FALL 2018

The FLORIDA Green

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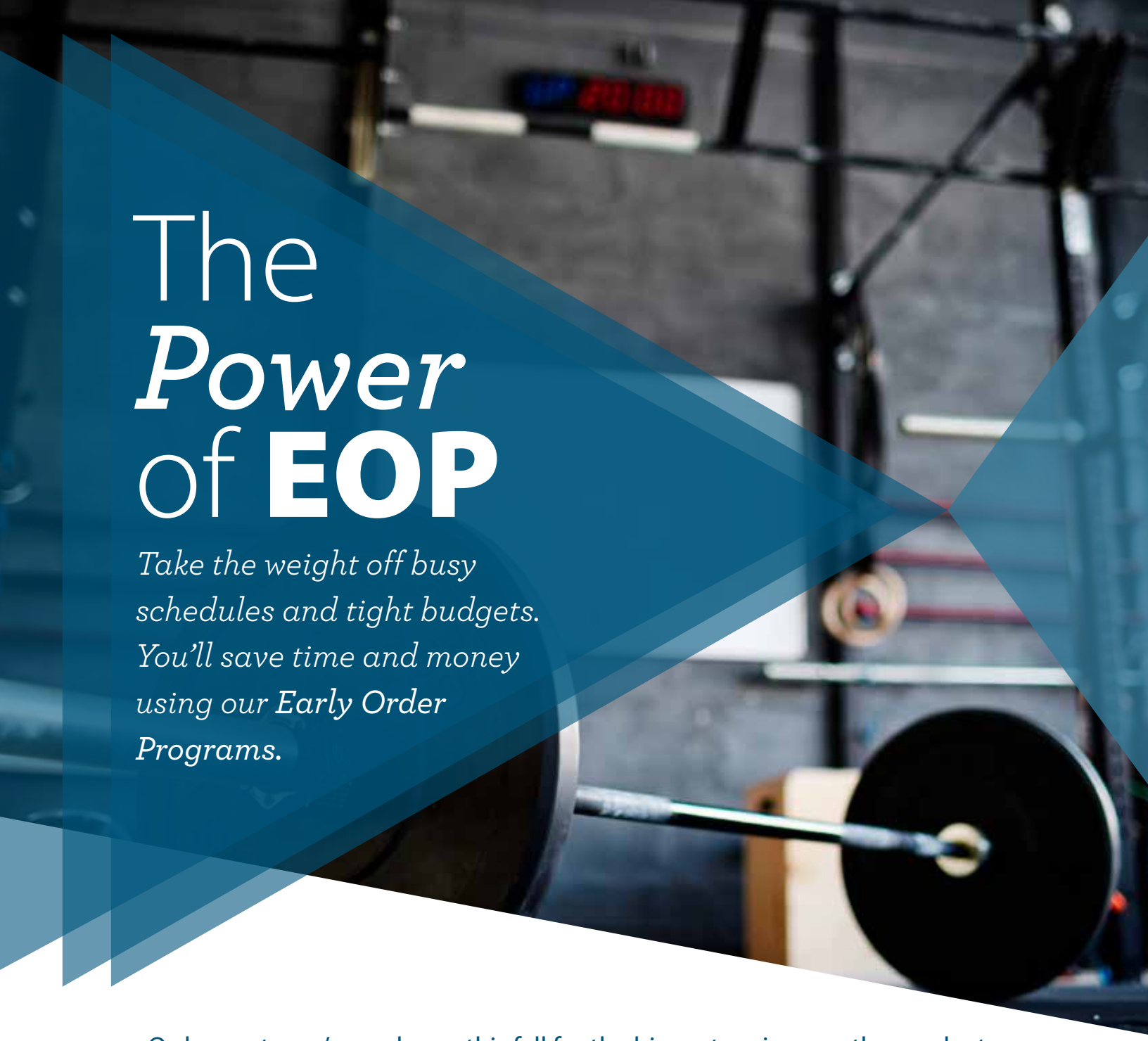
Florida Chapter GCSAA



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Steven M. Wright, CGCS

January 19, 1957 – November 5, 2018

The Florida GCSA mourns the sudden loss of Steve Wright, certified golf course superintendent at Pine Tree Golf Club in Boynton Beach, who died November 5. He was 61 years old. As current vice-president of the state association, he was on track to become president next fall. It says much about his dedication to the profession that his term as Florida GCSA president would have come nearly two decades after serving as president of the Carolinas GCSA.

News of his death came just hours before this magazine was to go to print, barely time enough to record the fact let alone to do any sort of justice to his contributions. That will come in the next issue. Instead, inside this magazine you will find Wright present, in photos and in news as he was most recently, and as he was so typically - involved, engaged and giving. Those traits, pillars of who he was, are why he will remain present to many for a long time still.

From the entire Florida GCSA community, prayers and thoughts are with his wife Sheree and their children Casey, Pierce and Bayley.

ON THE COVER: Eric Swenson at Floridian National Golf Club.

PUBLISHED FOUR TIMES A YEAR: January, April, July and October

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So, Here's a Question, What Matters Most?

by Trent Bouts

So, here's something different. Normally, you'd find your president's column in this space. But as you'll see elsewhere in this issue of The Florida Green your president, John Curran, has been in something of a different space himself recently. Curran, just 46, suffered a heart attack, a serious one, in September. Thankfully, he survived and is progressing well in his return to full health.

But here's the thing. His all-too-near-death experience forced him to ask some questions, of himself, about his job, and what matters most in life. Not just his life, but the lives of those he holds nearest and dearest, his family. It forced him to consider how they would be affected if he was gone.

Whether you're a superintendent, a salesman driving 75,000 miles a year, or someone working your way towards either of those scenarios, it's a question worth asking. Sadly, though, it's a question that rarely occurs to us until, like Curran, we no longer have any choice. I plead guilty.

Not that my circumstances were anywhere near as dire as Curran's. Not by a long shot. But when they know you have cancer yet don't know exactly where it is and where it isn't until they cut you open, let's just say, it gives you pause.

I admire John Curran's courage in sharing his story. Just as I admired the courage of another Florida GCSA president, David Dore-Smith, when he volunteered photos while undergoing treatment to fend off skin cancer, on his face. He looked like he'd used sandpaper for sunscreen. I admired another colleague of yours, who also shared his story in this magazine, of battling alcoholism that cost him a job.

Believe me, not one of these guys is better off for telling his story. It's touchy stuff and takes some back and forth to get the words to a "safe" place. And they sure as heck didn't get paid for their stories. For the record, the superintendent/alcoholic withheld his name, at the last minute, only to honor the tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous.

These were their stories, yes, but make no mistake, it was never about them. Their motivation, in each case, was simply, to help you. Help you pre-empt and hopefully avoid the scenario where the only question worth asking is, "What would it do to the people I love if I wasn't here?"

We spend an awful lot of energy being polite and proper and observing protocols. Being careful not to offend those we meet, work with, and, yes, work for. A lot of that is for good reason and, therefore, worth paying attention to. But what if, once a day, we asked ourselves the big question? Just once a day.

This year, among dozens of interviews, maybe even more than a hundred, I talked with a superintendent, in another part of the country, who was near the end of a major renovation of the course he'd worked for decades. You know the drill. This guy worked his backside off from sunrise to sundown, seven days a week, for months.

And things had gone pretty well. But shortly before reopening, he said this: "I feel more vulnerable right now than I have at any point in my career." I'm going to insert my words in a moment. But know that he was far too professional, far too cognizant of protocol, to say anything like I am about to.

Here was a guy who, outside the ups and downs you'd expect over 20-plus years of working with Mother Nature, had scarcely put a foot wrong. Sure, when there were 50-50 calls to be made, he'd gotten some wrong, but he'd gotten a lot right too. Still, here he was, sweating in his bed, night after night, because he knew egos were driving expectations he couldn't possibly deliver on deadline.

Yet, he made it work. That's what superintendents do. Sure, it wasn't perfect, but it was way better than it should have been if people mattered more than a pissing match. For too many superintendents, that would be too much to hope for.

But what we do have in our power is to simply ask ourselves the kind of questions John Curran was confronted with. We don't just owe it to ourselves. We owe it to those we love.

Florida Chapter GCSAA

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What You Need to Know

1. **Entry is free to all chapter members.** Any current member of a Florida chapter is eligible to participate.
2. **Official Rules**. Through to the end of May, 2019, take a picture with your catch while holding a recent issue of The Florida Green magazine, and email the picture along with your name, company name, chapter, and the weight and/or length of the fish to jgbailey25@yahoo.com. There is no limit to the number of entries an angler may send. The picture must have a copy of The Florida Green magazine visible to be validated.
3. **Prizes.** All entries will be evaluated by the selection committee at the end of the Challenge. Prizes will be awarded to the largest species of fish in the following categories: Freshwater species - Largemouth Bass and Peacock Bass. Saltwater species- Redfish, Snook, Mahi-Mahi, any legal Grouper species, and any Snapper species. Special consideration will apply for all other species. Prizes will also be awarded to the angler with the most different species entered and the best picture overall. Winners will be announced in the summer issue of The Florida Green.
4. **Legal.** All participants must adhere to all state and local fishing and/or boating laws. By sending in your picture, you give permission for the Florida GCSA to use the picture in any future publications by the Florida GCSA or your local chapter.

Facts and Science Make Our Story Powerful

Jennifer Bryan

Here we go again - fertilizer restrictions, pesticide bans, glyphosate bans, and water are all on the minds of Florida legislators, city mayors, county commissioners and city commissions. Whether you are dealing with the red tide or affected by the Okeechobee discharges and green algae, all these subjects are buzzwords being thrown around during a very emotional election period. It occurred to me while reviewing various anti-fertilizer groups' Facebook pages, that what they are good at is providing their members with talking points. It is time we have ours.

It is our job to calm these emotions and remind folks what we and the green industries are doing to keep our water and environment healthy. As ordinances, integrated pest management plans and voluntary bans keep popping up around the state, I want to make sure you know what our industry is doing and provide you with some talking points for your own toolbox.

The Florida GCSA is proud to administer the Golf Best Management Practices (BMP) Certification Program. The program is intended for golf course superintendents, assistant superintendents and other industry professionals to demonstrate their understanding of and adherence to Golf BMPs for operation and maintenance of Florida golf courses. The Florida GCSA believes that Florida superintendents are truly environmental stewards. By providing an ongoing certification program, we continue to demonstrate our industry's respect and pro-active efforts for good of the environment.

The Florida GCSA received the 2015 Excellence in Government Relations Award in recognition of the Golf BMP Certification Program. In addition, our program continues to be the model for other BMP programs across the country.

The Golf BMP Certification Program was developed by the Florida GCSA in cooperation with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, United States Golf Association Green Section, and the University of Florida. It was driven and informed by science, not sentiment.

Participants receive training using the "Best Management Practices for the Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida Golf Courses" handbook with emphasis on the following:
Environmental Concepts
Environmental Monitoring
Design and Construction
Irrigation
Nutrition and Fertilization
Cultural Practices
Lake and Aquatic Plant Management
Turfgrass Pest Management
Pesticide Management
Maintenance Operations

There is a similar emphasis on sound environmental management to be found in the Green Industry BMPs. Many superintendents are already of aware of this as they manage landscaped areas at their facility, not just the golf course itself. These science-based BMPs provide

educational program for Green Industry workers (lawn-care and landscape maintenance professionals) and are delivered by UF-IFAS Florida-Friendly Landscaping program.

They teach environmentally safe landscaping practices helping conserve and protect Florida's ground and surface waters. They can also save the Florida homeowner money, time, and effort; increase the beauty of the home landscape; and protect the health of family, pets and the environment.

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The GI-BMP training is designed to provide corporate, governmental, environmental, and other personnel BMPs for lawn and landscape. Florida Statute 482.1562 states that all commercial fertilizer applicators must have a license from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). To get this license, each green industry worker must be trained in the GI-BMPs and receive a certificate of completion from UF/IFAS and FDEP. Additionally, many non-commercial green industry applicators or other workers are required to pass the training by local ordinances or voluntarily participate in the program to better serve their clients.

Responsible fertilizer use is strongly proscribed by the Florida Urban Turf Rule, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's (FDEP) Model Fertilizer Ordinance, and broad evidence-based guidance contained in numerous formal BMPs operated under rule by the FDEP, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and other cognizant professional bodies.

Further, substantive peer-reviewed research provides inarguable evidence that the responsible application of nutrients to actively growing turfgrass and landscapes does not contribute to urban nutrient runoff in any material way.

Florida's green industry professionals should be treated as partners and not culprits – the benefits of their immense knowledge base as an asset in this mutual effort is routinely ignored and disparaged.

Education has repeatedly proven to be far more effective in reducing irresponsible behavior than regulatory approaches. Reference is made to the enormously successful water conservation education messaging undertaken by the state's water management districts.

Glyphosate is the world's most commonly used herbicide. Agriculture accounts for over 90 percent of its use. We use glyphosate because it is systemic, non-selective, non-volatile, effective and relatively inexpensive and has a low mammalian toxicity. Only one agency, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has made the claim that glyphosate is possibly carcinogenic. The EPA, Joint Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations and World Health Organization, European Food Safety Authority and regulatory bodies in Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand refute this claim.

Of over 1,000 "agents" that the IARC has tested, only one, was rated as "probably not carcinogenic." IARC ratings show that we are surrounded by carcinogens, including such "known carcinogens" as processed meats, alcohol, oral contraceptives, and estrogen treatments; such "probable carcinogens" as fried foods, indoor wood fires, mothballs, and working as a hair dresser or barber; and such "possible carcinogens" as gasoline exposure, cell phone use, coffee and pickled vegetables.

A substance's toxicity is measured by the median Lethal Dose (LD50) number. It is critical to note that the higher the number, the lower the toxicity. The LD50 is a number expressed in milligrams of the substance per kilogram of body weight of the test subject (typically rats and mice) to kill (LD = lethal dosage) 50 percent of that test population.

More understandable are the LD50s of substances in everyday life: caffeine has an LD50 of 127; aspirin = 200; salt = 3,100; vinegar = 3,300. Meanwhile glyphosate has an LD50 of 5,100 to 5,600, depending on the surfactant that was used. In other words, caffeine is about 40 times more toxic, and aspirin is about 25 times more toxic than glyphosate.

I urge all of you to stay connected to the local communities in which you live and work. Reach out to your commissioners, attend meetings, or send emails, but above all share your stories. You have a lot to be proud of. You are the environmental stewards and if we share our story, it will be heard. ■

- Jennifer Bryan, Executive Director

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IN MEMORIAM

Louis David deVos

Louis David deVos, 65 of Seminole died August 1. de Vos was a long-time golf course superintendent and a past-president of the Florida West Coast GCSA. deVos worked virtually every position during a long tenure at The Tides Golf Club, starting as a cart boy and eventually serving as general manager. Friend Steve Hritsko, of Unique Turf, used to tell deVos the only position he never held was that of club pro "because he was a lousy golfer." "But actually, he was a very good player in his day," Hritsko says. "I think his game dropped off when he no longer had the time to attend superintendent meetings because he was so busy with the GM role."

Bill Kistler, regional director of agronomy in Florida for ClubCorp, remembers deVos as a "great person to be around." "Louis always had a heartfelt interest in everybody he spoke with," he says. "He was a big man who always had a big smile on his face." Kistler adds that while deVos did not have children he was "deeply involved with his family" and gave back to his community through his involvement with service clubs. deVos also enjoyed travel and meditation.

Jimmy Ellison

Jimmy Ellison, a giant of the superintendent profession in Florida, over a career of close to 50 years, has died in Atlanta, GA aged 68. The lion's share of his career – more than 30 years - was spent at Bay Hill Club and Lodge and as vice-president of agronomy for Arnold Palmer Golf Management. Ellison also worked at Brentwood Golf Course in Jacksonville, The Swallows in Debary and, before he retired, at Orlando Country Club.

He was among one of the first graduating classes from the golf course management program at Lake City Community College in the early '70s. He remained loyal to Lake City over the years in several ways, including making sure to provide opportunities for graduates at the courses he managed.

One of his classmates, Danny Alwyn from Oceanside Golf and Country Club in Ormond Beach, remembers Ellison as "as a class act, no question." "Jimmy was real great guy in every respect," Alwyn says. "As good as you could find."

Ellison came to work at Bay Hill after working on the course during an internship. Arnold Palmer came to visit, and Ellison got to play golf with him. The two soon realized they had much in common. Both had fathers who were superintendents, and both worked on the golf course during summers and after school. They became fast friends.

Soon after Palmer bought Bay Hill, he hired Ellison as his superintendent. He told him there would soon be a PGA Tour event at the course and they embarked on a major renovation effort. That event became what is now the Arnold Palmer Invitational. During his time with Arnold Palmer Golf, a brother, William, says Ellison worked closely with the PGA Tour, LPGA Tour, European Tour, Asian Tour and the R&A. "He was also involved with work on the likes of Augusta National, Pebble Beach, Pinehurst, Royal Birkdale and the K Club. He was truly the kindest, sweetest, most honorable person. If you talk to people who worked with him and for him they'd tell you same thing."

David W. Pitkins

David W. Pitkins, died October 2 as the result of a tragic accident. He was 43 years old. Pitkins' career in golf course maintenance included stints at Gainesville Golf and Country Club, Ironwood Golf Club, Miami Beach Golf Club, Ocala Golf Club and, most recently, as head superintendent at Summer Glen Golf Club in Ocala. Colleague Andy Jorgensen from On Top of the World, says, "Dave was a tremendous friend to all, and a great superintendent willing to think outside of the box. His smile and personality will not be forgotten."

Born November 12, 1974, Pitkins was the son of David W. Pitkins, Sr. (Theresea R.) and Pamela Sparks who preceded him in death. He was also, preceded in death by both of his maternal and paternal grandparents. Along with his father and stepmother, he is survived by sister, Sarah, of Johnstown, PA and daughter, Cara, and her mother, Jessica Camp, both of Citra, and several aunts, uncles, cousins and friends. Pitkins was a graduate of Westmont High School, Lock Haven University and Penn State University.

The Seven Rivers GCSA is running a GoFundMe page to help support Cara's future education. To donate, please go to: www.gofundme.com/cara-pitkins-education-fund.

Neil Sheridan

Members and friends of the Florida GCSA and Palm Beach GCSA are rallying to support the family of Neil Sheridan who lost his battle with cancer in July. Sheridan was golf course superintendent at the Rees Jones Course at Breakers West Country Club in West Palm Beach. A fund has been established to assist his wife, Kate, with future college expenses for their children Lucy, 5, and Kellen, 2.

Sheridan's passing was announced in an email "with the greatest amount of sorrow" by his boss, Mark Reid, director of golf and grounds maintenance at The Breakers. "Neil's battle over the past two years has been nothing short of inspirational," Reid wrote. "Neil had been with The Breakers 11 years … and I am truly blessed that I was able to call him my co-worker and more-so my friend for that period of time. He will be missed by all that knew him."

Sheridan was diagnosed in the fall of 2016 with stage four cancer

after doctors found a pheochromocytoma, a rare tumor that develops off the adrenal gland. A celebration of his life at The Breakers West clubhouse, was attended by a wide group of family, friends and colleagues. "His attitude never wavered, and his smile never dulled," Reid says. "His love for his work and his family grew in every moment! A young man with an amazing future in our industry, but more so a life of being a father and a husband, was taken way too early."

The college fund is being administered by The First Tee of the Palm Beaches and all donations are 100 percent tax deductible. Checks, referencing the Sheridan Scholarship Fund in the check memo line, can be mailed to Sheridan Scholarship Fund, c/o The First Tee of The Palm Beaches, 7301 N. Haverhill Road, Riviera Beach, FL 33407. Credit card donations can be made by phoning (561) 842-0066.

John Clark Webb

John Clark Webb, 66, died August 3 at his home. He was a sales representative for Trigon Turf Sciences for 15 years, a member of the Central Florida GCSA and a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Wales. The Central Florida GCSA expresses heartfelt condolences to his family during this difficult time.

Webb was born March 13, 1952 in Tampa, to the late John Lamar and Doris Jean (Clark) Webb and was a lifelong resident in the area. Survivors include his wife of 38 years, Marcia Ann Webb; sons, Josh Webb (Andrea) of Tampa, Chase Webb of Greenville, SC, Cohl Webb of South Hampton, NY; and two grandchildren, Josef and Matthias.

Robert Cecil Wethy

Robert Cecil Wethy, long-time resident of Miami, died October 5 after an extended battle with cancer. He was 50 years old. Wethy served as golf course superintendent at Deering Bay Yacht and Country Club in Miami for more than 20 years. Born in Miami on August 6, 1968, Wethy was a graduate of Miami Palmetto Senior High School. He was an avid outdoorsman who loved golf, hunting and fishing.

Wethy was known for his sense of humor and zest for life, which he drew on during his illness. Family and friends say he had an impact on many with his positive attitude and quick wit. A published obituary said Wethy was "loved well, and his passing has left an indelible mark on many."

He is survived by his children, Carson Wethy and Ryan Wethy; parents, Nancy and Cecil Wethy; siblings, Melissa Woodall, Roy (Lillian) Wethy, and Laura Williams; nine nephews and one great nephew.

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SOUTH FLORIDA

South Florida GCSA's championship foursome: Billy Entwistle, Kenton Gamache, Joe Pantaleo, and Seth Strickland.

South Florida GCSA president Jason Bailey presents the President's Trophy to Kenton Gamache from Davie Golf Club.

South Florida GCSA president Jason Bailey presents the Vice-President's Trophy to Chocky Warriner of Golden Golf Services.

The South Florida GCSA annual meeting was a well-attended event at Parkland Golf and Country Club in July. It featured education on tropical signalgrass research presented by Dr. Neil Young. Our host superintendent, Jason Bailey, was also elected as the new president of the association with Mike Bruno, director of agronomy at Weston Hills Country Club, becoming vice-president.

Laurie Bland, director of golf course maintenance at Miami Springs Golf and Country Club is the new secretary-treasurer, and Billy Entwistle, director of golf at Flamingo Lakes Country Club will serve as external vice-president.

At the event we held our annual President's and Vice-President's Cup tournament. The winner of the President's Cup, which is open to superintendent members of the association, was Kenton Gamache of Davie Golf Club. The winner of the Vice-President's Cup, which is open to vendor members of the association, was Chocky Warriner of Golden Golf Services. We want to thank everyone who attended and participated in the golf event.

We want to congratulate our winning team members who took out the 23rd annual Florida GCSA Golf Team Championship at Streamsong Resort in August. South Florida GCSA has brought the trophy back home after a 10-year drought. Our winning team with a combined score of 304 featured Billy Entwistle, Kenton Gamache and Joe Pantaleo of Indian Creek Country Club and Seth Strickland of Miami Shores Country Club. Great job guys.

September saw our joint chapter meeting with the Palm Beach GCSA at Lago Mar Country Club in Plantation. This great event between chapters, with education by Dr. Billy Crow on nematicide research, was capped by a friendly match play event between the two chapters for the prestigious Blackledge Trophy.

Last year saw the Palm Beach GCSA take home the trophy. But this year South Florida came away with almost a clean-sweep, giving up only a half point across all matches played. We want to thank the Palm Beach chapter for coming out in support of this event.

In October, we were looking forward to our 34th annual Golf Tournament to Support the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, at Jacaranda Golf Club in Plantation. In the last 33 years we have raised approximately $670,000 for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. This would not be possible without the support of everyone involved with this great event.

- Jason Bailey, Parkland Golf and Country Club.

CENTRAL FLORIDA

We once again enjoyed a successful event at Bay Hill Club and Lodge in August in support of Arnie's Army. This year we raised enough money to be able to donate a check in the amount of $7,500 to the Arnie's Army Charitable Foundation. This is a wonderful effort on behalf of the members of the Central Florida GCSA and is much appreciated by the folks at the foundation.

We received a nice letter of thanks from Amy Palmer Saunders, Arnold Palmer's daughter and president of the foundation. She wrote:

I would like to thank you for your generous gift to the Arnie's Army Charitable Foundation. Our foundation will honor my father's legacy and the impact he had on so many people during his lifetime. Your gift will perpetuate his spirit of giving back because of how you touched his life and inspired his mission

While my father was an ambassador of sportsmanship and the game of golf that he loved, he and my mother will be remembered for their commitment to serving and caring for the most precious among us – children and youth.

With friends and followers like you, we hope to sustain this legacy of Arnold Palmer's philanthropy and cotonue to invest in the health, well-being and development of children and youth.

Again, my sincere appreciation for your support to carry on his legacy for years to come.

Sincerely,
Amy Palmer Saunders.

Other winners on the day included T.J. Swafford and Matt Horak who were victorious in the two-man scramble with

a score of 44. Runners-up two shots back were Jeff Fisher and Jeff Hiday. The best ball event was won by Tom Alex and Sean Klotzbach. Their 62 was three shots better than runners-up Gene Stys and Doug Andrade.

At press time we were looking forward to our third annual Member-Vendor event Mayfair Country Club with host Chris Zinna. Beard Equipment will sponsor this year's Larry Kamphaus Crowfoot Open at Grand Cypress Golf Club on December 14.

-Lisa McDowell, Grand Cypress Resort.

NORTH FLORIDA

Chris McCranie, Al Clements, Alan Brown and Nate Maurer on Team Turf Nutz finished second in the North Florida GCSA Inshore Fishing Tournament.

Biggest redfish winner Nate Maurer with his other "great catch," wife Mary.

We had a wonderful day in June for the third annual North Florida GCSA Inshore Fishing Tournament, with 15 boats and 38 fishermen and women. The rains held off and the Conch House was the perfect place to end a great day of fishing. There were lots of laughs, good food and some big fish and, of course, plenty of one-that-got-away stories. A wonderful day for everyone.

Thanks to Chris McCranie, Anthony Baur and Al Clements for putting this together for everyone. Results:

1st Team MacCurrach - Brian Almony, Jeff Tourangeau, Hamish Maclean; 2nd Team Turf Nutz -

Chris McCranie, Al Clements, Alan Brown, Nate Maurer.

1st Individual Points - Al Clements. Biggest redfish - Nate Maurer. Worst dressed – Scott Franklin.

At press time were getting ready for the annual Fall Classic at The Omni at Amelia Island. This event is looking bigger and better each year and the 2018 event was going to be no exception.

- Betty Hooten, association manager.

SEVEN RIVERS

The Seven Rivers GCSA staged a successful roundtable discussion at Infinite Ale Works in Ocala back in August. This well-attended event was a refreshing alternative to the normal schedule and got us out of the heat and rain for a nice afternoon amongst our peers and colleagues. We will look to keep this sort of format for next year's August meeting as well.

The September event at Rainbow's End Golf Club was excellent. More than 50 people came out to support host golf course superintendent Joel Fort and staff while enjoying a nice home-cooked meal from Miss Linda. Afternoon golf was fun and exciting despite the sweltering heat and the lack of anything resembling a breeze. It was also nice to see Joel's new maintenance shop as a sign of economic growth for this hidden gem in north central Florida.

It is with great sadness and sorrow to report the passing of Seven Rivers GCSA member David Pitkins. Dave was in the golf industry for over 20 years holding positions at Gainesville Golf and Country Club, Ironwood Golf Club, Miami Beach Golf Club, Ocala Golf Club and most recently as golf course superintendent at Summer Glen Golf Club in Ocala. Dave held a Bachelor's and Master's degree from Penn State University. He was a great superintendent that would think outside of the box to get the job done. He was a great friend to all and will surely be missed.

At press time we were getting ready for our annual Toys for Tots Tournament at Juliette Falls Golf Club in Dunnellon on November 8. This is always a great event raising money for a great cause. Thanks in advance for your support.

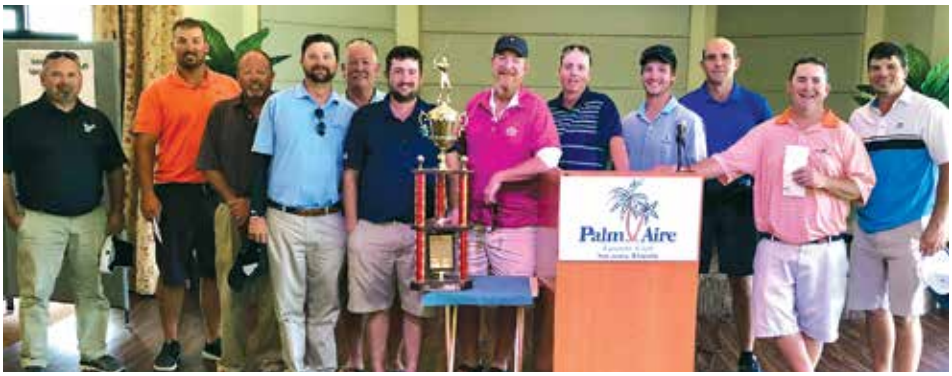
- Andy Jorgensen, CGCS On Top of the World.

SUNCOAST

Textron Golf's Luke Little presents a check for $5,600 to Suncoast GCA president Dan Haubein.

Wesco Turf's Tina Neuzil and "friend" at the Tampa Bay Ray's game.

In June, we had the second annual Summer Slam at historic Palm Aire Country Club. The format was vendors versus superintendents, two-ball match play. In the inaugural year at Esplanade, the supers ran away and hid. This year was a different story altogether. The classic Dick Wilson design, in terrific condition, proved to be the great equalizer. The contest ended in a draw which meant the



Some of the victorious superintendents at the Suncoast Summer Slam.

cup stayed in the rightful possession of the supers for another year.

In July, we took the Suncoast chapter on the road to the friendly confines of Tropicana Field for a Tampa Bay Rays v. Detroit Tigers game. The Rays won, and we got to see our great friend Tina Neuzil from Wesco Turf out and about. Awesome to have you back in action Tina.

Then in August, this happened –

and now The Florida Green magazine will never be the same.

In September, our Pro-Superintendent-Vendor tournament fell victim to the constant rain, but we were able to reschedule. We played the East Course at Laurel Oaks Country Club. The course was fantastic, and the greens were like glass. The winners of the Pro-Super division were Tim Beckwith and past-president Nick Kearns from the prestigious Oaks Club.

The blind draw vendor division was won by Ron Padilla of ProPlus and Tim Webb of Tacit. Textron Golf's Luke Little was on hand to present current chapter president, Dan Haubein, with a check for $5,600 from the "Growing Greens" program associated with funding to local chapters for purchases of Cushman Utility vehicles.

-John Reilly, Longboat Key Cub and Resort.

CALUSA

Aaron Ohloff from the Everglades GCSA bids farewell to the Spainhour Trophy for another year with Jake Wentz happy to hold it for the Calusa GCSA.

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist Kathleen Smith talks mammals on the golf course at Old Hickory Golf Club.

With summer in the rear-view mirror and season fast approaching, the Calusa GCSA has had a great summer and was very fortunate to have some excellent meetings at some outstanding venues. We want to thank everyone out there for their continued support. We are excited to announce the fifth annual Golf for the Children Christmas Classic at The Verandah Club on December 7. Please be sure to make every effort to support this event that brings a lot of joy to some youngsters who need it most.

We also would like to welcome two new Calusa GCSA board members - Frank Lyda from Plantation Golf and Country Club and Eric Oster from Coral Oaks Golf Course. Frank hails from Northeast Ohio and moved to Florida 14 years ago. He worked at the Sanctuary on Sanibel before earning the superintendent position at The Plantation in 2016.

Eric is from Bedford, PA and graduated from Penn State in 1999 with a Bachelor's degree in Turfgrass Science. Formerly the assistant superintendent at Kensington Country Club, Eric is the superintendent at Coral Oaks, appointed in 2015. Please welcome Frank and Eric to the board next time you see them.

In June, we held our annual meeting at Pelican Preserve where we feasted on steak and lobster and discussed the Calusa GCSA's efforts for the upcoming year. We can't thank Jim Torba and the staff at Pelican Preserve enough for their hospitality and a great day.

In July, we went to The Club at Renaissance for our ever popular "Yellow Ball Tournament" which is always a good time. We would like to thank Nick Cristaldi for welcoming us out for the day and having the golf course in fantastic shape.

In August, we had our annual joint meeting with the Everglades chapter where the Calusa chapter was victorious and retained the Spainhour Cup for another year. Additionally, we owe a huge thank you to David Dore-Smith and the entire staff at Copperleaf Golf Club for hosting the event while providing a fantastic day.

In September, we had our annual Pro-

Superintendent-Supplier-Plus one event at The Sanctuary Golf Club on Sanibel Island. As always, the golf course was in top shape and the food was fantastic. A huge thank you to Kyle Sweet, CGCS and the rest of the staff at The Sanctuary for hosting another great event for our chapter.

In October, we had Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist Kathleen Smith come talk to us about mammals we see on the golf course. It was a very fun and informative speech that everyone got something out of. The event was at Old Hickory Golf and Country Club and we thank Phil Garside and the entire staff at Old Hickory for fun day.

-Jake Wentz, Verandah Club.

PALM BEACH

Chapter championship winners were gross superintendent champion Steve Wright, CGCS; gross affiliate, Mark Henderson; net superintendent, Parker Ferren; net affiliate, Kevin Downing, CGCS.

Rob Uzar, Deron Zendt, Steve Wright, CGCS, Parker Ferren, Dave Tandy and Brett Sanderson helped the Palm Beach GCSA defeat the Treasure Coast GCSA in the annual Ryder Cup-style match play event to retain the Cavanagh-Wagner Cup.

The Palm Beach GCSA annual meeting and election was on July 19 at The Falls Club in Lake Worth. Our 2018-2019 board of directions consists of Parker Ferren, president; Robert Anderson, vice-president; Ryan Swilley, treasurer;

The 2018-2019 Palm Beach GCSA board of directors, from left, Brian Birney, Robert Anderson, Declan Freswick, Nate Watkin, Parker Ferren, Brett Sanderson, George Kervern, John Spiwak, Deron Zendt and Ryan Swilley.

Nate Watkin, secretary; John Spiwak, past-president; Deron Zendt, external vice-president; with George Kervern, Brian Birney, Brett Sanderson and Declan Freswick as directors.

Steve Wright, CGCS was our superintendent chapter champion with a score of 73. Parker Ferren won the superintendent net flight with a score of 68. While in the affiliate division, Mark Henderson won the gross division shooting a 78 and Kevin Downing, CGCS was the net winner with a 71.

In early September, the Palm Beach and Treasure Coast chapters teamed up for a joint meeting at Hobe Sound Golf Club. Education was provided by Dr. Lee Butler, plant pathologist at North Carolina State University. The Palm Beach chapter was victorious over the Treasure Coast in the Ryder Cup-style individual match play competition for the Cavanaugh-Wagner Trophy.

Shortly after the Treasure Coast joint meeting, the Palm Beach GCSA headed south for our annual joint meeting with the South Florida GCSA. Dr. Billy Crow, nematologist at the University of Florida covered the education portion of the event. The Palm Beach GCSA was defeated by South Florida GCSA in the annual golf match, handing over the famous Blackledge Trophy for our friends to the south to keep for the next year.

Hopefully, everyone is happy with their summer cultural practices and ready for our busy season. As our calendar fills up for the next few months, we will be sure to post our upcoming events on the Florida GCSA website and our social media outlets. As always, we would like to thank our superintendent and affiliate members for their ongoing support of the Palm Beach GCSA.

-Parker Ferren, The St. Andrews Club.

Congratulations to the 2019 Palm Beach GCSA scholarship winners and their proud parents.

Perception Can Serve as Reality
SOMETIMES, REGARDLESS OF FACTS

by Andy Jorgensen, CGCS

We've all seen it. I've even done it. The obligatory Twitter post showing your recent fertilizer application. These posts are hashtag heavens; #26tons #green #bailinghay #rainontheway. But what isn't seen with these posts is the context behind them. What is the product? Release curve? How many acres is it covering? What is the rate? When was the last application?

Andy Jorgensen, CGCS

Here's another one – the mower/sprayer/cart sitting in a pond. A nice petroleum sheen on top of the water surrounding it. Sure, you may think it's funny. Accidents happen. They happen in any industry and in any walk of life. But what kind of perception are we showing by posting this? That the golf industry is okay with damaging the environment? Is this perception the reality?

The old adage of "never post anything on the internet that you don't want found later" couldn't be truer than it is today. Social media can be a great tool to share ideas and gain knowledge in this industry. In fact, I have learned several new tips and techniques from my peers using this technology. I also enjoy seeing the posts of your staff's hard work and talent.

However, opponents and activists can use the kind of posts mentioned above against us and the industry. They can do, very easily, add fuel to the fire. A simple retweet of your post can include the hashtags #polluter, #RedTide and #culprit and can be seen by millions of people.

As the golf industry comes under increased scrutiny for our practices, why would we want to provide ammunition to those who would take these postings and skew them to score points?

Although you and your colleagues may understand the meaning behind your post, the general public does not. For all they know, you do this on a weekly basis and are the culprit behind the environmental issues so many of us work tirelessly to fight every day.

With unnecessary regulation being pushed for against this industry, these posts continue to hurt us. We promote the adoption of Best Management Practices yet continue to see photos of the opposite, or that at least could be perceived as such. Without context, how could anyone know. And as another saying goes, "Nature abhors a vacuum." In the absence of all the information, someone will guess at the back story, or worse, make up something that serves their goal.

We need your help to combat this and help spread the message of the positive benefits that golf courses provide for the environment. Golf courses provide habitat for many species of wildlife, often as the only green corridor in the midst of urban development. Turfgrass in general acts as a filter for pollutants as well as the prevention of dust and water erosion. And we provide jobs and wages for families in our communities.

As a superintendent, get certified with the Florida BMPs for golf courses, and promote these practices amongst your staff. Talk about the positive benefits of your golf course on social media. Show the wildlife that calls your course home. But most importantly, consider how your post can be perceived before putting it on the internet. ■

- Andy Jorgenson is certified golf course superintendent at On Top of the World in Ocala. He is also a Florida GCSA director and Florida Turfgrass Association president.

When Funny...

...Becomes Not-so Funny

A picture may be worth 1,000 words but it doesn't always tell the full story when it comes to Twitter and who's doing the Tweeting. For the record, these "Tweets" are mock ups just to illustrate a point.

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National Leadership Takes Floor
AS STATE EVENT CONTINUES GROWTH

Immediate past-president Ricky Reeves is this year's recipient of the Florida GCSA's Distinguished Service Award. Reeves, from Miami Beach Golf Club in Miami, received his award from association president John Curran during the Florida GCSA's annual reception and golf championship at Streamsong Resort near Bowling Green in August.

Efforts to grow the annual gathering and golf event continue to make ground with a record turnout this year. More than 150 members took part over the two-day event that kicked off with the reception and a "state of the association" presentation from GCSAA president Darren Davis, CGCS and chief executive officer Rhett Evans.

"I think our members were very appreciative of GCSAA's leadership being present and open to questions," Florida GCSA executive director, Jennifer Bryan, says. "Historically, there have been times when, rightly or wrongly, the national association was criticized for being too remote from its members. Outreach like this can only serve everyone's best interests and we thank Rhett and Darren for their time."

Davis, of course, is himself a past-president of the Florida GCSA and long-serving superintendent at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples. On the subject of the state association presidency, there has been a change in the line of succession following Mike Stevens' resignation from the board. Stevens, who is regional director of agronomy for Billy Casper Golf, stepped down recently because of increased work demands.

As a result, Steve Wright, CGCS from Pinetree Golf Club in Boynton Beach, takes over the vice-president's role. Nick Kearns, from The Oaks Club, is now secretary-treasurer. The board's annual meeting at Streamsong in Bowling Green also welcomed new directors, from the South Florida GCSA, Billy Entwistle, Flamingo Lakes Golf and Country Club in Pembroke Pines, and, from the Suncoast GCSA, Dan Haubein, Pelican Pointe Golf and Country Club in Venice.

"The good news is that he is open to returning to board service in future," Bryan says. "The association is grateful for Mike's contributions to the board. Board service requires considerable time and effort and Mike's input was always valuable."

In the golf championship on the Black Course, Gary Newcomb got off to such a rough start that was thinking he should have stayed at work that day. At four over par after just three holes, the superintendent from Big Cypress Golf Club in Lakeland thought his shot at the Florida GCSA championship was pretty much that – shot. But then he "stopped trying to steer it and just let the club swing."

Ricky Reeves with the Distinguished Service Award presented by president John Curran.

This year's Florida GCSA golf champion, Gary Newcomb, with his trophy.

Part of the crowd at the annual reception hearing from GCSAA president Darren Davis, CGCS.

GCSAA president Darren Davis, CGCS makes a point during the reception at Streamsong while GCSA chief executive officer Rhett Evans watches on.

By round's end he was not only three under par (on the par 73 course), he was the new state champion.

"Having a really good caddy also helped," Newcomb says. "I'd never played the course before so that was a big factor."

Newcomb went seven under over the last 15 holes of his round, which he wrapped up with an eagle on his closing hole, the par five 12th. His win finally broke Florida GCSA board member Deron Zendt's string of five consecutive championships. Zendt, who shot a round of 76 at Streamsong, in fact, won eight titles over 10 years stretching back to 2008.

More than 150 players competed in the golf championship, team championship and two-man scramble in August. Using two courses greatly improved the playing time on the previous year and golf committee chair and Florida GCSA vice-president Steve Wright, CGCS says he was "super happy" with the outcome. "The golf courses were in phenomenal shape," he adds, with a nod to director of agronomy Rusty Mercer and his team.

Newcomb's eagle, from eight feet after a five-iron approach from 210 yards out, avoided a playoff with runner-up Mike Kelly, from Gulf Harbour Yacht and Country Club, who finished two under par. Kenton Gamache, from Davie Golf Course, was one shot further back in third.

Gamache did taste victory though in the team championship representing the South Florida GCSA along with Billy Entwistle, from Flamingo Lakes Golf Club; Joe Pantaleo, from Indian Creek Country Club; and Seth Strickland, from Miami Shores Country Club.

Scott Austin, from Longboat Key Club, and Todd Steward, from Heritage Oaks Golf and Country Club, won the two-man scramble.

Jay Mullen, Plantation Golf and Country Club; Jeff Huelsman, Syngenta; Lee Crosby and Jason Frank, Harrell's; Deron Zendt; Mark Brazinski and Kevin Wasilewski, Syngenta.

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The Florida GCSA's executive committee of Ricky Reeves, immediate past-president; John Curran, president; Steve Wright, CGCS, vice-president; and Nick Kearns, secretary-treasurer.

Three of the four team championship winners from South Florida GCSA – Kenton Gamache, Davie Golf Course; Billy Entwistle, Flamingo Lakes Golf Club; and Joe Pantaleo, Indian Creek Country Club. Absent, Seth Strickland, Miami Shores Country Club.

Jack Harrell, III, Harrell's ; Rusty Mercer, Streamsong Resort; Lee Crosby, Harrell's; and Nick Kearns, The Oaks Club.

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HOWARD

"I Kind of Woke Up … Like WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON"

It's the evening of September 20. John Curran and his wife are getting ready for bed, and something doesn't feel right. There's pain in his chest that starts snaking into his left arm. "That raised a little red flag," he recalls.

Of course, he thinks heart attack but doesn't believe it. There was that scare back in July, the chest pains, but he'd seen doctors, undergone an EKG. The cardiologist told him, "Everything's fine," that he should "walk more." They did put him on cholesterol medicine, however. Maybe this is just a reaction to that, he wonders.

But the pain worsens, and his arm becomes numb. He calls his doctor, floating the cholesterol medication theory. "Oh, no," the doctor says. "You're having a heart attack. You need to go to the ER now."

Curran tells his wife, Lindsey, she better get him to the hospital. But even as they climb into the car for the 15-minute drive, he questions himself. Will this too turn out to be nothing, just an expensive visit to the ER. One that costs him a few hours of sleep and "a couple hundred bucks." Maybe that was a factor in not calling 911.

Before long though, Curran is yelling to his wife, "Drive faster, drive faster!" "I don't think she really comprehended what was going on," he says.

At the hospital, doctors and nurses hook him up to another EKG. This time, as screens light up with their first feedback, someone yells, "STEMI!"

Amid the sudden flurry of urgency and activity, Lindsey has the presence of mind to Google what she's heard. She learns a STEMI, or ST-Elevation Myocardial Infarction occurs when one of the heart's major arteries is blocked, depriving it of oxygen and nutrient rich blood. As heart attacks go, it's the bad one.

That's why the pain is unlike anything Curran imagined possible. He wants more morphine, but he's already maxed out. Doctors promise him a mild sedative once they wheel him into the operating room. But he'll be awake while they insert a catheter through an incision in his groin, positioning a stent to prop open the artery.

This explains Curran's surprise when, next thing he knows, a nurse is slapping him on the face. "I kind of woke up and was like, 'What the hell's going on?'" he says. The nurse responds, "Oh, good. You're back."

The next day, in ICU, the cardiologist – not the one he'd seen in July - tells Curran his heart stopped. "I was dead on the table." It took three jolts from a defibrillator, and a face-slapping, to get him going again. "I didn't realize until I got home – I guess you'd call them scars – but you can see where they had the paddles on my chest," he says.

John Curran, father and family man, earlier this year with daughter, Kayla, 26, son, Rhett, 7, and wife, Lindsey.

There was another memento. Out of all the pain amid the exigent bustle and the bright lights, Curran recalls, "This sense of peace and tranquility … it must have been, you know, when I died for a few seconds or whatever."

That was all on a Thursday night. Curran was discharged at 2.30pm on the Saturday. In between, and in the weeks since, he spent a lot of time on the kind of reflection and introspection psychologists expect when mortality stares us down. It dragged through most of October.

"I'm not going to say I was severely depressed," Curran says. "But I didn't have that sense that life feels good, you know what I mean?"

As much as this story is about John Curran, golf course superintendent at Johns Island Club in Vero Beach and current president of the Florida GCSA, the telling of it is entirely for other superintendents, his colleagues. Because Curran knows an awful lot of them share traits that define him and how he goes about his work. Some of which might have contributed to his heart attack.

> "It's not just about you. It's your family too."

"I don't want people showing me pity," he says. "I'm not interested in that. But as men, a lot of us are guilty, like me, and say, 'Oh, it'll be fine. Nothing's really wrong. Thank God I acted this time. If I'd popped a few Advil and laid down and gone to sleep, I never would have woken up."

And, like a lot of superintendents, Curran works long hours and even when he's done, he often drives away from the golf course with the job riding shotgun. "I didn't get to where I am by not giving a shit about my work," he says. "I am one those people who puts a lot of stress and worry on myself. It makes me who I am as a superintendent, but also as far as carrying the job home with me."

Doctors tell him that has to change, at least to some degree.

"Stress, I'm sure played into it," he says. "The doctor told me, basically, 'You either have to learn to walk away when things get bad, so you don't stress yourself and get your blood pressure up … or you're going to have to find a new career.'"

Put yourself in those shoes for a moment. Maybe they're more your size than you realize.

Curran is only 46. Yes, he did smoke but gave up cigarettes well over a decade ago. Yes, his diet wasn't always the best, but he gave up the hamburgers and fries around the time he turned 40. He started going to the gym too.

"I'd fallen off on working out a little bit but I'm not out of shape. I'm not overweight and I don't eat that bad," he says. "So, this was all kind of a freaky thing for me. But the doc' says it's not the last five or six years, so much as it's the 40 before that. He calls it the 'fast food lifestyle.' It just catches up with you." The odd cigar Curran enjoyed since quitting cigarettes didn't help, even though he didn't inhale, "Apparently it still constricts your arteries."

Then there's the job. Superintendents tend to take it personally. Some joke that they have 19 kids, counting the practice green. It's what makes some of them as good as they are. But the "kids," and everything that connects them, are outside all the time and golf course maintenance is not an assembly line. It is not a controlled environment, at least not by anything other than Mother Nature. Things go wrong, often in complex, mystifying ways.

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John Curran, the golf course superintendent, with spray tech Tom Caldwell at John's Island Club's West Course.

And when they do, a superintendent often feels sick too, like when there's a pit in your stomach. But at every facility, large or small, someone is paying the superintendent with the end goal of great conditions, relative as that might be. At high-end clubs, as Curran points out, where memberships pay handsomely, funding big budgets, the tolerance for anything less can be minimal.

"When you've got millions of dollars to make things right, and they're not, it's hard to walk away, you know. It's hard to just shrug things off and say, 'I'll come back to it tomorrow,'" he says. "I'd like to keep doing what I'm doing. But I'm either going to have to learn to adapt or I'm going to have to walk away. Which sucks. Part of my issue for those first few weeks was, 'My God, how am I going to do this?'"

How? The good news is Curran's club, and his boss, director of golf course maintenance, Greg Pheneger, are doing all they can to make it possible. "The club and Greg have been very supportive the whole time, 100 percent," he says. "The fact I've been here 21 years probably helps them have a little faith in me."

Still, it will take some time to learn what Curran is capable of physically and where he comes down mentally, then to calibrate the two. A significant point came when he was able to shake the funk of those first few weeks.

"They had me doing cardiac rehab that I liken to old people aerobics," he says. "They have you working on aerobic equipment at a pace that you think, 'At my age, this is ridiculous.' But it's basically to teach you how far you can take yourself and how high you can get your heart rate. In that sense it's helped me a lot really."

Until then, without parameters, Curran admits to some of the anxiety doctors predicted. "You're afraid to do anything," he says. "I was afraid to come out and work in my yard. Now I feel like I have a little bit of control, knowing how far I can go and what I can do. Until then, everything was kind of, 'Well, I can't do what I used to do. I can't get myself worked up physically.'"

As Curran learns his way into life post-STEMI, he's getting used to the idea of daily medication. "You name it, I'm on it now, for who knows how long," he says. "It's been interesting, I'll say that, a definite eye opener. Makes you really evaluate and look at life."

Most superintendents would be subject to at least one of the factors in such a re-evaluation. "It's not just about you. It's your family too," Curran says. "That's what really hit me the hardest after the fact, thinking about all I would have missed. In this business, we tend to put the job first. That's not always right, probably never right, but it is what it is.

"I've got a 26-year-old daughter who's obviously grown. But I've also got a seven-year-old kid. Is my job more important than him and his future? When you ask yourself that, I'd think for anybody, the answer is no. People should be aware. Life's precious. When something feels wrong, by all means, do something about it. I was fortunate." ■

- Trent Bouts

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QUIET, SMART, DEDICATED THE PERFECT PERSONALITY

By Trent Bouts

By the time he arrived at the University of South Florida, Eric Swenson, left, already had a two-year degree under his belt. But his pre-med path soon encountered a detour, the university's William F. Mitchell-designed golf course, known as The Claw. Instead of textbooks, Swenson was busy most afternoons reading greens.

The anticipated second degree never arrived – at least not in medicine - but there's no doubting Swenson made it, all the same. Today, he is golf course superintendent at Floridian National Golf Club in Palm City. Owned by Jim Crane, who also owns the Houston Astros, the club counts former Presidents, Barack Obama and George W. Bush, among its members.

Some of the game's brightest stars such as major champions Brooks Koepka, Dustin Johnson, and Jimmy Walker are regulars, along with Tiger Woods, who, of course, has won more majors than anyone. Anyone other than Jack Nicklaus, who participated there in a fundraiser a couple of years ago with Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino and Gary Player.

Player designed the course originally for Wayne Huizenga, the late Miami Dolphins owner. Huizenga sold it to Crane in 2010 and he brought in Tom Fazio for a complete renovation a year later. Swenson has been around for everything since joining the club as assistant superintendent in September 2005 and becoming superintendent in March, 2008.

There is a wealth of exceptional golf clubs in Florida and amongst them, Floridian National is itself an exception. As the club's website explains, in addition to the golf course and new Butch Harmon-designed short course, there is a "68-slip marina; members have access to on-site guest cottages, the club's 61-foot Viking yacht, 24-foot Hurricane deck boat, and private helicopter service with two on-site helipads."

To make it in such a world, and at such a young age - Swenson was barely in his 30s when he became superintendent – without any formal turfgrass education, underscores the impression he left on first boss, Jim Torba. "I thought he had the perfect personality," Torba says. "He was quiet, smart, dedicated. Did a great job. So, I'm not surprised at all by where he is today."

There was a time, though, when Swenson himself must have been. He'd played golf all his life and loved it just as long. But even into early adulthood, he never considered it would provide him a career.

Born in Chicago, Swenson was introduced to the game by his father. With a muni just over a mile from home, he landed a job caddying. "Really, it was more like dragging a bag around for lunch," he laughs. When the family moved to Orlando in the early '80s, they landed even closer to a golf course. Swenson played a lot.

In hindsight then, given The Claw's proximity to USF, it could be argued it was entirely predictable, though certainly not planned, that Swenson the college student, turned out to be a lot like Swenson the high school student. "I played just about every single afternoon," he says, of his college time in Tampa. "I knew everybody in the pro shop. It got to where they let my green fees slide if I brought in the flags."

Eventually, he began helping with outside operations, which

Spanish moss and long shadows lend to the sense of serenity at Floridian National.

turned into conversations with golf course maintenance staff and ultimately, the offer of a job as a spray tech. Swenson worked full-time hours to pay for school. Of course, he wasn't earning much, but he soon realized being on and around the golf course was, for him, at a time of "flux in his early 20s, a richer experience than college itself.

"We're never satisfied. I know when we're really, really good and when we're only so good. I'm pretty hard on myself, which is probably why I don't play golf anymore."

He hit it off with a young irrigation tech by the name of Seth Strickland, now at Miami Shores Country Club, and both were so well regarded by Torba and his assistant at the time, Kim Tomkinson, that "we thought of them like our sons." In that sense, the entire crew was a big "family" including a number of female students who worked the softball fields that were also under Torba's charge.

"We'd go through spells where we'd work 10- or 11-hour days then play basketball out the back of the shop until dark, for two or three hours," Strickland recalls. "We were young and had nothing else to worry about. Those were the days."

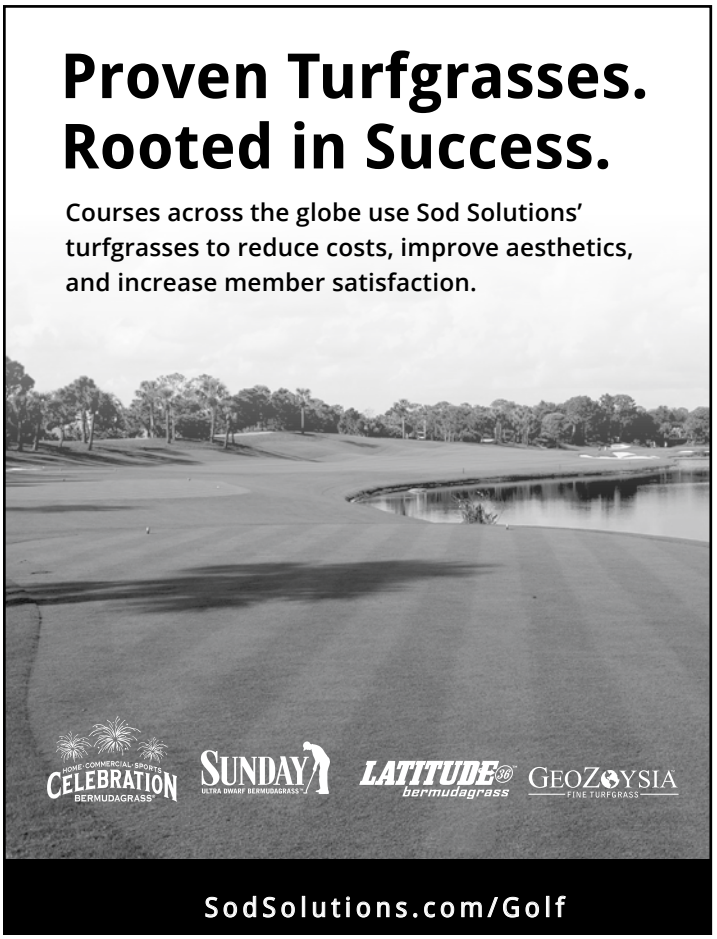
For a kid in "flux" as Swenson was, it was a great incubator for a love of the game to become a passion for preparing the course. "We had a blast and Jim made it that way for us," Strickland says.

When it wasn't basketball after hours, it was golf. As Swenson says, Torba, now at Pelican Preserve Golf Club in Fort Myers, and Strickland "can both play." Each has won the Florida GCSA championship and Strickland is also a three-time winner of GCSAA's national championship. "I was a bit like the fifth wheel," Swenson says. "They had to give me shots."

That was more than 20 years ago and while they "were pretty good buddies," Strickland says, he and Swenson "unfortunately, lost touch over time." When he heard Swenson was at Floridian National, the news was eyebrow-raising, "A little surprising maybe, but not a shock."

"You know how it is with jobs like that one. It's a little bit like hitting the lottery," Strickland says. "So, it was a bit like, 'Wow, he

This snag behind a green serves as a penthouse for one of Floridian National's avian "members."



must be doing well.' But I can tell you this, he deserves it. He's very smart and very hard-working. It's good to know we're both doing what we love."

After three years at The Claw, Swenson followed his roommate in Tampa, an assistant pro, to Lost Tree Club in North Palm Beach. He started as second assistant to Mike Ballard in January 1999 and was there for a complete renovation by Nicklaus in 2002. While he was no longer in college, he remembers his time at Lost Tree, at least early on, as "the school of hard knocks." Without the underpinning of a turfgrass degree, he was learning "everything by feel and experience."

This year, more than 20 years since deciding there was a future in golf course maintenance, he added that theory and, for lack of a better term, book learning to the practical knowledge bank that got him where he is. He is about to graduate from Penn State with a B.S. in Turf and Turfgrass Management."One class a semester takes a long time," he grins.

Swenson readily admits he has derived more from his career than he imagined possible. There was a time when he thought the pinnacle might be hosting a PGA Tour event. Now, perhaps not so much, since he's met so many highly-accomplished people similarly passionate about the game.

From players, to architects, to construction maestros and people like Butch Harmon. "The knowledge and passion he has is incredible," Swenson says. "I never would have imagined that I'd get to meet the people I've spent some time with."

A note of thanks from the White House takes pride of place in Eric Swenson's office.

Of course, that kind of opportunity doesn't freely. "We've got some pretty big expectations of ourselves," Swenson says, of his team. "We're never satisfied. I know when we're really, really good and when we're only so good. I'm pretty hard on myself, which is probably why I don't play golf anymore. I don't like doing what I can't do well, and I couldn't break 80 now. I'd probably throw my clubs in the lake."

One of Eric Swenson's immecualte Tifeagle greens.

An aerial view of the new short course at Floridian National.

Like many superintendents, one of the biggest clouds looming over his ability to present the conditions he strives to comes down to boots on the ground. In a buoyant economy, golf courses are competing with thriving construction and landscaping operations. You may get enough interest to fill positions but getting what's required after that point is far from guaranteed.

"The scary part is the workforce, the labor side," he says. "We take great care of everybody who works here. My view is that you're getting 100 percent pay for every second you're here. And all we need is 100 percent effort in return."

At a personal level, that has never been a negotiable equation for Swenson. "I have a work ethic that my father instilled in me and I try to emulate it every day," he says. "My kids (John, 8, and Savannah, 5) know daddy is doing "schoolwork" every day to provide for them. Thank God, for my wife (Sharon). She knows this is a passion for me and we do it all for them."

Since the renovation, Swenson feels like Floridian National is part of his family, because the project lived with them so fully from start to finish, even while it was in another geographic location altogether. "This is one of my children because you're in every part of it," he says. "You care that much that you feel like you won't have anyone to blame but yourself." ■

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All for One and One for All:
QUAIL CREEK BOUNCES BACK

Clean up operations in the early stages after Hurricane Irma.

Kevin Leo

The USGA recently announced that Quail Creek Country Club in Naples will get its national championship after all. The club will host the U.S. Senior Women's Amateur in 2020, three years after Hurricane Irma forced the USGA to take the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur elsewhere. But in Kevin Leo's eyes, Quail Creek saw plenty of champions in the days, weeks and months after Irma's rampage, though not one of them swung a club the whole time.

Leo, director of golf and grounds at the 36-hole facility, has 40 years in the business. He was a superintendent at 16, albeit at a nine-hole executive course with adult supervision just down the road. He's since been at 15 different facilities, in the U.S. and the Caribbean, guiding many from construction, through grow-in and into operation. He's seen some things.

But he says what happened at Quail Creek post-Irma was "crazy." Crazy good, that is.

Quail Creek lost more than 4,000 trees. The entire club was closed for a month. Sections of the golf courses were under water just as long. There was no power at all for 14 days. Things were grim. And that was just the golf and club operation. For many members living at Quail Creek, their own lives were in upheaval from the storm, houses damaged, cars ruined.

In the immediate aftermath, no one could guess how long recovery would take. But there was no doubt it would take some time. The club prepared to lay off food and beverage staff, some of whom, like Leo's own staff, were already burdened with damage to their homes.

"We were well on our way to being well-represented with the Women's Mid-Am. when Irma came in on Sunday, September 10," Leo says. "The storm really put a hurtin' on us, not only on the golf course, but also the community we're in. It was a hit, it was a gut-punch, an upper-cut and a right-cross all at the same time."

Leo determined he wasn't about to stay down for long. When he learned waitstaff was to be let go, he said, "No, no. They can come out and work with us." To sweeten the deal, if the food and beverage folks pitched in, Leo promised his team would repay the favor once the clubhouse reopened.

"All for one and one for all, that was my motto," Leo says. "After about half a day of feeling sorry for yourself, you had to say, 'Okay, we've got to fix this. And we're going to fix it together and we're going to grow together because we're all affected.' So, if we were going to ask anything of others we had to be willing to do the same."

What played out was the "coolest bonding experience." Inside staff and outside staff, largely strangers to that point, found themselves toiling shoulder to shoulder in conditions that could only be termed miserable. Everyone was dirty and sweaty in constant humidity that, without relief from air-conditioning during breaks or at the end of a day, can raise irritation levels and shorten tempers.

"With a lot of clubs in the area hit just as hard as us, contractors were very busy, so we had to wait our turn," Leo says. "But we

did a lot in-house while we were waiting." It wasn't just Leo's staff and those from the clubhouse. Members pitched in. "People who couldn't even spell the word chainsaw were out there" sending sawdust flying. "It was an amazing group effort. People weren't just good working companions, they became good friends."

Leo's maintenance facility became known as "command central." His wife, Lori-Jane, prepared lunch for everyone on a daily basis. "Everyone came to the shop," Leo says. "Members, homeowners that had no one to talk to came over. You had members who are millionaires sitting next to laborers and waitstaff, eating the same meal, telling stories, laughing, hugging, patting each other on the back. Really, it was a great experience for everybody to go through because everybody was on the same level. Everybody needed everybody."

Clean-up began at and around the clubhouse, the highest point on the property. As days passed but floodwaters didn't, Leo had to send people out to any elevated greens – those not submerged - to clear them of blankets of debris. He has indelible images of staff wading chest deep through water holding their backpack blowers high over head.

Leo's plan was to work to reopen nine holes at a time. "We wanted our members and homeowners to have something to get their minds off the challenges," he says. "So they could go play, compare stories, have a couple of cocktails, enjoy each other's company, laugh for the first time in a month."

By the first week of December, essentially three full months after Irma, the club opened the last nine holes. By then, an alternate venue, in Houston, TX of all places, had hosted the Women's Mid-Am. which was delayed a month. Remember, this was not long after Houston itself was clobbered by Hurricane Harvey. Leo was flabbergasted when he heard: "Are you friggin' kidding me? Houston!" But he was happy for the hosts all the same.

In retrospect he thinks Quail Creek could have had a course ready for a November date. "But our community wasn't ready," he says. "It would not have been a good look for Naples, not for anybody in southwest Florida. Hotels were dealing with damage and a lot of them were still full of people dealing with damage to their homes."

From December through to the end of the season in April, Leo and his team concentrated on managing turf that came through the storm and flooding remarkably well. "Across all the Celebration fairways, roughs and tees and the Tifeagle greens, we didn't lose a single blade of grass, not one," he says. "Which was unbelievable."

Perimeter areas were still war-zones of downed trees dragged into huge piles. "We couldn't get in there to get to the trees because we didn't want to be running chainsaws and chippers while golfers were out there," Leo says. But once summer rolled around it was clean-up mode again.

The club also used that time to make some modifications, grassing and landscaping areas where trees were lost, building more tees, introducing some mounding and converting cart paths from asphalt to concrete. Leo is busy with a driving range project right now. "We've kept the ball rolling since Irma," he says, with more than hint of understatement.

All of this would be significant enough to make a mark on anyone in Leo's position but the fact it all took place at Quail Creek touched him even more. He helped build the place, as a kid out of high school in 1981. That nine-hole "superintendent" gig, in Cape Coral, with Bob Shevlin keeping an eye on him, was during school. He'd mow greens and cut cups early morning, go to school, then return to the course and jump on a fairway and rough unit.

He loved that job, but Quail Creek was where he fell in love with the profession, with the idea of bringing a golf course out of the dirt. "I was just out of high school and didn't know what I wanted to be," he says. Shevlin suggested he take a look at Quail Creek. He traveled a dirt road to find himself staring at a flurry of excavators, dozers and earthmovers.

"I got to see the shapers work their magic with the dirt," he says. "Building holes, laying irrigation and drainage, grassing, then you had to grow it in. Then we got to go to do it all again on the other (course) site, working with Arthur Hills and his staff. It was just non-stop, seven days a week, sun up to sundown. I just fell in love with it."

In time, Leo would leave to earn a turfgrass degree at Catawba Valley Technical College in North Carolina. From there he launched out on that long and winding string of course constructions. When

Command Central: Management, members, homeowners and staff met daily at Kevin Leo's maintenance facility for updates throughout the recovery.

he was invited to interview for the job at Quail Creek early in 2013, memories from more than 30 years ago came instantly to life.

"I remember the emotion as I looked out the clubhouse window and took in the view," he says. "Greens that I helped build in '81 and '82. When I finally accepted the position, I drove around the whole course by myself and I had tears in my eyes because it was … wow. Like, I'd remember this tree when it was my size, and now it's 40 feet up in the air and I can't even put my arms around it. It was a really neat and emotional time."

Leo oversaw a two-year renovation project to position the club – in an intensely competitive market – to continue to attract members and lure events such as the Women's Mid-Am. And the club was right on target, until Irma. Rather than disappointment and bitterness, though, Leo regards what followed – at least after the initial shock – as something truly wonderful, a refreshingly rewarding human experience.

"I don't think there was anything negative about we did and what we went through," he says. "Of course, it was uncomfortable. But I think it's brought everybody closer, as a club and as a community."

He credits general manager Don Hunter with "grabbing the bull by the horns" and helping bring the club "out of the doldrums." "He's been really big along this ride," Leo says. "I take my hat off to him for steering the ship."

True to his word, once the clubhouse reopened, the golf course maintenance staff and Leo included, donned aprons and returned the favor bussing tables every Tuesday for a month. "If we were going to talk about all for one and one for all, we had to prove we believed it," he says. "The membership enjoyed it because they got to pick on us while we learned what the inside staff did. We all had a laugh with it, but it sent a strong message, that we really were all in it together."

Leo reiterates that Quail Creek was not alone in its challenges or with its successful recovery. "We're not heroes. We just had to deal with it as best we could, like everybody else. So many clubs were affected," he says. "But to see the clubhouse staff and the outside guys and members all together in the thick of it was really amazing. It was crazy." ■

-Trent Bouts

Floodwaters kept some parts of Quail Creek submerged for a month.

Kevin Leo with his world back in order today.

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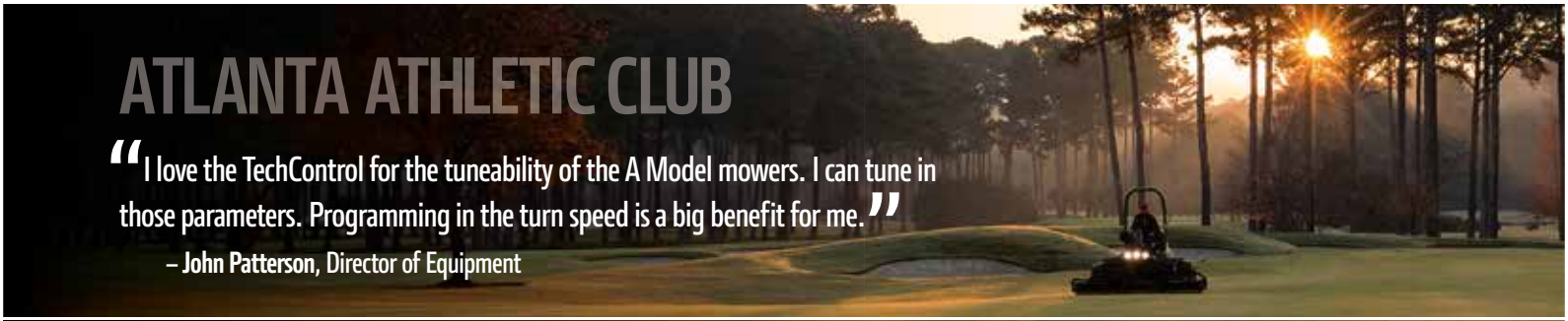

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The Blue Pearl, Jewel OF THE TREASURE COAST

Among an impressive slate of annual charity fundraisers in Florida, the Treasure Coast GCSA's Blue Pearl is up there with the best, having raised well over $200,000. Host superintendent for the 25th anniversary of the event this year was Dick Gray, who not only hosted the very first Blue Pearl at Loblolly Pines, now Loblolly, in Hobe Sound, but came up with the name itself. Welcoming players this year, to PGA Village in Port St. Lucie where he is director of agronomy, Gray penned a note telling the story of the Blue Pearl in colorful detail.

Dick Gray

Craig Weyandt

"Twenty-five years ago, at a bar in Stuart, Florida, the Treasure Coast Golf Course Superintendents Association was drinking a board meeting," Gray wrote, with characteristic good humor. "Tim Cann, lead drinker, was the president and lamented that we were the only association in the entire state without a fundraiser. We needed to have a fundraiser.

"Twelve ounces later, (about three minutes), we had it. We had the name and the purpose. The name was the Blue Pearl, named after a picture of earth taken by NASA from a satellite. The purpose was to raise money in order to fund environmental awareness projects in schools along the Treasure Coast. In return, we just wanted green ink in the form of acknowledgement that the local golf course superintendents association funded the project."

The catalyst for tournament's mission, Gray explained, was what amounted to nothing short of an attack by popular ABC broadcaster Paul Harvey. Harvey's broadcast, Gray recalled, "indicated golf greens, due to our spray programs, were some of the most toxic areas on earth." So much so, Harvey claimed, that "not only are golf course pesticides killing the birds, but they're killing golf course superintendents also." See a transcript of Harvey's on-air statement on page 38.

A quarter-century later, Gray believes the mission of the Blue Pearl – education and dissemination of facts about golf course operations - "may be more important than ever." Not just because of is-

Winners and grinners: Some scenes from previous Blue Pearls.

sues like fertilizer bans and red tides but because there is "so much more awareness."

"Today, it's not just Paul Harvey. It's anybody and everybody with a cell phone," Gray says. "With the technology today, people can superimpose things and make statements and you don't know real from what's not. It is so important for us to get the message out with what is reality."

Gray cites the growing presence of pollinator gardens and bee hives on golf courses as one example of a reality that contradicts a perception. "A number of us have bee hives on property now and these are healthy hives producing pounds and pounds of honey," he says. "But there's some ink suggesting golf courses are unfriendly to bees with certain chemistries we use. Well, if you have bees and healthy hives isn't that an indication that, 'Hey, it ain't us. It's something reducing the bee population, but it's certainly not the golf courses."

While deliberate efforts to establish habitat for pollinators may be a recent trend, Gray points out golf course efforts to promote environmental stewardship, and put a name on it, go much further back. Audubon International's cooperative sanctuary program began as a collaboration with the USGA in 1991. "At PGA National we're the oldest signature sanctuary going," Gray says.

At the time, Gray thought other superintendent chapters across the country might adopt the Blue Pearl as a *blue*print. That, being confronted with the same realities, they would be inspired to raise their own funds to tell golf's environmental story locally. That may not have happened, but Gray believes the event has still served its purpose well, both directly and indirectly.

Directly, the Blue Pearl has written checks large and small for entities ranging from elementary schools, of a few hundred dollars and up, to the likes of the Florida Oceanographic Society, $20,000. Money helped schools establish vegetable gardens, nature trails and native plant nurseries and in the case of Pelican Island Elementary, $20,000 helped buy designated scrub jay habitat. Over the years, close to $75,000 has gone to Environmental Learning Centers and outreach education efforts such as EcoFest.

Indirectly, Gray believes the annual beating of the Blue Pearl drum has helped members infuse the message. "I don't know if it's specifically because of the Blue Pearl, but do I think there's been some carry over effect," Gray says. "Because we all recognize how important environmental stewardship is and the importance of sharing that message. For the most part, I think the movement that the Blue Pearl started is still going. You look at guys like Craig Weyandt (at The Moorings Yacht and Country Club). I mean he's really a naturalist in disguise as a superintendent."

As it happens, Weyandt, from The Moorings Yacht and Country Club, was also at that meeting where the Blue Pearl was born. Since then he has been certified as a Florida Master Naturalist. He hosts regular "wildlife walks" for members at The Moorings and is never shy about presenting the golf's story. As reported in the spring issue of The Florida Green, when Pelican Island Audubon Society – unrelated to Audubon International - hosted a sustainable landscapes conference in January, he was there shaking hands and sharing the message.

It wasn't just Paul Harvey criticizing golf, Weyandt recalls. Back then, Rocky Raccoon was in on it too. "There was this cartoon floating around where he'd visited a golf course and it made him sick," Weyandt says. "That told me we had to get to the kids first. We needed to be proactive with the message that golf course superintendents are stewards and not polluters. It's pretty hard to educate parents who have their minds made up and have for a long time."

Weyandt says there was a sense that more superintendents needed to parallel what Tim Hiers, CGCS was doing at The Old Collier Club in Naples, "bringing kids over and letting them see for themselves all the good that golf courses provide." As Cann, from Harbour Ridge Yacht and Country Club, says, "We really wanted to brighten the eyes of young kids with what golf courses and golf course superintendents did."

Gray says Cann deserves considerable credit for walking into that meeting all those years ago with a demand of his colleagues. "Tim was really the instrument because he came with an agenda and we got it very quickly," he says. Cann himself is proud that the event is still going strong. "It hasn't lost its appeal, or its purpose," he says. "Sells out every year."

Of course, there have been many others with a hand in the success of the Blue Pearl, including countless industry partners whose sponsorships have generated the lion's share of proceeds. Roger Welker, formerly superintendent at Vero Beach Country Club now with Independent Turf Partners was another at that board meeting and later host of the Blue Pearl.

Doubtless, the event has been helped by the caliber of host facilities. The chance to get on Loblolly back in the day was such a draw the first Blue Pearl was played by eightsomes. Other host courses include Johns Island, Quail Valley, Red Stick and Medallist, where, in addition to speaking, then owner Greg Norman lent his helicopter for a fundraising ball drop on course.

Barbara Tierney, administrative assistant at Johns Island, has been a critical cog in the Blue Pearl operation for 22 years. "I love it," she says simply. This year's event at PGA National raised about $26,000.

Outcomes like that lead Gray to believe the Treasure Coast chapter has done a fine job caring for the Blue Pearl. He says he hasn't always been as active at the chapter level as he would like but was very pleased and proud to host the silver anniversary event. As he wrote in that welcome note, "Twenty-five years later, one quarter of a century, about the age when the most virile and handsome of men lose their hair, and maybe five jobs, we are again playing "The Pearl" on a Dye Course … Thanks for choosing us today and enjoy your round."

Who will host a 50th annual Blue Pearl and what it might look like is anyone's guess. But Gray is hopeful that its essence will remain strong. "We don't have signs and banners at every golf course promoting golf environmental message 365 days a year," he says. "But when it comes time for "The Pearl" people understand, and they know what it is. The guys who've been in the business long enough to understand where it came from, hopefully we can pass that on. Because we're no spring chickens." ■

An Air Attack On-Air, that is

Paul Harvey, ABC Radio, February 8, 1994:

"Two years ago, you and I talked about the pesticides poisoning so many birds, that our golf courses face a silent spring. I received some indignant response from greens keepers and their association, and from pesticides manufacturers. They were adamant in their insistence that the stuff they were spraying on fairways and greens was not toxic. It was, and it still is. Today the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America is holding its annual meeting in Dallas, and a study commissioned by that organization of superintendents is reporting that not only are golf course pesticides killing the birds, but they're killing golf course superintendents also. Golf course superintendents have a higher incidence of cancer. The association has to know that this is going to open the door to lawsuits by golf course workers against their employers for exposing themselves to cancer causing chemicals. A statistical mortality study found among golf course superintendents more lung cancer, more brain cancer, more cancers of the large intestine and the prostate, especially however, lung cancer. Dr. Burton Kross, University of Iowa, one of the researchers on this project, recommends further studies and recommends meanwhile that golf course workers minimize however possible their exposure to pesticides. There's a moral here which demands to be underscored. We and the beautiful wild things live in harmony together, or we perish together."

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Curtis, The Flower Man
FLOURISHES AT EAGLE CREEK

By Craig Smith

Evan Curtis is a welcome daily sight in the dining room at Eagle Creek Golf and Country Club in Naples, where he has been an assistant golf course superintendent for the past 10 years. By the time he hits the kitchen, head chef Patrick Bryan breaks into his routine welcome - "It's the Flower Man!" - in his broken English that he brought with him from his native Jamaica.

"It makes you feel good when people like what you do," says Curtis, who has developed a special touch for plants and flowers that makes Eagle Creek one of the most picturesque private country clubs in south Florida. "Eagle Creek feels like another home to me, and that's nice because you spend more time at work than you do at home when you are in this business."

Eagle Creek was recently voted a "Blue Zone" healthy workplace and "Best of the Gulf Shore" in South Florida by Gulfshore Life, and the special touches that Curtis has brought to the golf course are a major reason. He developed a green thumb for growing flowers, especially Fortunian roses, which flourish in the soil of south Florida. His flower arrangements are routinely used as table centerpieces in the clubhouse dining room.

It all started about eight years ago when the top administrative staff visited Rabbit Run Farm in northern Arizona. Rabbit Run is noted for vertical farming, where crop yield can be doubled by special hydroponic growing methods. Golf course superintendent Jimmy Alston was particularly intrigued, and Curtis ran with the idea. "I just taught myself, and found I was pretty good at it," says Curtis, who tends to his garden work near the maintenance facility.

He developed a 250-sq. ft. shade house where he grows flowers and garden vegetables that are delivered farm to table for the food staff. His snow peas are a particular hit, featuring on the menu every Friday night in the fall. He also grows carrots, several types of tomatoes and three types of bananas.

Curtis is a recognizable figure on the course, where he oversees a full-on $50,000 landscape program with blooming flowers on every hole. His favorite flower planting is just behind the third tee where he has blended roses with orange Geiger trees. "When they bloom together it shows an amazing red, pink and orange combination, along with green foliage," says Curtis, a 10-year member of GCSAA.

Evan Curtis has developed a special touch with plants and flowers at Eagle Creek.

"The members love the gardens. It's extremely satisfying when some of the women stop me on the golf course because they know I grow all of the roses on the course. As an assistant, you usually don't have much exposure to the membership."

The 32-year-old Curtis, however, never realized he had a green thumb. He did, however, know that he wanted a career in turfgrass and landscaping early in life. As a kid in Michigan, he would mow his parents' lawn every chance he got, probably starting at age seven. As a teenager, he rode his bike four miles to his part-time job at Dunham Hills Golf Club in Highland, MI.

He found his way to Rutgers University in New Jersey for his turfgrass study and landed an internship at the Club at Mediterra, another high-end golf facility in Naples. He became a member of the grounds staff there after graduation, and in 2009 he was hired at Eagle Creek.

He is one of three assistant superintendents under Alston, a 21-year member of GCSAA. And while Curtis is keen on becoming a head superintendent, he is content knowing that he is learning every day. "Jimmy is one of the smartest people I've ever been around," says Curtis. "And I don't say that lightly."

"Evan has an instinct for agronomy," says Alston, who has been at Eagle Creek for 11 years. "It comes natural to him, and I have not had someone like that with me before Evan. He also embraces the off-the-wall stuff we do around here. He doesn't question it; he fully buys into our culture at Eagle Creek. He is unique."

And while it may seem that Curtis spends most of his time beautifying the golf course and growing vegetables for the clubhouse staff, that is only a small part of his work – about an hour a day. He can usually be found paying strict attention to the second nine at Eagle Creek, that closes with a tough four-hole stretch where water comes into play.

On the weekends, he tends to his work with his eight-year-old son Kayman in tow. And when he's not at work, Curtis is an outdoorsman who enjoys duck hunting and fishing in the Everglades.

"I can't think of a better place to work," says Curtis, who has the support of top-level management for everything he is doing. "I am proud of what we have accomplished on course and I am glad everyone appreciates it. It's just fun for me." ■

A bountiful spring harvest of carrots grown by Evan Curtis at Eagle Creek.

Some of the roses Evan Curtis grows for use in the clubhouse at Eagle Creek.

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Ellis Looks to Celebrate
FRENCH CONNECTIONS

For Jason Ellis, one of the benefits of volunteering for the golf course maintenance crew at this year's Ryder Cup in France will be a beer with new friends at the Golf Industry Show in San Diego, CA in February. Ellis, 40, spent eight days during the event on the team at Le Golf National in Paris thanks to a program provided by GCSAA and Capillary Concrete. He was one of 10 superintendents who got to immerse themselves behind the scenes at one of golf's biggest stages.

Jason Ellis

Ellis, from The Villages at Country Creek in Estero, came home a little tired but a lot impressed by what he experienced. Not least of which was the chance to establish new relationships on both a personal and professional level. He is looking forward to catching up with some of his new friends from France in a reunion of sorts at GIS. Plans "for a few beers" are already being worked out via social media.

That's Jason Ellis in the heart of a bunker during the Ryder Cup in France.

"I think it was terrific," Ellis says of his trip. "I wish I had done it when I was younger because it was definitely tiring. There's some long hours that go with volunteering at an event like that."

Indeed, Ellis and his companions were on a bus at 5am and at the golf course before 6am. His duties for the week, centered on holes eight through 12, ran the gamut including mowing, hand-watering, stimping greens, filling divots and bunker work. The morning shift was finished before 9am. Second shift ran from 4.30pm to 7.30pm before the bus ride home.

During the day, volunteers were free to take in the matches or make the most of daily education sessions provided by Capillary Concrete. "That was a really nice touch," Ellis says.

While he'd attended the Ryder Cup as a fan, at Hazeltine in 2016, this was Ellis' first foray into big-time tournament volunteering. He came away with several impressions but perhaps what struck him most was the attention to detail.

"Essentially, as superintendents, I think we all strive to do the same thing on a daily basis, but they had the resources to get it done," he says. "There was super attention to detail. It was something to be able to get out there and take it down to the finest detail. Very impressive."

Apart from resources on the golf course, Ellis identified another major asset during the week – adrenalin. He experienced a few rushes himself, given the star-power on hand and the crowds, and he saw how it helped the club's permanent staff stay on track despite the months of preparation. He also observed it amongst many of the European-based volunteers.

"There were a lot of people on the European side who were 10 or 12 tournaments deep as volunteers," he says. "Maybe they like the adrenalin thing, I don't know, but I met a lot of guys who, this was what they do."

In contrast, Ellis says, as an "elder statesman in the group," he tried hard to take care of himself physically. "There were a couple of nights where there was less sleep than others," he says. "We'd hang out and have a couple of beers. But I did a pretty good job of managing myself I think."

Hanging out after a day's work is a great way to cement a friendship and Ellis says the ones he made in France were a major benefit and why he would recommend other, maybe younger, superintendents find their own opportunity to volunteer at a big event.

"From a relationship standpoint, I'd definitely recommend it," he says. "It's unbelievable the people you meet. You do it for the right reasons, of course, but you never know what the connections you make can do for you personally or professionally. A lot of the time it's all about who you know and there are always a lot of influential people around those events. So, you never know."

Right now, Ellis is considering his next volunteer experience. He's been invited back for the French Open. He won't be able to make a decision though until his club make its own call on a possible renovation. But even if a return to France doesn't work out, there may be other opportunities. "Never say never," Ellis says.

*Another Floridian was at the Ryder Cup in France, GCSAA president Darren Davis, CGCS from Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples. The Ryder Cup was one of a host of significant events Davis attended this year as part of his official duties. ■

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Between Black and White

GRAY IS A SIGN OF FORTITUDE

by Kyle D. Sweet, CGCS

Finally, that quarterly publication that you're always looking forward to flipping through has hit your desk, The Florida Green. Maybe you grab it up right away and flip through or put in on the corner of the desk or even toss it in the truck awaiting that quiet opportunity to take a few minutes to read through. The important thing is that you're going to read it, albeit quickly, chuckling at the photos of your gray-haired buddies that seem to get more weathered and distinguished with each passing year.

If you are proud of your grays, chances are you're also proud of your career in this business. If you're lucky enough to not have grays in this business don't worry, they're coming my friends, never mind your age.

Seriously, what a great time it has been to be in the business. Entering into the business in the early '90s as an assistant, climbing the ladder and becoming a superintendent would put you in the ranks of being a 20-year superintendent about now. Yikes, 20 years of this. Holy crap ... remember having a pager and running up that first cell phone bill because it was so damn cool to make a call while out mowing fairways. Ah...the good old days.

Kyle Sweet, CGCS sporting some of the "grays" that he says are coming to everyone "in this business...never mind your age."

Times have changed. Technology has advanced. But are we better at what we do? I seriously don't know. If it's striped and green, it shows up on social media for us to gawk at and hope that our own course is looking that good. If it's a natural disaster, it hits the pages of the magazines and internet and we gaze in disbelief at how years and years of work can be wiped out in one storm.

These are what I would call Black and White images, extremes, poles apart. But overall through our careers, I'm convinced that we're striving for the same gray on the course that we're growing under that cap. There are times when the course can be in great shape and then, not so much. It's just a fact of life but muddle it all together and gray is the reality.

But I believe it's a good reality. Gray shows character and stability. It represents time-tested fortitude and ability to adjust over the years, just like your course should be perceived. And just like you should be looked at as well, as you have travelled through your career.

I have a belief. I'm convinced that no other department manager in your club operation understands the club more than you do. I also bet that they all grossly underestimate the role that grease, sweat and soil play in the survival of your club and the ultimate satisfaction of your golfers. Your job is to make sure that they know!

The interpersonal relationships you have with your staff and your peers at the club are so damn important. I'm betting that you like going into that break room in the early morning and seeing the team that gives it their all to make you and the course successful.

Take the opportunity to bring your golf director, membership coordinator and food and beverage manager out there and show them what you're doing. It shouldn't be this mysterious thing that requires cargo shorts, a floppy hat and chew tobacco to understand. The better they understand your challenges, your Black and Whites, the better they will work with you and communicate with you to ultimately aid in your daily job.

Rest assured, they have their Black and Whites just the same. So, to be fair, take the time to understand their side as well. I've said it before, you are not an island. If you become one, be careful, islands don't weather storms well.

Is gray the new green? Maybe not, but the ups and downs throughout the year are inevitable and finding that middle ground, so we don't lurch from great to god-awful, is something we all strive for. So, as you roll into this season, may your course be the brightest gray on a sunshiny day!

Ode to my dad, Allen Sweet, the grayest head of hair you've ever seen and the person I strive to be gray for every day of my life. ■

- Kyle Sweet is certified golf course superintendent at The Sanctuary Golf Club in Sanibel

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School Sports Field Project
TURNS INTO AWARD WINNER

A turfgrass community effort to provide a first-class sports field for a south Florida elementary school has proved to be an "award" winner. Students and staff from Bonita Springs Elementary School recently honored David Dore-Smith, from Copperleaf Golf Club, for his efforts helping the school overhaul what was an unattractive and even unsafe play area.

At Dore-Smith's suggestion, the Everglades GCSA purchased Celebration bermudagrass sod worth close to $2,500 to wrap up the project that included tree removal and irrigation repairs. The field is now level, grassed and busy with student activity. It will also be well-cut since Dore-Smith donated a mower on the same day he received his award.

Bonita Springs Elementary PE teacher Zach Schroeder and fourth grade students Javier Brito and Marion Marquez-Davila presented a hand-written thank you board as an "award" for David Dore-Smith's efforts.

Dore-Smith won the mower, provided by Wesco Turf, through one of the company's regular monthly drawings. Given the option of Disney tickets, an account credit or the mower, Dore-Smith chose the mower. "The school has a contract with a company to come and mow but this way, if they have a special event that doesn't fit with the mowing schedule, they can take care of it themselves in no time," he says.

"I know the school is very grateful and so am I for the way our industry got behind this community service project, just as it does so often. It was also very kind of the school and the kids to say thanks the way they did with the award. I know there's a lot more kids and teachers now aware of golf course superintendents and the concept that there's something cool about taking care of golf courses."

A past-president of the Everglades and Florida GCSAs, Dore-Smith stepped forward when the school sent a letter to parents last fall appealing for help. "The sports field was in terrible condition with minimal turf coverage and negative impacts from a neighboring tree and broken sprinklers," says Dore-Smith, whose son Brady, 10, is in fifth grade at Bonita Springs. "The school was concerned about safety it was so rough."

After meeting with school staff and inspecting the field, Dore-Smith drew up a plan and sent out an appeal of his own. The short-term fix entailed new sprinklers donated by Copperleaf, and overseeding with ryegrass donated by Bill Lund, of Winfield Solutions. Then this summer, Juan Ramirez, of Ramirez Landscaping, donated a lift and chipper to remove the live oak causing shade and root issues. Copperleaf staff, who helped with the tree removal, treated the field to remove the ryegrass and used a boxblade form the club to level the surface.

With a new school year approaching, Scott Heydolf, of Golf Rental Services, organized delivery of 44 rolls of Celebration from Bethel Farms, which were laid by Copperleaf staff. Steve Simpson, of Turf Equipment Solutions, donated the use of a large turf roller.

"I'm grateful for the support from the Everglades GCSA, everyone who donated products, equipment or services and of course my guys from Copperleaf," Dore-Smith Says. "And I know everyone at the school is very proud of their new sports field." ■

A look at what the Everglades GCSA was able to help provide for students at Bonita Springs Elementary School and the mower donated by David Dore-Smith.

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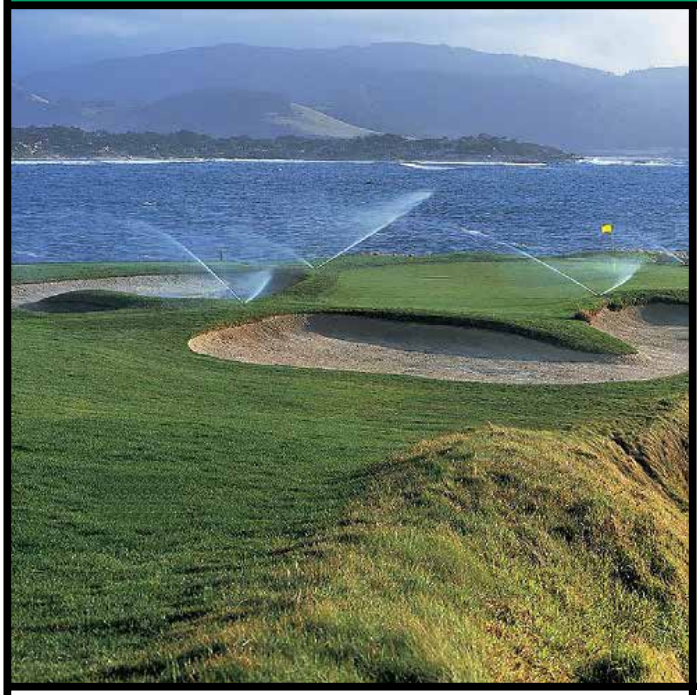

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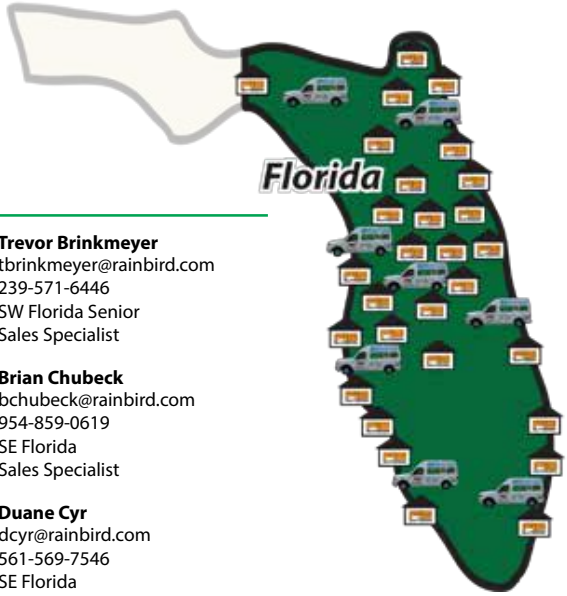

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Part of the crowd at the FTGA reception at World Golf Village Renaissance.

Jones and Ginella Offer
DOUBLE THE FUN AT SHOW

Golf Channel's Matt Ginella and Golf Course Industry magazine's Pat Jones made for a star-studded double at the 66th annual Florida Turfgrass Association Conference and Show in September. Jones turned the tables on Ginella, who is more accustomed to doing the interviewing on Golf Channel, firing question after question. About 150 people attended the reception where Ginella and Jones were on show.

Their discussion, sponsored by the Florida GCSA, was one of a number of highlights during the two-day affair at World Golf Village Renaissance in St. Augustine. World Golf Foundation chief executive officer Steve Mona also spoke. The conference wrapped up with the FTGA's annual meeting and a presentation by Dr. Gerald Henry of the University of Georgia.

Golf Channel's Matt Ginella fields another question from Golf Course Industry magazine's Pat Jones at the FTGA Conference and Show.

John Lammrish with the FTGA Golf Championship trophy.

The FTGA awarded Dr. Phil Busey its Wreath of Grass Award. The award is the FTGA's highest honor and pays tribute to individuals who have shown outstanding service to the association and to the turfgrass industry. The award was presented by past-president John Mascaro.

Busey is a University of Florida professor emeritus, independent consultant with Brookside Laboratories and president of Phil Busey Agronomy Consulting. With more than 35 years of service at the University of Florida in Davie, he taught many classes including turfgrass culture, golf and sports turf management, genetics and grass biology and invented three patented turfgrasses.

He is a prolific author, a frequent lecturer and speaker, as well as a Certified Crop Adviser (CCA), Certified Professional Agronomist (CPAg) and has attained the benchmarks of professionalism recognized by the American Society of Agronomy for practicing agronomists.

John Lammrish, golf course superintendent at LPGA International in Daytona Beach won the FTGA Golf Championship. The victory earned him a place on the Florida GCSA team to compete in the chapter event at GCSAA's annual golf championship in San Diego, CA in February.

The FTGA also awarded a total of $5,500 in scholarships during the conference. Recipients were:

Pablo Agustin Boeri, University of Florida, Ralph White Scholarship - $1,000

Jamie Buhlman, University of Florida, Bill Entwistle Sr. Scholarship - $1,000

Katherine Cox, University of Florida, Ralph White Scholarship - $1,000

Mark Kann, University of Florida, Col. Frank Ward Memorial Scholarship - $1,500

Cory Ketchum, University of Florida, Ralph White Scholarship - $1,000. ■

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A Q&A for Crew Members

LOOKING AT THE NEXT STEP

Labor and the supply of talented assistant superintendents are among the biggest challenges confronting the world of golf course maintenance. The following Q&A from Florida Gateway College could provide incentive for a promising member of your crew to consider taking the step from an hourly role to a salaried position. Consider sharing it with someone who shows promise or maybe post it in your break room.

What do I gain by pursuing a horticultural certificate?

The horticultural certificate will prepare you to work with plants from both production and aesthetic standpoints. Our Agribusiness Management Degree, with an emphasis in turf management, will enable you to pursue entry-level careers in golf course operations, landscaping, nursery management, and many other agricultural industries.

Program specializations include landscape plants, soil science, turfgrass management, integrated pest management, and horticulture project estimating, among others.

What are the upfront costs and requirements?

Programs fall into the college credit hour category. Each class is three credit hours. Tuition cost for each credit hour is $104. With online fees, each class is $342. This is among the lowest tuition fees in the state. A high school diploma or its equivalent is required for our horticulture certificates and the Ag. Business Management degree.

What is the tradition associated with Florida Gateway College?

In the mid-1960s, the horticulture industries were growing in Florida and golf course superintendents and landscape companies needed better educated assistant superintendents and landscape foremen, so industry met with Florida Gateway College administrators about starting a program to educate students for these industries and jobs. With industry input, the college developed programs that the golf and landscape industries quickly supported and respected.

If I am not from the Florida area, how will the courses apply to my region?

Programs consist of sound nationwide scientific and industry practices. Our landscape plants class deals with the common landscape plants found throughout the nation and their use. Our turfgrass classes deal with the physiology and identification of all turf species. The soil science and Ag. chemistry classes are not region specific, nor is the irrigation class. The knowledge is applicable to any area.

Who are the online instructors?

All of our instructors have a minimum of a Master's degree from the University of Florida or Penn State in horticulture related fields. They are employed, or have been employed, in the fields of soil science, nematology and golf, just to name a few.

How many courses should I take at one time?

That is up to you. Each three-credit course, on average, will require three hours per week to complete all work for that week. For example, if you had 12 hours per week that you knew you could dedicate to your education, we would suggest you take four classes.

Are there financial aid options?

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Are there future educational options after receiving my certificate?

The horticulture certificates are the launching platform into our Agribusiness Management degree. The horticulture certificate consists of 10 classes. Once those classes are finished, you have the option of continuing with the Associate's degree by taking an additional 10 classes, for a total of 61 credit hours.

I already have a degree. Are these online courses helpful for my continuing educational goals?

Yes, the online horticulture certificates, and their courses, provide a specialized education to any current degree holder. These courses also work to earning CEU's with various nationwide industry certification organizations, like GCSAA and FNGLA.

What is the average starting salary for graduates?

The average starting salary for our graduates is approximately $35K/year depending on regions. As you increase your education opportunities and reward also increase.

Do past college courses and credits transfer?

Most plant science classes from other accredited institutions will transfer in, although, 30 percent of your educational program must be earned at FGC. We can transfer up to 70 percent of your horticulture education.

How does FGC compare with other horticultural and turfgrass degree programs?

For many years, FGC has been in the top three programs for golf and landscape education along with Penn State and Rutgers University.

Do any classes require proctored exams or is everything online?

The horticulture certificates are 100 percent online. The Agribusiness Management degree is also 100 percent online but does require proctored exams for the math classes.

Are classes at your own pace or based on a traditional schedule (i.e. semester)?

Classes are taught on the traditional college level with three semesters per year. Fall and spring semesters are 16-0week courses with summer semester only 12 weeks. ■

IN THE NEWS

Excerpts from press coverage on people in the world of golf course maintenance in Florida.

Brian Birney

Palm Beach Post

October 18

Fertilizer application will be banned in Jupiter during the rainy season to curb the influx of nutrients into the Loxahatchee River…The Northwest and Southwest forks of the Loxahatchee River are deemed impaired by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, having excess chlorophyll and phosphorus…Nutrients flowing into the river need to be reduced by 37 percent, officials estimate…

This ban does not include golf courses, farms, scientific research areas, vegetable gardens that are more than 10 feet from any water body or wetland, reclaimed water and specialized turf areas like athletic fields or cemeteries. After comments made during a public hearing last month, town staff also exempted commercial fertilizer applicators with certification from the state agriculture department.

Brian Birney, golf course superintendent at The Club at Admirals Cove, spoke at the September 20 meeting, saying that banning fertilizer use would thin out turf stand and possibly require more pesticides to be used. "I don't think that's going to benefit the environment any more either," he said. While Birney's profession was already exempt from the ban, he was concerned about how it would affect other professionals. "We need to let the professionals do what they were trained to do," he said.

Todd Ingram

PR Newswire

September 21

Fort Lauderdale Country Club … has approved a $3.7 million renovation of its North Course.

The project is scheduled to begin on April 1, 2019, with an anticipated completion date of November 30, 2019 … "Reinvestment into a club's infrastructure is vital to the success of not only that club, but of the golf industry as a whole," said FLCC general manager Michael O'Brien. Fort Lauderdale Country Club has contracted with Kipp Schulties of KS Designs, LLC to head up the renovation.

The result will be "a distinctly different golf course," according to Schulties. The scope of work approved, and fully funded by the membership, not only includes the replacement and expansion of the greens, but also goes further with replacement and/or relocation of all bunkers, and providing tees between 4,500 yards and 7,200 yards, making the course more enjoyable for both men and women of all abilities.

"The North Course greens were due for replacement," says golf course superintendent Todd Ingram. "However, this project not only addresses the age of the greens, but creates an exciting new course that I know our members will enjoy."

Jeff Klontz

Golf Course Architecture

November 5

The Country Club of Florida near Boynton Beach in Palm Beach County, USA, is upgrading its practice facility with the help of golf course architect Lester George. The project will include an expanded driving range, short game practice facility and teaching facility. The upgrade is scheduled to coincide with a renovation of greens and regrassing. The club also plans to reconstruct bunkers with a modern liner system.

Golf course superintendent Jeff Klontz said: "Lester takes a lot of pride in his work and reaches out to everyone involved in the project for their input. We're always trying to further enhance the playing ability of our members, and with this renovation, we can alter the short-game area to reflect the shots members will find on the golf course." ■

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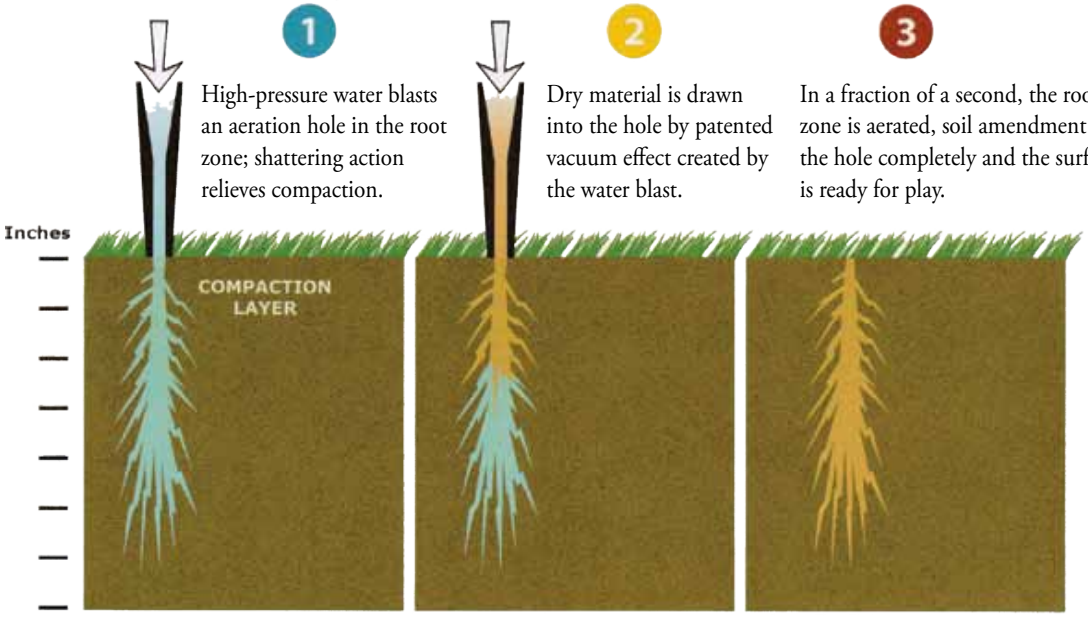

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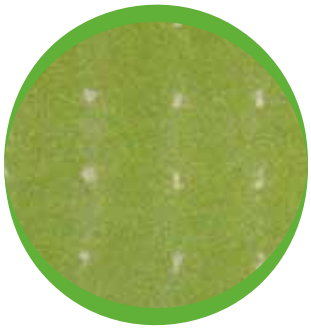

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Dillinger Launches Start-up Company

Rob Dillinger

Rob Dillinger, former manufacturing representative for Holganix, announces the launch of M.D. Plant Health Solutions, a green industry distribution company based in Fort Myers. The start-up will provide agronomic products and solutions for the turf and ornamental industry in South Florida. M.D. Plant Health Solutions will supply products ranging from fertilizers, adjuvants and surfactants to golf course equipment and supplies.

"M.D. Plant Health Solutions will provide high-performing yet economical solutions for primarily the golf market but also the lawn and landscape and athletic field markets," says owner Rob Dillinger. "Our mission is to support customers with hard science, creative solutions, and measured results."

Dillinger previously spent five years as the Florida manufacturing representative for Holganix. He also was an assistant superintendent at Vanderbilt Country Club in Naples for four years.

Dye Joins Solitude

Solitude Lake Management recently added eight staff members to the company's growing team. The new hires are spread from the Northeast to the Southwest. In Florida, aquatic specialist Scott Dye will offer sustainable lake, pond and wetland management solutions for clients in Orlando and throughout Central Florida.

Sara Bay Reopens After Restoration

Sara Bay Country Club in Sarasota where Bob Gwodz is longtime golf course superintendent reopened in October after a complete restoration. Golf course architect Kris Spence oversaw the project which featured an emphasis on recapturing the original design intent of the 1926 Donald Ross greens and bunkering. Construction started in late-April 2018, greens were sprigged during the summer, bunkers were completed in September and the course officially reopened on October 6. Bunker construction included all subsurface drainage, Capillary Concrete liner system, and Golf Agronomics' G-Angle bunker sand.

Gwodz now has greens with a greater number and variety of pin placement options, something Spence says was lost in earlier projects on the golf course. That work involved removing organic build-up and excess rootzone from the green tops. Almost every green was lowered 12-to-14 inches in the center section to reduce the crowning and excessive slope radiating outward.

"Previous renovations had eliminated or altered the course to the point where the putting surfaces were one dimensional, repetitive and severely crowned, eliminating all but the center sections useable for hole locations," Spence says. "A trademark of Ross greens is his wide variety of surface contours making each hole unique. His greens should have multiple hole locations in close proximity to the edges, in corner sections and near where the greens fall away into bunkers and down fill pad edges."

Mirasol's Sunset Course Reopens

The Sunset course at Mirasol Golf and Country Club in Palm Beach Gardens was on target to complete a renovation this fall. The primary purpose of the project was to improve the ageing infrastructure of the course, which opened in 2001 and hosted the PGA Tour's 2003 Honda Classic. Michael Thomas is director of golf maintenance at Mirasol and Ben Hyduk is superintendent at the Sunset course.

The club commissioned golf course architect Drew Rogers, who led the original design of the Florida layout while working for Arthur Hills' firm. Features of the project included bunker and tee reconstruction, along with fairway turf conversion from Tif-Sport to Celebration bermudagrass. Some tee areas were refined, some bunkers were repositioned and some eliminated, and some drainage and paths were replaced.

Planning for the project started in early 2014, and construction commenced in May. Rogers, Thomas and Hyduk worked closely contractor, South Florida Golf Renovations.

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Check Presentations

Florida GCSA president John Curran, center, accepts a check for $3,000 from Richard Colyer, left, and Mark Henderson, right, with Golf Agronomics Sand and Hauling. The donation is for the association's turfgrass research fund.

Florida GCSA president John Curran presents a check for $5,000 to EREF, the Environmental Research and Education Foundation and executive director Mac Carraway. Curran says EREF's work on behalf of the golf and green industries is "more valuable than ever and worthy of our support."

Sunday Installed At Leisureville

Leisureville Golf Club in Boynton Beach is installing Sunday ultradwarf on its greens using the no-till method of sprigging. Golf course superintendent Steve Brown is working with Modern Turf on the project.

The private course, originally covered in Tifdwarf bermudagrass, decided to regrass in the wake of various contaminations of its 18 greens and tees. "After thorough research, we found Modern Turf offers no-till method of sprigging," Brown says. "Sunday provides desirable attributes, which will greatly enhance all aspects of our greens. Leisureville Golf Club staff and players are extremely excited for the new changes."

Boca Lago Ready After Overhaul

Boca Lago Country Club in Boca Raton is scheduled to reopen in November after a renovation of the 27-hole layout which is overseen by golf course superintendent George Redshaw. The overhaul of the South, East and West nines by golf course architect Jan Bel Jan includes redesigned greens, repositioned fairway and greenside bunkers and new tees.

Boca Lago's 27-hole layout was originally designed by Bruce Devlin and Robert von Hagge in 1975. The $9-million renovation project includes a new irrigation and pump system, enhanced fairway drainage and refurbished cart paths. All 27 new greens are planted with TifEagle bermudagrass, the fairways with Latitude 36 bermudagrass and tees with TifGrand bermudagrass.

Governor Tours Air2G2 Facility

Governor Rick Scott speaks on the Air2G2 factory floor.

GT AirInject president Glen Black and his wife, Sharon, with Governor Rick Scott.

Florida Governor Rick Scott toured the Air2G2 factory at GT AirInject, in Jacksonville this summer. The Governor was greeted by GT AirInject president Glen Black. Black and his staff of 17 also demonstrated the Air2G2 air-injection process that is used on golf courses, sports fields lawns and sod farms in Florida. He also stressed the importance of the golf industry to the state economy.

The Governor chose GT AirInject's Air2G2 factory as the backdrop for a campaign stop to promote his bid for the U.S. Senate. During the press conference on the factory floor Governor Scott said: "This company is less than eight years old and, if you look at the map, they're selling products in over 50 countries. They're all across the United States. And it's because Glen and his team have put together a great business model, and it's done really well."

The Air2G2 is assembled in Jacksonville and is manufactured primarily with parts made in the U.S.

FL Assistants Attend Green Start Academy

Four Florida GCSA members were among 50 assistant superintendents chosen for this year's Green Start Academy class which ran October 24 to 26. Since 2005, Green Start Academy, presented by John Deere Golf and Environmental Science, a business unit of Bayer Crop Science has invited assistants to the Bayer Development and Training Center in Clayton, NC, the John Deere Turf Care factory in nearby Fuquay-Varina and the John Deere headquarters in Cary, NC.

The Florida GCSA participants, all assistant superintendents, were Sullivan Murphy, from Quail Ridge Country Club (Palm Beach GCSA); Drew Nottenkamper, from Riviera Country Club (South Florida GCSA); Louis Eckhart, from Tranquilo Golf Club at Four Seasons Resort Orlando (Central Florida GCSA); and Nicolas Garibay, from The Venice Golf and Country Club (Sun Coast GCSA).

Through hands-on learning activities, networking opportunities, panelist presentations and breakout sessions, Green Start Academy attendees learn from like-minded peers as well as top industry professionals in career development, turfgrass science and general management.

"For years, Green Start Academy has been recognized as a premier experience for assistant superintendents looking to build strong careers," says Ren Wilkes, marketing manager for John Deere Golf. "Cultivating the leaders of tomorrow is critical not only for the impressive professionals that attend this event, but for the industry as a whole. With each new class of graduates, we become even more proud to support this unique development program."

PBI-Gordon Names New FL Sales Head

Matt Ayala

Employee-owners of PBI-Gordon announced that Matt Ayala has joined the company's sales team as Florida manager. Based in Fort Myers, Ayala is responsible for PBI-Gordon product sales to golf course and turfgrass management customers in Florida and the Caribbean.

Ayala takes over the sales territory from long-time PBI-Gordon representative Tim Allen. Allen has been a member of the Florida, Alabama and Mississippi Turfgrass Associations and is retiring this fall.

Ayala comes to PBI-Gordon from SePRO Corporation, where he served as sales manager for the turf and landscape markets in western Florida. He is a certified pesticide operator and alumnus of the University of Central Florida.

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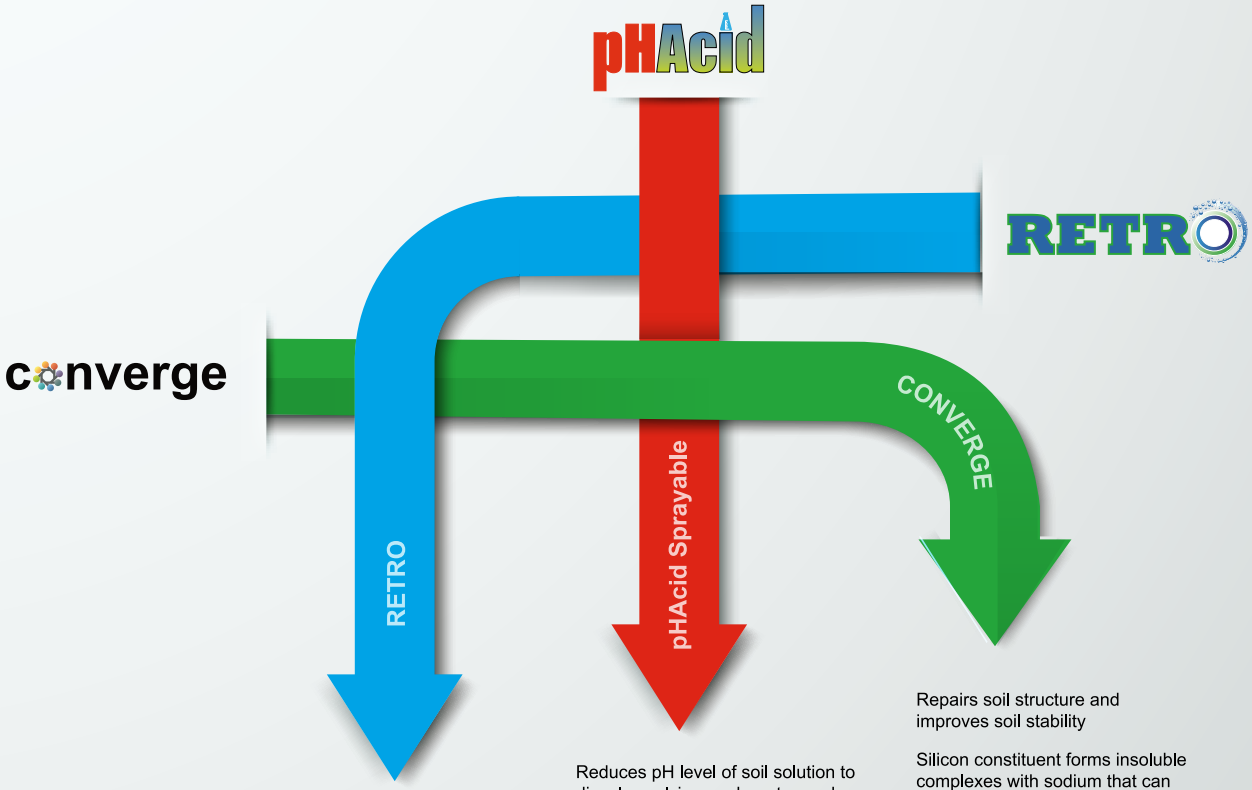

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Moments in the Hot Seat Lead to Decade of Reward

Ralph Dain, CGCS

Sitting in an oversized chair that had a little too much recline in it, I remember my heart racing. I had to keep my feet squarely planted on the floor in front of me or risk my seat slinging backwards. With sweaty palms, I answered the barrage of questions being hurled at me from the six interviewers sitting across from me in the GCSAA board room. This was the easy part of the process.

In less than an hour, I would give a presentation to department leaders and various staff members on membership recruitment and retention. All the moisture in my body must have exited through my palms earlier because when it came time to speak, my mouth felt like sand. Even so, things went well that day in the auditorium, and I remember feeling pretty jazzed up afterwards.

I believed I had a chance to join what I thought to be one of the best teams ever. I so wanted to be selected as part of the staff at GCSAA and work alongside the professional men and women who serve our 18,000 members daily. That was the scene 10 years ago this month as I was selected to become the first "in the field" GCSAA regional representative.

There have been many great moments since and many wonderful people with whom I have had the opportunity to work. The GCSAA board, staff, all the members, and our industry partners have made this job what it is. I am grateful for the opportunity to be in the position I am.

The staff at GCSAA is comprised of professionals totally dedicated to making our members successful. Our chapter outreach team is led by Steve Randall. You could not ask for a better role model. He provides our entire team with guidance and valuable insights. I take great pleasure in working alongside him, Leann Cooper and the rest of the field staff team that has grown stronger with every individual we have brought into the fold.

We have enjoyed great success delivering GCSAA programs and services to our members through the chapters and in individual site visits. Members that have had the opportunity to visit GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, KS can attest to the benefits of their membership. It becomes tangible for them.

Through field staff, we strive to bring those same benefits to our members regionally with a level of professionalism paralleling that at headquarters. Our interactions are intended to strengthen the bond between GCSAA, the local chapters and the individual member creating a sense of "we."

It has been a rewarding decade but truthfully my eyes are on the future as we continue to develop programs and services designed to promote and advance the superintendent profession. Our education continues to diversify and grow stronger with new offerings for all classes of membership. Currently, for both assistant superintendents and turf equipment technicians, there is an emphasis on certificate programs designed to elevate these individuals and make them an even more valuable asset at their facility. I am confident that GCSAA education will continue to be a cornerstone for members' professional development far into the future.

GCSAA advocacy through the government affairs department has grown exponentially. The tireless work across the nation to battle actions that may negatively impact the industry continues. The development of the Grassroots Ambassador program and the increased presence and success of National Golf Day are but two examples of how GCSAA's reach has expanded in this realm.

Strategic planning sessions we conduct with chapters provide an outstanding opportunity to strengthen the bonds between GCSAA, the chapter and members as goals are established for the betterment of the chapter. If it has been a while since your chapter has participated in a strategic planning session, I would encourage you to contact us and pursue this opportunity.

Field staff will continue to provide two-way communication between the local chapters and the national association as well as work with all members to ensure that they are getting the most out of their membership. We are here for you.

I am excited for the future at GCSAA. I am also confident that over the next 10 years we will execute our mission to serve our members, advance the profession and enhance the enjoyment, growth and vitality of the game of golf. I thank all of you for making the past 10 years as personally enriching as any in my career, and I look forward to giving back to you as we move together into the future. ■

- Ralph Dain is GCSAA regional representative in Florida. You can reach him at (785) 424-4306 or rdain@gcsaa.org.

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