

Country Club of Naples: Everything Old is New Again

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

The last stop on the 2012 tour of South Florida courses is the Country Club of Naples (CCN). A search of the club's website indicated that CCN was the fourth course built in the Naples area following the Beach Club (1920s), Hole-in-the-Wall (1957) and Palm River (1959) which were already active by 1966. The growth of golf in southwest Florida over the past 46 years didn't really explode until the real estate development boom in the 1980s and 90s.

The Country Club of Naples is located

just off Goodlette-Frank Rd, which fronts quite a few of Naples' in-town golf courses. The banks of the Gordon River Extension mark the eastern boundary of the golf course property and the Gulf of Mexico lies a scant two miles to the west as the crow flies. The course property, with its five lakes and 15 acres of natural areas, creates a prolific wildlife habitat in the urban setting.

In describing the architectural design of the course, superintendent Bill Davidson said, "The style of this course emphasizes

the ground game, in the true spirit of the iconic golf courses built during the 'Golden Age' of course design. There are very few forced carries from the tees or 'heroic' shots required to reach the greens on this course. The challenge lies in hitting fairways and mastering your short game around the accessible greens."

To that end Davidson's maintenance program seeks to maximize fast and firm playing conditions throughout the course.

The architect, Bill Diddel, was an



View of the 16th Tee complex from the fairway. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Indiana native and his design portfolio teems with a long list of Midwestern golf courses, but he also designed and/or remodeled some notable Florida courses, including Melbourne G&CC, Sunset G&CC and Sunset Hills CC all in 1926; Jupiter Island (1958); CC of Naples (1963) and the Bardmoor Courses (East – 1968 and North and South in 1974). Diddel also did remodels or expansions of Ponce de Leon Resort (1955); Oceanside G&CC (no date) and the Mountain Lake Club (1961).

The subtitle of this story is “Everything Old is New Again.” One of the main reasons for that selection is that back in the late 1930’s, according to the link

SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

Meet Bill Davidson, CGCS

Originally from: Born in Miami. Grew up in Naples.

Family: Wife Trisha. Together we have four kids. We are busy!

Education: Graduated Barron Collier High School in 1992. Worked at Quail Creek for Steve Durand while waiting to get into Lake City CC (Now Florida Gateway College). 1996 AA in Golf Operations from Lake City.

Employment history: 1996 spray tech Collier’s Reserve CC for Tim Hiers; 2000 Promoted to assistant superintendent at Colliers Reserve CC; 2003-2008 superintendent Naples Grande GC; 2008- Present superintendent Country Club of Naples.

Professional affiliations/awards: Class of ’96 President Lake City CC Golf Operations. GCSAA member for 18 years. Past president of the Everglades GCSA and board member for 10 years. Currently secretary/treasurer of the Florida GCSA and serve as chairman of the Government Relations Committee. 2001 recipient of the GCSAA’s Environmental Leaders in Golf Award for both Private Clubs and Overall category.

Goals/Accomplishments: Attained my CGCS status earlier this year. This has been a goal since college. Try to be as good a father as possible, which can be challenging in today’s “in your face” atmosphere. Teach my new assistant what my mentors shared with me. Implemented and administered Audubon International’s Signature Sanctuary Program. Included among his achievements are “Recipient - Environmental Leaders in Golf Award for Private Country Clubs 2002,” sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendent’s Association of America, and “Recipient - Overall Winner for Environmental Leaders in Golf 2002,” sponsored by Golf Digest.

Personal philosophy of work: In today’s golf market, great greens and playing surfaces are not just for special occasions, they are the standard. Run your operation like a business and balance what you do with how it affects the bottom line.

Hobbies and Interests: Fishing and coaching his children’s sports teams.



BILL DAVIDSON, CGCS

Photo by Joel Jackson.



A natural area on the 13th hole. Photo by Joel Jackson.



The open accessible 17th green is an example of the “ground game” course design. Photo by Joel Jackson.

titled “Bill’s History” on the website, “The Golf Courses of Bill Diddel,” he became intrigued with the idea of smaller golf courses to bring more people into the game. He even developed a golf ball that flew half the distance of a regular golf ball. It never caught on, but 40 years later the “Cayman Ball” with similar “shorter” flight characteristics was developed.

Today, the golf industry is engaged in “Growing the Game” and “Tee It Forward” initiatives to make golf easier and more enjoyable to attract more golfers. CCN already has a friendly

ground-game design and they are adding a set of Silver tees so shorter hitters can move up and still enjoy their golf outings.

Davidson brought a few more interesting and noteworthy facts about Diddel to my attention. By 1971, he had shot his age 1,261 times. He shot his age 77 times at the age of 81 in 1966. In 1970 at age 86 Diddel played CCN and shot a 74. At the age of 93 he made his seventh hole-in-one which put him in the Golf Digest’s all-time hole-in-one record book. He passed away on February 25, 1985 just a few months shy of his 101st birthday.

Following the story’s theme of renewal, the club rebuilt the original greens to USGA specifications in 1997.

The original irrigation system was modernized in 2004 and, in 2009, a complete restoration of the course was done under the guidance of architect Gordon Lewis. Everything was refreshed and restored except the greens’ wells, which remained in their original locations.

During these reconstruction projects, Davidson learned quite a bit about the soil profile he was managing.



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The layout of the course is a north-south orientation with the front nine occupying the western half of the property and the back nine the eastern half closest to the Gordon River Extension. He already knew he had rocky subsoil on the back nine and mostly a sandy profile on the front nine. In southwest Florida, finding limestone near the surface is not an unusual occurrence. However, buried rocks ranging in size from baseballs to steamer trunks play havoc with aerifying, verticutting and Curfew injection blades and tines.

During each construction project, Davidson's crew has major harvests of the rocks and boulders and uses them as riprap to stabilize several of the course's lake banks. He has quite a rock garden growing around the lake behind the tenth green. Seasonal aerifying also identifies more rocks under the surface. Each rock harvested means fewer broken tines and lower parts costs each year.

Another project that Davidson undertook was necessitated in 2005 when hurricane Wilma slammed into south Florida from the Gulf of Mexico. He said that they have planted more than 700 trees on the course to replace the damaged landscaping.

The landscaping and "rock mining" comments lead to another aspect of modern course management that is slowly but surely evolving – the use of social media and other popular computer-age communications opportunities to keep members informed of golf course news.

The membership at the County Club on Naples is made up of about 25 percent year-round residents and 75 percent seasonal members who come down for the winter season. When the course was being rebuilt from stem to stern, Davidson started a blog to keep them informed of the various individual projects and overall progress. After discussions about content and presentation with the club leadership, Davidson launched the CCN Golf Maintenance blog site during the course rebuild in 2009.

The advantages of having a blog are twofold: First, when members are gone for eight to nine months and come back, the course looks normal or slightly different with new features, but they have no idea of the amount of work that actually went on during those long, hot summer months.

Davidson's regular blog entries with ample photographs documented the challenges and time and effort it took to accomplish the finished product. The blog became an instant hit with the members and now, if he misses posting something regularly, people write and ask what's going on.

The second benefit is that now there is a large group of members who know what's going on, and when a fellow member asks a question about maintenance, they say, "What, you didn't read about that on Bill's blog?" There's no doubt blogging can be an excellent communication method to keep members informed. Davidson admits that it's not all work and no play. Sometimes he just posts "beauty shots" of the course like blooming flowerbeds,

DAVIDSON FUN FACTS



Bill with a large pike he caught on a trip to Lake Lac Seul in Ontario. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Vehicle: 2003 GMC Yukon

I stay home to watch: The Discovery Channel

What I've been reading: Fictional and historical books about Florida

Favorite meal: Seafood

Prized possessions: Family

Personal heroes: My Dad

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Observation

If I could do it over: Might have become an engineer. I'm very analytical.

I'd give anything to meet: Benjamin Franklin

My fantasy is: To become independently wealthy

The one thing I can't stand: Misuse of words and grammar in the English language.

If I could change one thing about myself: I know where to get copies of records online and from other hardcopy sources, but I'd be more of a paperwork saver.

My most irrational act: At age six, donning my Batman costume and jumping off the roof.

Most humbling experience: A chewing out by Tim Hiers.

The words that best describe me: Leadership, communicator, people person.

My dream foursome would be: Matt Damon, George Lopez, Toby Keith and me.

My best fish story: Taking my son fishing and watching him land his first catch with his granddad and me present.

My most amazing/lucky/important golf shot: Scoring two eagles from 150 yards out from the green.

dewdrops on a leaf blade and wildlife on the course. You can check out Bill's blog at: <http://ccnmaintenance.blogspot.com>.

Bill's communication skills and leadership qualities have earned the trust and confidence of the membership. He is called upon to also oversee the maintenance operations at the clubhouse, which leads us back to the story's theme. The whole air-conditioning system in the clubhouse is being overhauled and the club is considering a rooftop solar panel system to help power the clubhouse and generate power back to the local grid.

Davidson said he really appreciates the confidence the club has in his abilities. He added, "Another thing I like is that the club

has taken a practical and proactive stance on running the club. They haven't over-reacted to the current trends in the flat golf market and economic stresses. They are working to re-purpose the club in a very practical way to include the amenities needed to attract new members as the face of golf and club membership needs and expectations change with the generations.

"I love my job. I like the certain amount of autonomy that comes with my responsibilities and the new challenges given me with the clubhouse maintenance duties. I think of myself as being pretty detail-oriented and analytical. I like the wide-ranging problem-solving aspect of the superintendent's role."

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View from the clubhouse overlooking the first hole. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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Location: Naples
No. of Holes: 18;
Yardage: 6,772;
Par: 72; **Slope & Rating:** 73.7 / 136
Ownership: Member owned since 1966
Playing Policy: Private
Designed by: Original design by Bill Diddle in 1963. Redesigned by Gordon Lewis in 2009. Opened in 1964 as the first full-service private club in Naples.
Management Team:

Club President Marshall Dean; Green Chairman Charlie Murphy; Head Golf Professional Tony Franklin, head pro at CCN for 14 years; Controller Libby Hoyer-Booth (20 years); Membership Director (new position at the club) Holly Stevens (1 year); Chef Todd Warosh (22 years); Superintendent Bill Davidson (since 2008). Bill also has clubhouse building maintenance management responsibilities.
Projects: Complete golf course reconstruction in 2009. This was the first major improvement to the course since 1964. The only items left in place were the greens' wells and 70 percent of the irrigation system.
Total property acres: 185. Acreage under maintenance: 85
Greens: Turf Type: Miniverde. Average size: 3,500 square feet. Acres: 1.8
HOC: .120 year-round.
Overseeding: none. Green speed goals: 10.5 – 11.5.

COUNTRY CLUB OF NAPLES



The Country Club of Naples Maintenance Staff. Photo by Joel Jackson

Tees: Turf Type: Celebration bermudagrass. Acres: 1.8. HOC: .350 in season, .500 in summer.

Overseeding: Tees 1 through 18 none. Practice Range Tee overseeded due to small size. 400 lb/acre ryegrass blend.

Fairways: Turf Type: Celebration. Total acres: 25. HOC: .500. Overseeding: None

Roughs: Turf Type: Celebration. Total acres: 35. HOC: 1.25" in season. .75" in summer.

Bunkers: Number of bunkers 65. Sand type: 326 Overseeding: None; Machine raked: Toro Sand Pro with no tines on rakes and brooms to smooth surface. Landscaped and naturalized areas/beds: Around 15 acres total.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: Total number: 5. Acres: 5.3. Lake maintenance contracted out.

Irrigation: Direct feed from effluent plant. No pump station. We do have two emergency wells.

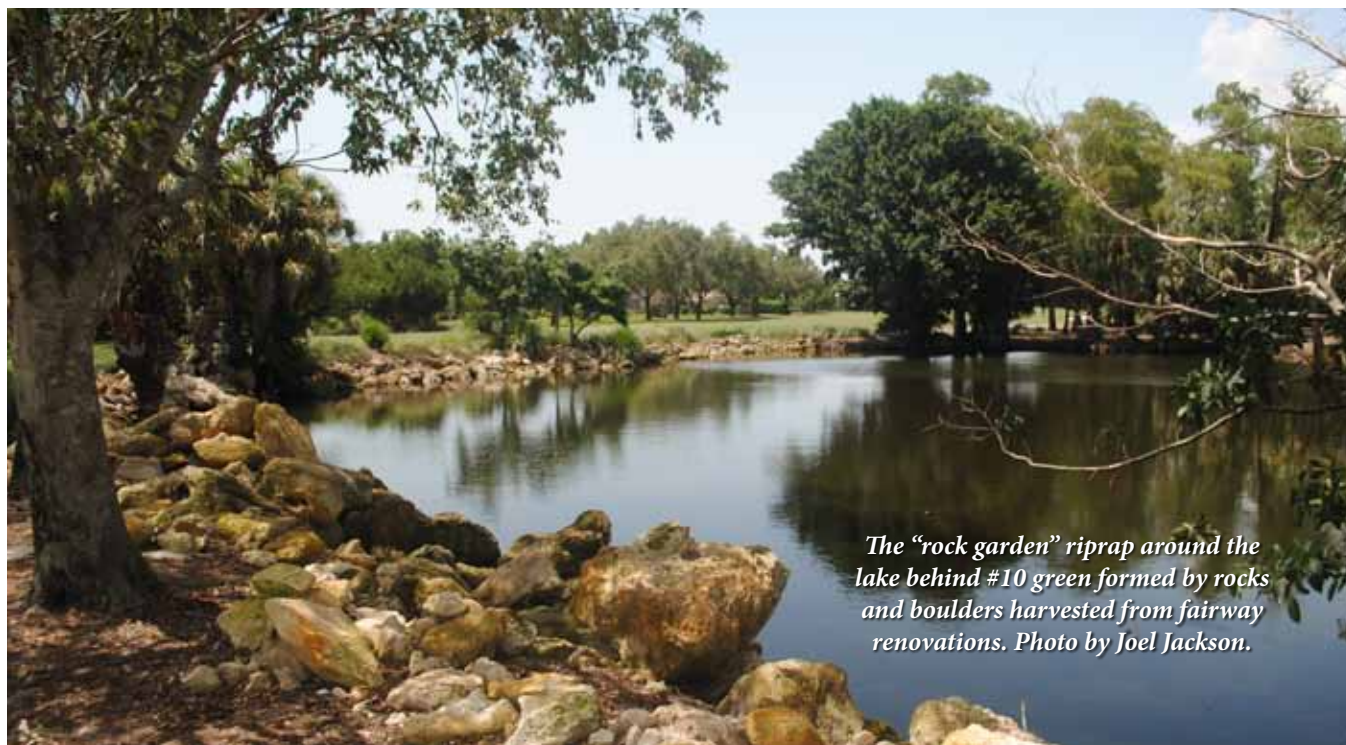
1,600 heads, 65-foot spacing. Osmac control system. Around 750 heads on 85-foot spacing. We do have fertigation capability, but it is rarely used.
Watering restrictions: No restriction as long as pumping only reclaimed water. Water Management/Conservation practices: We use a lot of adjuvants to help manage our soil moisture levels.

The course design is an "old-school ground-game" approach so that dictates fast, firm and dry conditions to help ball roll.

Staff: Total including superintendent: 19. Schedule: 40 hours straight time.

Key Staff: Assistant(s) 1st Assistant Erick Landis; 2nd Assistant Trevor Floyd; Head Equipment Technician Frank Novotny; Assistant Equipment Technician John Morgan; Pest Control Technician Ken McAlister.

Meetings/ Communications: Monthly safety crew meetings. Regular daily crew assignments are displayed digitally on a large-screen monitor in the break room. Any daily changes or special instructions are handwritten and posted on a white board. The club currently has no general manager, so the club committee system is very active managing the club's operations and I attend many of these meetings on a monthly basis.



The “rock garden” riprap around the lake behind #10 green formed by rocks and boulders harvested from fairway renovations. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Davidson added, “I was fortunate to work with some quality people coming up in the business like Wayne Stewart, Steve Durand, Matt Taylor, Frank Kynkor and Tim Hiers. From them I learned you have to be persistent, dedicated and diplomatic to really make it in this business. Now I strive to mentor my assistants and share my experiences with them.”

There is a growing focus on programs for assistant superintendent members of the GCSAA and state and local chapters. There’s no question that today’s golf market has made career progression a rockier road.

Davidson said, “When I hire an assistant, I’m looking for an individual with personality, leadership and communication skills and a good work ethic. Certainly a turf management education background

is worthwhile, but I can teach them the turf management skills they need at CCN. Each course has its own special needs, but it’s all about attitude and how they work with people that makes them successful. Once they learn our turf programs, I want to focus on their business and communications skills, which has been a sorely neglected side of the job for many years.”

Davidson continued, “I’d also like to see assistants do more networking with peers. I learned the value of that network by watching guys like Matt and Tim over the years. I know I can call on any number of folks in our industry for help when I have a problem whether it’s turf-related or help with association business.”

Davidson went on to discuss the current

trends in associations and club operations in general. “We are in the midst of a generational shift from the “man cave,” work-centric model for superintendents and associations. Today, where dad goes the family goes. We are mobile family units and tend to be kid-centric in our spare time. We work hard all day and all week, but when the whistle blows we want to spend time with the family. I love coaching my son’s lacrosse team. I even play the game myself. I also love fishing with my son and one of the greatest joys I’ve had is teaching him to fish like my dad taught me.

And so it is, as we move from generation to generation, enjoy the journey, because in life and golf course maintenance everything old is new again.

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Rocks and boulders are harvested from the back nine fairways during renovation and construction projects.



Peyton and Trace Davidson check out a Lane Edwards Design bird box on Dad's course.



These Canna lilies add color to the naturalized areas on the course.

Country Club of Naples

Photos by Joel Jackson

Aerial photo view on #7 looking north. The tall buildings in the distance border the Gulf of Mexico.



The dirt flies when fairway verticutting during the "100 Day War," otherwise known as summer renovation at CCN.