “Magic” easily go together. I learned first hand how true this is when I had the opportunity to spend a couple of days visiting the Walt Disney World golf courses, all five of which are fully certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuaries.

There are four 18-hole courses, and one 9-hole walking course at Disney World.

*Close up of one of Disney's wild turkeys on the Magnolia Course. Photo by Shelly Foy.*



The Palm (130 acres) and Magnolia (142 acres) were the first, built in 1971, both designed by Joe Lee. Lake Buena Vista Golf Course, also a Joe Lee design (105 acres) opened in 1972, and Osprey Ridge (194 acres), a Fazio course, opened in 1991. Oak Trail (32.7 acres), the nine-hole walking course, was designed by Ron Garl and opened in 1980.

Every golf course has a unique story to tell. The foundations for their success are staff longevity and commitment to their environmental programs, the abundance of wildlife on the properties, and the fact that even though you know you are in the middle of the Walt Disney World Resort, on the majority of golf holes you think you are in the middle of Florida one hundred years ago.

The golf management team of the Disney Courses, Gary Myers, CGCS, manager, Golf Course Maintenance Operations; Robert (Bob) Karnes, superintendent of Osprey Ridge and Lake Buena Vista; and Scott Welder, superintendent of Magnolia, Palm, and Oak Trail, collectively has almost 100 years of experience managing these courses. Myers has been at WDW for 15 years, Karnes for 37, and Welder is celebrating 40 years in 2011. The three of them know every square foot of the

properties, and their experience helps them anticipate problems and head them off.

Karnes, the environmental liaison for the golf courses, spends a lot of his free time reaching out to schools to promote environmental stewardship. He and Tami Jones, superintendent, are currently working with five schools in the area, either giving talks or working on community outreach projects.

Karnes has a goal of speaking to 5,000 students this year, and he is well on his way to meeting this goal. He and Jones have what they call the “Audubon International Road Show” - they enlarge and mount wildlife photos to help teach kids about Florida wildlife.

To garner support from other cast members, they are hosting a WDW Golf Maintenance Photo Contest, offering prizes, and enlarging to winners to join the road show in local schools.

“Every day I come to work and just try to make a little magic happen,” Karnes says. Sometimes it is hard to gauge success of environmental programs, but Karnes was thrilled to recently receive a call from the front desk of the Old Key West Resort letting him know guests are asking for hotel rooms close to the golf



*A golfer shares Disney's Oak Trail Course with a flock of wild turkeys. Photo by Shelly Foy.*

course because they have heard about the course's certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

When talking to Welder about what drives his commitment to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, he said, "I am old school. My father taught me the importance of leaving things better than I found them."

In discussing changes in golf course management over the years, and specifically as they relate to environment issues, both Joel Jackson (who spent 20 years at Disney before retiring) and Welder agreed that "We've gotten better... the sense of environmental awareness is there, and it gets better every year."

Jackson added "Technology, methods, and products have and continue to improve as well."

The majority of cast members (maintenance staff) are also long-term

employees. Every cast member we rode by, or spoke to, seemed genuinely happy to be there. Whether the course staff is filling bird feeders or monitoring nest boxes, or rangers are speaking to golfers about the turkeys, or the starters are telling golfers about the wildlife they can expect to see on the course, there is a collective effort to share environmental information with guests.

The longevity and continuity of the staff and their enjoyment of their jobs is an asset and a reason they work so well together as a team. As strongly as they feel about making magic happen on the golf courses every day, they also are committed to continuing to protect and enhance the natural environment of the golf courses.

One of the highlights for me was watching golfers and a flock of turkeys (estimated 300 on property) amicably share the golf course.

A lot of families play the courses and

sharing a round of family golf with turkey, deer, and more birds than one could count can only add to the magic of a trip to Disney. Welder told me there were days when you can round a corner and see herds of deer on the fairways. Most of the golf holes are bordered by hundreds of acres of undeveloped property, and wildlife has ample space for safe travel.

On the Palm Course, according to Welder, "each hole is like its own little world."

We came upon a fairway where a large flock of wading birds was foraging on the fairways between two lakes, turtles were sunning on a log, and an osprey was flying overhead looking for lunch. It was an amazing experience, yet just another day on the course for Welder, who has this pleasure every day.

The abundance of wildlife rarely causes damage to the course.

"Occasionally, if the deer are spooked,

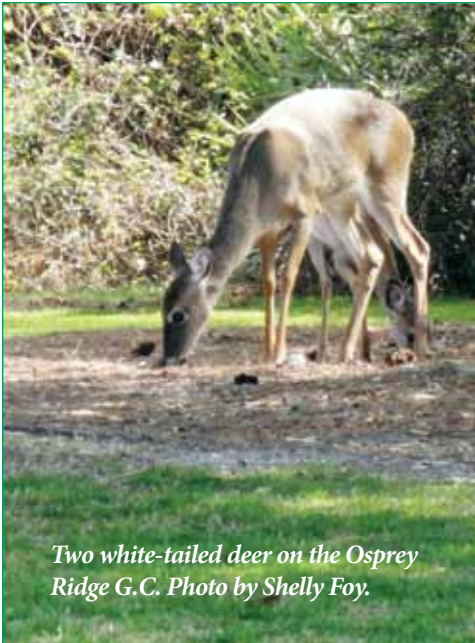
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Two white-tailed deer on the Osprey Ridge G.C. Photo by Shelly Foy.

they can cause a little damage on the greens, but nothing we can't handle," he said.

Two days on the Disney golf courses do not seem like two days at a major tourist attraction. On the Lake Buena Vista Course there are holes where you can see townhouses, cars, buses, and even parts of Downtown Disney, but there is an overwhelming sense of quiet on most of the holes on all five courses.

The next time you make the trip, do yourself a favor and don't miss the golf courses. Take the time to notice the smiles on the faces of the staff, the abundance of wildlife on every hole, and don't forget to breathe deeply and take it all in on those holes where you feel you are the only person out there.



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