The calendar on my iPhone said it was March 28, 2013 as I pulled out of the UF/IFAS Research and Education Center in Ft. Lauderdale and headed south toward Miami. I was en route to the Biltmore Golf Course to visit with superintendent Bryan Singleton and research this cover story.

Once on the property, I was transported in time, aided by the architecture of the hotel and golf course. The portraits and photographs of presidents, sports legends, iconic entertainers and other historical figures on the walls made it even easier to turn back the pages of history.

I was familiar with course in general because I had played it a couple of times when it was a municipal golf course while I was in the U.S. Coast Guard and stationed in Miami in 1965 to 1967. The hotel was closed at the time and was acting as a military hospital. But I’m getting ahead of the amazing story of this historic property.

None other than the legendary Donald Ross designed the golf course in 1925. It was originally a 36-hole layout that wrapped around and extended southward from the hotel. Six years later, in 1931, the Miami-Biltmore Open – the richest professional golf tournament in golf at the time – attracted legends Walter Hagen, Paul Runyan, Ralph Guldahl, Bill Mehlhorn, U. S. Open Champion Billy Burke and Gene Sarazen, who would capture the Biltmore a record four times.

The Tour moved on, but the Biltmore maintained its place in golf history by hosting the Junior Orange Bowl International Golf Championship for 49 years since 1964. Names like Nick Price, Jose Maria Olazabal, Tiger Woods, Craig Stadler, Hal Sutton, Bob Tway, Mark Calcavecchia, Helen Alfredson, Gary Koch, Annika

The Par 5, 15th hole with an approach shot over the Coral Gables Waterway. Photo by Joel Jackson.
Sorenstam and Paula Creamer can be found among many others in the Junior Orange Bowl Hall of Fame.

For many foreign players like Olazabal and Price, it was their first venture on American soil. They qualified abroad by winning their national championships.

These facts and other anecdotes came courtesy of J. R. Steinbauer, tournament chairman, whom superintendent Bryan Singleton had invited to his office to share the importance of the Biltmore in the history of that premier amateur event.

“We cannot praise Bryan and his staff enough for the outstanding job they do preparing this course to top level conditions required for our

Meet Bryan Singleton
Originally from:
Born in Washington, DC. Grew up in Beltsville, MD
Education: BS in Agronomy from “The’ Pennsylvania State University
How did you get into the business: I began working on golf courses as a summer job while in high school. Really, it’s the only work I have ever done.
Professional affiliations/awards: 28-year member of the GCSAA. South Florida GCSA and FGCSA member since 1987. SFGCSA sec/treasurer in 1997-2000. SFGCSA president in 2000-01. Served on the Missing & Exploited Children Tournament since 1995. Received the FGCSA President’s Award in 2011 for Lifetime Service.
Goals/Accomplishments: To maintain the best golf course I can and to treat others with respect. I have been involved in five major course renovations. I appreciated being recognized by my peers with the 2011 President’s Award.
Personal philosophy of work: You have to enjoy what you do and give your best every day. I would advise a young person coming out of college to select a superintendent to work for who has a history of helping place their assistants into superintendent positions. Also, unless you have a pension plan at work start your own IRA account as soon as you can.
Personal memorable moments: Playing the Royal Dublin Club in Ireland with my dad and going to the 1997 Masters with my dad and fellow superintendent and friend Dave Klinkhammer.
Hobbies and Interests: Golf, relaxing at the beach with a good book, and fishing.
Behind the trees on the Par 3, 14th hole and across Bird Road lies the Riviera Country Club which for twenty years was part of the Biltmore property. Photo by Joel Jackson.
world class players," Steinbauer said.

**The Jazz Era: 1926 - 1942**

Let's go back to the beginning. Developer George Merrick teamed with Biltmore hotel magnate John McEntee Bowman at the height of the Florida land boom in the 1920s to build "a great hotel." The property would serve the crowds of people thronging to the Miami area and would also serve as a center of sports and fashion.

The architects hired to design the hotel were Leonard Schultze and S. Fuller Weaver, who already had the Atlanta and Los Angeles Biltmores, New York's Grand Central Terminal, Miami Beach's Nautilus Hotel (later the first location of the Mt. Sinai Medical Center). They also did the famed Miami Daily News Tower (now known as the Freedom Tower) downtown on Biscayne Boulevard across from the American Airlines Arena, home of the Miami Heat.

In November 1925, the Ross-designed course opened and, a few months later on January 15, 1926, the hotel opened its doors to its first guests, including socialites from the Northeast who traveled down on trains marked "Miami Biltmore Specials."

Visitors during this era included frequent prominent guests, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Ginger Rodgers, Judy Garland and Bing Crosby. Everyone who was anyone stayed at the Biltmore from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to gangster Al Capone. During the late 1920s and early 1930s during the Wall Street plunge, the hotel still thrived by hosting aquatic galas drawing huge crowds on Sundays to watch synchronized swimmers, bathing beauties, alligator wrestlers and the four year-old boy wonder Jackie Ott, whose act included diving into the swimming pool from an 85-foot high platform. Johnny Weismuller, the tree-swinging Tarzan of my youth, was a Biltmore swimming instructor and even broke some records at the immense Biltmore pool.

**The War Years: 1942 - 1968**

In the period covering World War II to Vietnam, the War Department converted the hotel to a hospital called the Army Air Forces Regional Hospital. In the conversion, many of the windows were sealed with concrete and the travertine marble floors were covered with government-issued linoleum. It was also the early site of the University of Miami's School of Medicine. This was the Biltmore Hotel I knew during my Coast Guard days in Miami. It was also during this period, in 1945, that the property was cut in half. The 18 holes adjacent to the hotel...
remained under the city’s control, while
the other half was sold and became and
remains the Riviera Country Club.

A New Era Begins: 1983 – Present
In 1973 a coalition of the city officials
and residents of Coral Gables lobbied
for the city’s acquisition of the property
and was granted ownership under the
Historic Monuments Act and Legacy
of Parks program. Another ten years
elapsed before the city initiated a full
restoration of the Biltmore Hotel.
Four years and $55 million later, the
hotel reopened Dec. 31, 1987 as a four-
star hotel and resort. Three years later,
at the height of the economic crisis of
1990, it shut down yet again.
In 1992, the Seaway Hotels
Corporation, a Florida hotel
management firm, leading a multi-
national consortium, became the
Biltmore’s owner and operator. The
company’s portfolio also includes the
Alexander Hotel on Miami Beach and
the Sheraton Sand Key on Clearwater
Beach. Seaway embarked upon a $40
million, 10-year renovation plan that
concluded just recently. The City of
Coral Gables still owns the golf course.

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property, but Seaway operates it under a lease/owner arrangement. The city spent around $3 million to restore the historic championship golf course, which included a complete Brian Silva restoration in 2007, but more on that later.

All guest rooms were renovated and other improvements included a state-of-the-art fitness center and spa. The
Biltmore GC Maintenance Staff. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Location: Coral Gables

# of Holes: 18 holes Yardage: 6,772 yards
Par: 71 Slope & Rating: 72.1/121

Ownership: City of Coral Gables/ Biltmore Hotel Management

Playing Policy: Public/Resort/ Memberships available. Average rounds per year: 60,000

Designed by: Donald Ross. Opened: 1925

Management Team: Managing General Matthias Kammerer, Director of Golf Justin Bruton, Head Golf Professional Lara Payloff, Golf Course Superintendent Bryan Singleton

Special and Ongoing Projects: In 2007, golf course architect Brian Silva did a complete renovation of the greens, tees, bunkers and greens irrigation. He also redesigned the “short game” and teaching areas.

Total property acres under maintenance: 145

Greens: TifDwarf. Average size: 6,000 sq.ft., total 3.1 acres; HOC: .125 to .135 inches. Overseeding: none. Green speed goals: 9.5 to 10.5

Tees: Celebration. 3.3 height of cut: .350 in. Overseeding: Ryegrass @ 15 lbs. per 1,000 sq.ft.


Naturalized/Native areas/beds: 2 acres. Pine straw under Australian Pine Trees left of No. 10 fairway.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: Acres: 10. The Coral Gables Waterway runs through the course.

How maintained: City of Coral Gables and Lake Masters

Wildlife Inventory: Bald eagles, hawks and songbirds of all varieties plus coyotes, red-tail fox, and gopher tortoise inhabit the uplands. Alligators, otters, turtles, waterfowl, shore birds and wading birds find food and shelter in the lakes.


Water Restrictions: None currently in effect.

Water Management/Conservation practices: Water greens, tees and fairways as needed. Water roughs when they show signs of stress.

Staff: Total including superintendent: 16 with 15 full time and 1 part time. Schedule: 40 hours straight time. Seasonal variation in labor: Very little. May back off some of the part-time hours in the winter.

Key Staff: Assistant Danilo Perez; Second Assistant Ryan Hackert; Head Equipment Tech Richard Ramos; Assistant Equipment Tech David Figueroa; Pest Control Tech Osman Escalante; Irrigation Tech Chris Lopez.

Meetings/Communications: Weekly meetings with hotel general manager. Monthly crew meeting or as needed for special occasions.

Special Events: Host Junior Orange Bowl Golf Tournament. Hosted the Miami Open back in the early 1930’s.
huge 700,000 gallon, 23,000 square-foot swimming pool was emptied and completely resurfaced with polished marble. In fact I saw that renovation in progress during a family outing to the hotel back in August 2012 when we visited our daughter who was on assignment in Miami.

At the 1926 gala opening on the Miami Biltmore Country Club, Dr. Frank Crane, a popular local writer and columnist of the era, predicted, "Many people will come and go, but this structure will remain a thing of lasting beauty." That prediction came true in 1996, when the National Register of Historic Places designated the Biltmore a National Historic Landmark, an elite title offered to only 3 percent of all historic structures.

The golf course came into existence in 1925 and, 14 years later, the South Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association was organized in 1939 near the end of the Jazz Era. The history of this unique property and how the golf course fits into this landscape is one of golf's great stories. Next, we venture out on the course with the superintendent Bryan Singleton.

On the Course

We know the southern half of the property was sold and became the Riviera Country Club back in 1945. Essentially, Bird Road is the dividing line between the two courses. Most all of the holes on the Biltmore course run east-west, while the holes on the Riviera course run north-south to fit the original property lines. Like the Biltmore course, the Riviera course is also a classic "parkland" layout of the 1920's with no holes running between home sites. There is a cluster of homes on Bird Road that also separates the two properties.

I mention the Riviera CC, because ironically before coming to the Biltmore, Singleton was the superintendent of the Riviera CC from 1991 to 2006. He came on board just in time for the major 2007 Ross restoration by Brian Silva. Also ironically, Singleton also worked with Silva at Riviera in the late 1990s to do the renovation to that part of the old original layout. Bryan has been tied to this historical landmark in one way or another for the past 26 years.

In light of the historic landmark status of the property prior the renovation of the golf course, Silva had some interesting comments.

"If the Biltmore were a private club, the course surely would have been changed dramatically through the years," he said. "As it happened, the course was treated as any other underfunded muni would have been treated in tough times - it was left alone. This neglect was a blessing because the property was not planted with intrusive trees, and some of the most spectacular fairway bunkering was allowed simply to grass over." Silva added, "These fairway bunkers were a real find.

Vehicle: 2006 GMC Canyon Pickup Truck
I stay home to watch: The Washington Redskins
Last good movie I saw: One of my favorites is "Saving Private Ryan"
Favorite performers: Jerry Garcia, Tom Hanks
What I've been reading: I recommend a good book by Wally Lamb The Hour I First Believed.
Favorite meal: Crab cakes, baked potato and coleslaw
Prized possessions: Family
Personal heroes: My parents
I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Reliability
Nobody knows that I: Was a good chess player.
If I could do it over: I would have bought the house I was renting on Key Largo
I'd give anything to meet: Pope Francis
My fantasy is: Sail around the Caribbean
The one thing I can't stand: Miami traffic
If I could change one thing about myself: Play better golf
My most irrational act: Doing a bungee jump
Most humbling experience: Having great greens one day and the next day I'm scrambling
The words that best describe me: Loyal
My dream foursome would be: Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Mike Collins (the Apollo 11 crew)
My best fish story: Caught my first sailfish off Miami Beach with Craig and Jason Maret.
My most memorable golf shot: While playing Westview CC in Miami, I hit a driver into a pond. Took a drop and then holed out from 135 yards for a birdie.
These cross-bunkers are a classic Ross feature with the high berms behind them they become deep menacing hazards, and since this is south Florida and relatively flat, they provide dramatic relief on the landscape. This sort of design feature doesn't usually survive. Once again because the Biltmore was a public course, they did."

Singleton told me that when they did just a greens surface/soil mix rehab in 1990-91 they found the center stakes of the original Ross greens. So all the elements were there for an authentic restoration.

Another feature of the course is the Coral Gables Waterway, a meandering canal that separates six holes on the back nine from the rest of the course. "Back in those early days the hotel actually had Venetian gondolas with authentic Italian gondoliers poling guest from the hotel to Biscayne Bay," Singleton said. During my visit I did see a couple of kayakers plying the waterway and sharing it with a few Egyptian geese and other typical Florida birdlife. Also in 2007 all the bridges that spanned the waterway on the course were upgraded.

Singleton's turf management challenges include goose grass and some St. Augustine issues. He tested Specticle herbicide on the driving range before applying it to the rest of the course and, while it did a pretty good job on the course, he still has someone continuously spot-treating goose grass as a second job pretty much every day. He says in Miami there's no let-up.

The St. Augustine areas are mainly in the outer roughs, so it's not a real problem affecting playing conditions. His challenge is to make sure it doesn't spread, so he keeps a sharp eye on any encroachment.

The one pest that does keep him on his toes is the hunting billbug. In all my years, I've never heard of people saying they had a real billbug problem. Singleton said he thought only the grubs caused problems, but he swears he found chewed stem evidence from adults. The good news is that Acelyprin* does a good job on them. The bad news—most superintendents have a hard time identifying them. Singleton has become the go-to billbug guy in Miami, when others are having trouble identifying some mysterious damage on their greens.

The Go-To guys in Brian's career were first and foremost his hard-working parents who taught him a good work ethic growing up. Upon moving to Florida in 1987, Lee Van Valkenberg CGCS at the Card Sound GC on Key Largo became his career mentor and southern turfgrass tutor. Singleton also credits others like Tom Burrows CGCS, John Foy and one of his club managers, Bill Wagner, for helping him along his career path.

The Biltmore Golf Club has golf members, but it also caters to resort guests and public play. So for Singleton, his maintenance goals are simple: keep the course in private-
Cover Story

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club conditions and everybody should be happy. It is a rare combination of clientele, but then the Biltmore occupies a pretty rare place in the golf world.

Footnote
After doing my afternoon photo shoot that first day and wandering the hotel soaking up the historic architecture and furnishings, and viewing the endless photographs of all the visiting celebrities decorating the hallways and rooms, I enjoyed a quiet dinner and a few libations in the Biltmore Bar listening to the music of a piano and bass duo. I was reminded that this landmark was still a modern-day celebrity hangout when Goldie Hawn and Kurt Russell walked in and also sat down at the bar. I love my job!