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# Pines, Palms, and Pennncross



## **Bent Pine Golf Club**

*Vero Beach*

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

In the late 1970s several farsighted members of the John's Island Club in Vero Beach realized that the continued growth of their community would create overcrowding on their courses. They seized the opportunity to purchase and develop a tract of land just west of town. Their vision became a reality when the Indian River Country Club opened in 1978. A few years later the named changed to the current Bent Pine Golf Club.





Number 15

## Year-round bentgrass putting surface over a Tifdwarf bermuda base

### *Bent Pine Golf Club*

PHOTOS BY DAN ZELAZEK

*Continued from previous page*

The club is situated on the western flank of the great sand ridge that runs along Florida's east coast. This ridge is home to other well-known area courses like John's Island West, Hawks Nest, and Sandridge GC that lie just to the north and east of Bent Pine. The native vegetation ranges from pines and palmetto woods on the east side to a prairie/floodplain dotted with cabbage palms and wax myrtles to the west. Indian River citrus groves and CIBA's Vero Beach Research Center can be found north and west of the property.

The Bent Pine Golf Club falls into that group of private clubs that maintain a year-round bentgrass putting surface over a Tifdwarf bermuda base.

"June is the worst month for us," says superintendent, Scott Bell, "I tell the members that June is a great month to take a trip! Almost 90 per cent of the membership is gone by then anyhow."

"A busy day for us in the summer months is maybe 20 to 30 players. They know our post-season renovation is always the first week in June. That signals the time when we tend to lose patches of bentgrass on five or six of our greens."

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# 'The greens that are out in the open are quite healthy'



Number 14 from green to tee.

***“Contrary to popular belief we do not raise our height of cut very much in the summer. I feel the taller cut creates a micro-climate more conducive to disease than the shorter cut...”***

The other 12 greens are pretty good all summer!”

Why try to keep the bentgrass all year?

Scott explains, “It dawned on me one summer a few years ago when Tim Hiers declared he had finally gotten all of the bentgrass overseeding out of his John’s Island greens. It was August. I said, ‘Tim that’s great, but you’re going to be overseeding again in a month and a half.’ That’s when we decided to see if we could maintain the bent all year long.”

“These are not USGA greens but they were rebuilt in 1986 with 18 inches of 90-10 soil mix. The problem greens are the ones nestled in pockets in the trees which results in poor air circulation. We are going to try a couple of fans on the worst ones to see if they help prevent unwanted transition.

“The greens that are out in the open are quite healthy. The only other major problem in the summer is brown patch disease. I have been very happy with the control provided by a 16:1 mix of Daconil to Rubigan. We have also used Prostar 80 with good results.

“Contrary to popular belief we do not raise our height of cut very much in the summer. I feel the taller cut creates a micro-climate more conducive to disease than the shorter cut.

“We do back off on mowing frequency on the problem greens until the underlying host bermuda has re-established itself. That is the most trying time for me. No superintendent likes to see bare spots on his greens, but the



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members are very supportive and they appreciate the eight months of bentgrass greens that we produce for them."

Scott's fertility program is a recipe of spoon feeding that he has found to be quite successful even if it is labor intensive.

"We only apply granular fertilizer to the greens twice a year. We use Ringer's at 1 pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet. Every two weeks we apply a complete liquid fertilizer, Envirogreen, and on the off weeks we apply a low nitrogen high potassium liquid or a minors blend, usually with iron or manganese. The total nitrogen for the month will only run between 1/8 to 1/4 pound per thousand square feet during the peak bentgrass season."

"Like the other clubs that manage bentgrass, we have a special set of circumstances agreed upon by the members. They know we will have to endure a certain amount of transition in June and July, but again most of the members are

**"Like the other clubs that manage bentgrass, we have a special set of circumstances agreed upon by the members.**

gone. Bentgrass greens in Florida are not a reality for clubs with high-volume, year-round play!"

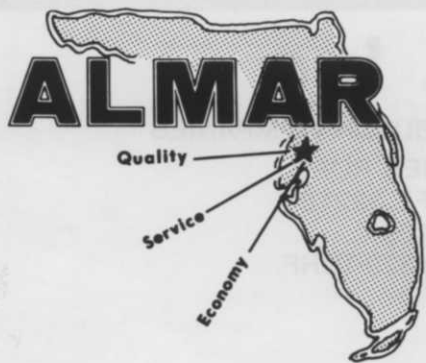
Scott acknowledges that other southern or Sunbelt states have bentgrass greens. Why then does Florida seem to struggle more with bentgrass?

"I firmly believe the unique difference is our latitude and the effect of the sun's angle, Scott explains. "We are exposed to

more relentless heat and humidity all summer than other locations. Other areas of the country do get hot and humid, but not for the same lengths of time. Our relationship to the equator guarantees our weather pretty much all summer!"

Forgetting the bentgrass for a moment, Scott and crew face the usual challenges of maintaining a golf course during a *wet* summer.

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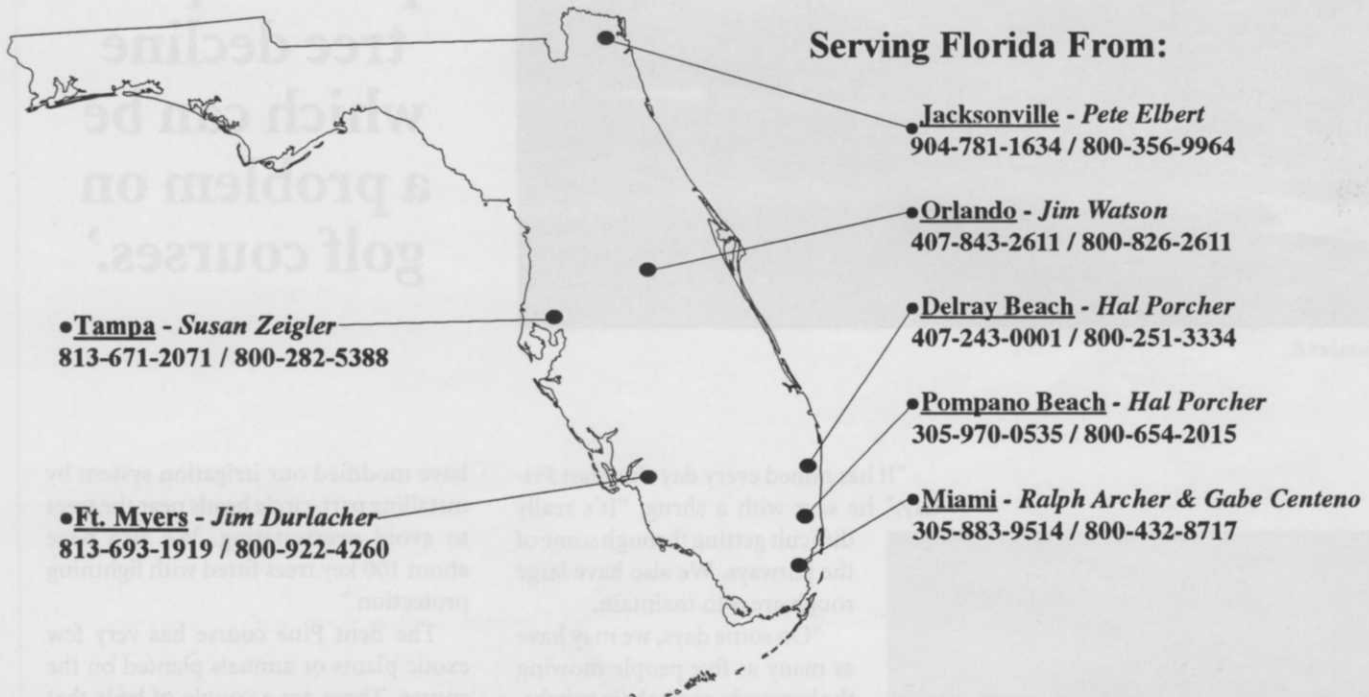
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Number 8.

*The Bent  
Pine course  
has very  
few exotic  
plants or  
annuals*

"It has rained every day since last Friday," he says with a shrug. "It's really difficult getting through some of the fairways. We also have large rough areas to maintain.

"On some days, we may have as many as five people mowing the bermuda and bahaia roughs. Last night we didn't get a lot of rain, but we had a pretty good windstorm as you will see. We only lost one tree, but we will have lots of pine needles to clean up before we can mow.

"You know what pine needles can do to those reel mower bearings!"

"We have begun a program to prevent pine tree decline which can be a problem on golf courses. We have created pine straw beds under groups of trees and around individual trees to help keep the pH more acidic, which they prefer.

It also keeps traffic off the root systems around the trees. The pine straw beds also give us a place to blow and scatter pine needles that we clean up after storms. We

**'We have begun a program to prevent pine tree decline which can be a problem on golf courses.'**

have modified our irrigation system by installing part-circle heads near the trees to avoid overwatering. We also have about 100 key trees fitted with lightning protection."

The Bent Pine course has very few exotic plants or annuals planted on the course. There are a couple of beds that are maintained during the winter, but they are allowed to lie fallow during the summer. The only exception is the clubhouse area which is accented with Washingtonia palms, flowering trees, shrubs and annuals.

There are also very few houses bordering the course, and these have generous set-backs and are screened with lots of landscaping to break up the roof lines.

As we rode around the course, I was envious of the very obvious lack of weeds. Scott says his herbicide program consists of a pre-emergent application of pendimethalin in mid-January each year for *Poa annua*. His timing must also catch the early germinating goosegrass and crabgrass. If he does have any problems in the warm season, he spot treats with MSMA.

Bent Pine also alters their routines and equipment during the year. In the