

The Aberdeen Golf & Country Club: It's A Family Affair!

By Joel Jackson, CGCS



Hole #4, Beauty & The Beast. A par 5 with a tempting island fairway shortcut. Photo by Joel Jackson.

The Aberdeen golf course, an interesting and unique Desmond Muirhead design which opened in 1983, is located in south-central Boynton Beach in southeastern Palm Beach County. This country club community lies almost midway between the Atlantic Ocean beaches to the east and the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge to the west.

And wildlife is no stranger to the Aberdeen golf course. Superintendent Brian Main, who has been at the helm of the golf and

grounds maintenance staff since 2003, reports an impressive list of waterfowl, shore and wading birds, burrowing owls, Egyptian geese, bald eagles, osprey, hawks, iguanas, alligators, rabbits, squirrels, and even armadillos. One day while riding the course, he came across a gathering of more than 200 anhingas with wings spread on one side of a hole and more than 100 sea gulls on the other. Golf course green spaces truly are effective wildlife habitats in urban areas.

Each hole on the course has a name, which itself is not unique — many courses have named their holes, such as Augusta National with its holes named after flowers, shrubs and trees. At Aberdeen, the holes' names are a little more evocative, such as *Grasping Hands*, *The Dragon*, *The Mermaid*, etc. The club has Muirhead's notes explaining his thinking and the symbolism of the features on each hole. *The Mermaid* is in the World Golf Hall of Fame and an aerial photo of the hole is



featured in this issue.

In the aerial photo on page 10, see if you can find the mermaid's head, tail, scales and a couple of fish swimming with her.

The course has not undergone any substantial renovations other than the conversion of the greens complexes in 1998 to TifEagle ultradwarf to eliminate the off-type grass contamination in the putting surfaces.

Brian says each year he tries to introduce a new feature for the members. Over the years he has made it a project to burn in stripes to give it that neat

SUPERINTENDENT FACTS

Originally from:
Carrollton, Ohio

Family: Wife, Andrea.
Twin 4-year-old
daughters: Isabella and
Savannah and my dog, a
boxer named Apollo.

Education: 1998,
Associate Degree in
Applied Science in
Turfgrass Management from North Carolina State University.

Employment: 2003 – present, Superintendent Aberdeen G&CC; 1999-2003, Golf Course Superintendent, Emerald Dunes GC, West Palm Beach, FL; 1998-99 Assistant Superintendent Emerald Dunes GC; 1997-98 Spray Tech, Lochmere GC, Cary, NC; 1998 Intern, Greenwich CC, Greenwich, CT; Grounds crew, Carroll Meadows, Carrollton, OH.

Professional Affiliations & Offices Held:

GCSAA: Chapter Delegate 2006-07; Member of 2008-09 Nominating Committee. **Florida GCSA:** Board of Directors and Research Committee Chairman 2011-12. **Palm Beach GCSA:** President 20007-08, Vice President 2006-07 & 2010-11; External Vice President 2011-12. Board of Directors 2005-06; Future of Golf Committee 2005-09. **Tournament Volunteering:** 97th PGA Championship, Winged Foot GC, Mamaroneck, NY and 2006 Honda Classic, CC of Mirasol, Palm Beach Gardens, FL

Career Path: Like many, I worked on a course in Ohio while in high school. It didn't really click as a real career until I was in North Carolina and two mentors, Donald "Bert" Totten and Danny Gwynn, CGCS showed me a different path. It was one that demonstrated the passion for the profession and how success was achieved through commitment, dedication and continuing education. After moving to Florida, Steve Bernard and Tyler Warner were instrumental in my maturation as a more effective leader and planner. My current GM/COO Michael DiPietro has been a vital cog in my career at Aberdeen. He exposed me to the internal workings of the club, which I had not experienced before. I cannot begin to describe the valuable knowledge and perspectives I have gained from him.

Hobbies & Interests: I am an avid home brewer. I love mountain biking, skiing, golf and family activities.



BRIAN MAIN,
Superintendent Aberdeen G&CC

Photo by Joel Jackson.



Neat fairway stripes point to the 18th hole and the Aberdeen Clubhouse. Photo by Brian Main.

ABERDEEN GOLF & COUNTY CLUB



Aberdeen G&CC Golf & Grounds Maintenance Staff. Photo by Joel Jackson

Location: Boynton Beach

Ownership: Member equity

Playing policy: Private. Average number of rounds: 38,000/year; 18 holes, 7,016 yards, Par 72,

Slope & Rating: 74.5/137

Unique course design by Desmond Muirhead with holes like the Mermaid, Marilyn Monroe, Florida Keys, Thread the Needle and Grasping Hands to name a few. The course opened in 1984.

Management Team: General Manger & Chief Operating Officer Michael DiPietro; Club President Richard Kaplan; Green Chairman Jerry Rozenzweig; Club Manager Sean Lutwin; Head Golf Professional Jackie Cort; Golf Operations Manager Wally Martin and Golf Course Superintendent Brian Main

Major projects: Removal of off-type contamination on greens

Total acreage: 150. Acreage under maintenance: 135 (course 100, club grounds 35).

Greens: 3 acres. Turf type: TifEagle. Avg. Size 6,200 sq. ft.. HOC 0.105 in. September–May; 0.120 in. June – August. Green speed goals: 10. No overseeding.

The Tees, Fairways & Roughs are all Tifway 419 and are not overseeded. Tees: 2.75 acres. HOC 0.550 in. Fairways: 35 acres. HOC 0.650 in. and Roughs: 60 acres, HOC 1.75 in. in summer and 2.0 in. during the season.

Native areas/beds: 15 acres. Most areas are mulched, some Wedelia groundcover

Bunkers: 64. Machine raking w/Toro Sand Pro 3040. Sand Type: G-Angle.

Lakes/Ponds: 7 lakes covering approximately 45 acres. Maintained by Advanced Aquatics Co.

Irrigation System: Reclaimed water. Controls: Toro Site Pro Central and OSMAC field satellites. 750 heads

Water Restrictions: No restrictions on the course. We irrigate the pool deck area with potable city water, so we follow the 2-days per week schedule.

Water Conservation: Irrigate using ET rates and regularly use a soil probe to check moisture level in greens root zones. Daily field inspection of heads, nozzles and programs. We adjust run times based on turf and weather conditions. Created various programs to customize water delivery to specific areas. We hand water isolated dry areas and use wetting agents monthly on tees and greens.

Staff including superintendent: 21 (20 full time and 1 part time) on the course and 3 full time for the club grounds. Weekly hours: 40 hrs. ST and 1-2 hrs. OT

Key staff: 1st Assistant Angela Wilson, 2nd Assistant Jose Andujar; Equipment Tech Sonny Rosado; Pest Control Tech Hector Segura; Irrigation Tech Revoque Lafontant; Admin Assistant Ellen Spellacy and Club Grounds Foreman Lucio Carranza.

Meetings/Communications: Quarterly crew safety meetings and general meetings as needed. Quarterly Club Management, Golf and Green Committee meetings. Monthly Financial meetings.

overseeded appearance when, in fact, no overseeding is used on the course. This past year he installed a “first” or “intermediate” cut around the fairways and approaches to give it that tournament look and feel.

The members appreciate the attention to detail that the maintenance staff puts into the course. I saw several golfers filling divots in the fairway and rough as we rode around.

“The members do a great job of policing divots and ball marks,” Brian said. “We appreciate that. It keeps the course playable for everyone and makes our job that much easier so we can focus on the important agronomic practices to keep the turf healthy.”

While riding the course with Brian, he mentioned the photo of the Egyptian geese published in the *Winter Florida Green*.

“We have four families of the Egyptian geese on the course,” he said. “I discovered a new nest in the green’s bunker on the 8th hole and told the crew to avoid the area. The female defended her nest aggressively when I wandered too close to inspect the bunker. Then the male came flying in and honking to the rescue. The members are also advised to avoid the area during the nesting season.”

And speaking of a “tournament look,” the maintenance department uses an “inside-the-ropes” approach for grooming, conditioning and weed- and pest-control programs. The reasoning is sound operationally and for cost control.

“We try to use our labor and



#11, *The Mermaid*. Can you find her tail, scales, head and fishy friends?
Photo courtesy of Premiere Aerials International.

financial resources for the biggest bang for the buck,” says Brian. “This isn’t a new concept. Everyone has had to manage his budget wisely so we focus on the greens, tees and fairways first and then the roughs.”

I was impressed with the tee complexes and Aberdeen’s approach to the whole “Play it Forward” initiative so golfers new to the game and longtime veterans can have a wide selection of tee — or should I say “course” — options. And to make it even more inviting to juniors, beginning golfers and perhaps seniors who can’t hit it

so far anymore, the club has a “course within a course.” Called the Desmond Muirhead Course, it is an executive length par-3 course with a separate forward teeing area designated in each fairway by a large gold in-ground plaque, similar to a yardage marker. There is a corresponding gold marker on the cart path to indicate the tee location. The Muirhead yardages are also listed on the scorecard.

The regular tee markers are not the usual dogmatic black, blue, white, gold and red with all the historic connotations. Instead, you are welcome to play the Maroon,

Teal, Orange, Green, Ocean and Khaki Courses. Sometimes a tee location will share two different colored markers. The yardage total remains within designated handicap ranges so your stroke rating is not affected, just your enjoyment of the round.

During a tour of the maintenance facility, Brian explained that they use a combination of 60 percent leasing and 40 percent purchasing plans.

“We purchase equipment with extended-life uses like trap rakes and triplexes, which can be staged from use on greens to tees to collars and first mowings after top dressing and aerification,” he said. “The same for walk mowers. The older mowers are used for those

initial cuts after seasonal greens renovations.”

This is a common practice superintendents use to extend the useful life of a club’s capital investment in turf maintenance equipment.

The key is for clubs to recognize that there comes a time when annual maintenance costs and meeting member expectations on course conditioning collide with the budget.

Speaking of capital investments, recently the clubhouse underwent a total renovation. Brian and Aberdeen’s Chief Operating Officer Michael DiPietro gave me a tour of the facility and over lunch, Michael explained the innovative concepts incorporated in the renovation and

also the management philosophy and family atmosphere that prevails in all aspects of the club from the members to the employees.

DiPietro said, “Our goal was provide the ultimate country club experience at a tremendous value. The form and function of the final product accomplishes just that. In fact the new design has won awards and lots of inquiries from other clubs. We are proud of that, but we are more excited about the response and use by the members and the operational efficiencies that help the staff provide great experiences for our members.”

Two great examples were the outdoor, multi-pool activity area and the Cardio Stadium, a theatre-style exercise/fitness room.

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MAIN FUN FACTS

Vehicle: 2007 Nissan Armada

I stay home to watch: NC State football

Last good movie I saw: I can't remember any recent movie I saw that didn't involve Disney princesses

Favorite meal: Filet mignon, baked potato and steamed vegetables

What I've been reading: Who has time to read?

Prized possessions: My family

Personal Heroes: Members of the U.S. Military

Nobody knows that I: I'll keep that one to myself

The one thing I can't stand: Irrational people

My most humbling experience: The birth of our twin daughters

My dream foursome: Jack Black, Will Ferrell, Adam Sandler and me

My best "fish" story: Still waiting for one

My most amazing golf shot: See the answer above



Brian Main with twin daughters, Isabella and Savannah. Photo by Andrea Main.

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“We have three distinct pool areas: the Serenity Pool for people to read and relax, the Exercise pool with swimming lanes for doing laps, and an Activity Pool for the kids,” DiPietro said. “You will note how the landscaping helps to separate and frame each area. Brian and his grounds staff do a super job of doing the detail work necessary to keep the area looking great.

“We are also very excited about the fitness room. All of the equipment is recessed into the elevated flooring levels and each station is offset from the ones behind so that everyone has a view through the window wall overlooking the pool areas and the 18th green. The use volume of the fitness room has increased dramatically since the redesign makes the surroundings more

conducive to achieving wellness goals.”

Another topic discussed at length was the work environment at the club. Expectations and opportunities were a major focus and DiPietro was proud of the retention, longevity, and 55 percent internal promotions rate for employees.

“It begins with the interview process,” DiPietro explained. “Not only is a club looking for the right person for the job, but the interviewee should be also looking for the right fit for their career growth and expectations. When we interviewed Brian, I told him that we expected his first year would be dedicated to making the improvements to the course that we desired and for him to learn our system and get to know

his fellow department heads and employees. During his second year, which should be easier, we’d like to see him get more involved with his professional associations by volunteering and getting involved on committees. Thereafter we’d hope he would assume a leadership role and serve on the board(s) of his groups which would be good for his continuing education which would benefit the club and himself.

“I call this a system of deposits and withdrawals. In the beginning you make deposits of time and effort for learning the systems and accomplishing primary goals. Later, when you need personal time off for travel and education and for raising your family, you make withdrawals.”

Michael DiPietro is the son of Jay DiPietro, who helped pioneer



Bunker fingers define hole #3, The Grasping Hand. Photo by Joel Jackson.



First Assistant Angela Wilson shows off a back saving spreader rack idea that Brian brought home from a trade show. Photo by Joel Jackson.

the growth and effectiveness of the Club Managers Association in South Florida. He has learned to appreciate true professionals who serve their clubs well, but who also understand that it is a joint effort by everyone that makes a club ultimately successful over the long term. He also understands the importance of having a global view of the issues facing our industry and for all committed professionals – manager, pro, membership, food and beverage or superintendent – to participate in their associations to grow personally and professionally for the success of the golf industry.

Brian has certainly thrived in

this positive atmosphere and he's following the model magnificently.

Like any new superintendent he spent long days getting the course into shape. He has served in all offices of the Palm Beach GCSA and is now on the Florida GCSA Board of Directors and he has a growing family he's devoted to.

When I asked him what advice he might share with others to help with having a successful career, he responded, "Never close the lid on your 'toolbox of knowledge.' Be open to criticism as well as new ideas. Practice sound judgment and agronomic practices. Be a leader, a role model and an enabler for learning. Finally, be a member and

get involved in your local chapter. Take advantage of the professional resources, educational sessions and networking opportunities they provide."

My visit to Aberdeen was unique in the history of the cover stories I've written over the years. It's often easy to convey the passion of the superintendent for his job at a club, but never before have I been treated to such a detailed discussion of the goals and mission of the entire facility. I called it "Team Aberdeen."

"We call it the "Aberdeen Family," Michael DiPietro said.