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*15th green. The Hamlet. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*



# It takes a village

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

Banyan trees marching down the medians of the roadways casting cool deep shadows as the aerial roots sway in the breeze seeking a new foothold. Sunlight filtering through pine needles and palm fronds. Bright and fragrant blossoms adorning the flowering trees, shrubs and annuals. Such were the sights greeting me as I turned into the entrance of The Hamlet this fine spring morning.



*Banyans, bottlebrush and pines surround the 2nd hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

This peaceful village of homes and golf course is located on an ancient sand dune in western Delray Beach, Florida. Blessed with well drained soils the flora and fauna flourish in this semi-tropical setting. The land for The Hamlet community was originally platted for condominiums. When instead it was developed for single family homes, there was an unprecedented spaciousness for the homesites, that now blend in unobtrusively with the mature golf course landscape.

Since 1973, The Hamlet Country Club, a design product of the legendary architect, Joe Lee, has been growing and changing with the times. In 1994, Lee was commissioned to oversee the renovation and rebuilding of the course. The members now enjoy improved greens, bunkers, tees and an expanded clubhouse.

Robin Goodell, an Ohio State agronomy/horticulture graduate, has

been the superintendent at The Hamlet for the past eight years. He is very pleased with the new greens and the other improvements, which allow him to deliver a better product for the members. "Our membership has been about 50% seasonal, but the number of year-round residents has been growing steadily. That was one of the key driving forces behind the renovation," said Goodell. "Normally, in the winter the overseeding masked the irregularities, mutations and contamination in the 22-year-old greens. With more people staying and playing in the summer months, they wanted to have the quality improved."

Robin and the Green Committee spent a long time searching and documenting the Tifdwarf variety selected for the greens. They finally settled on Georgia Certified Tifdwarf from Tifton Turf. They also decided on using Rapid Turf which is grown on plastic so a fully developed

root system is transplanted on the newly prepared greens soil mix. "One advantage I have seen with the Rapid Turf versus traditional field grown sod and sprigs is the lack of nematodes," said Goodell. "We have not treated the new greens for nematodes the past two years. In comparison, some field grown sod used on the greens surrounds were showing tell tale signs of spurge intrusions within the first year of installation. It is something to consider!"

Goodell continued, "There were some initial concerns about the encroachment of the more aggressive Tifway 419 into our new Dwarf collars and approaches. But, by having these wider dwarf perimeter areas around the greens, the members have come to appreciate that we can now manage these intrusions away from the greens and preserve the integrity of our putting surfaces.

Goodell, like so many others is sty-

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mied by the question of purity in the strains of bermudagrass the industry has depended on for nearly 30 years. “When I think back on some of the Ormond bermuda fairways at Doral and an Eveglades bermuda fairway I had at Miami Lakes I can’t recall any of the mutation and contamination problems we see today. I just wonder if the hybrid varieties are that stable over time?”

The maturity of the golf course poses other challenges for Goodell and the staff. “I believe that some trees that were planted at the inception of a new course were intended to be removed when their maturity began to cause problems later. When we were rebuilding one of the greens, we found a thick root mat intruding into the green from a ficus tree over 70 feet away. Within 18 months of cleaning out the roots and replanting the green they were back again causing stress to the green. We went back in and root pruned and installed bio-barrier to alleviate the problem.”

Another intrusion problem that has to be dealt with is the removal of thickets of brazilian pepper, an undesirable exotic that chokes out native plants. An aggressive program of removal and replanting with native and desirable species is a continuing project.

As we pulled up alongside one green, Goodell discussed his plans for managing an area of thin turf on the right slope. “This area has three things working against it. One, is the traffic pattern. The turf areas between the cart path and the front bunker and the walk off area between the greenside bunkers are too narrow. Two, this area is a low spot and holds too much moisture after rains. Three, there is too much shade from these trees for the St. Augustinegrass in the rough cut. Our solution will be: to put up some traffic control chain to get the carts on the path at the green; install a drain to carry off the excess water; and cut out the St. Augsutine and replace it with zoysia which is more shade tolerant.”

Besides managing new Tifwarf greens, the 23-year-old Tifway 419 fairways and roughs offers Goodell a challenge common to all superintendents. “The new



Hole #17 sports a new bulkhead as part of the 1994 renovation. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Hole #5 shows off many of the 100 bunkers that were rebuilt in 1994. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

growth regulator, Primo, has changed the face of summer golf in Florida! As one of my peers once said, ‘it used to be a battleground and a hayfield!’”

Goodell had an unusual and unexpected experience with his first Primo application of 1996. “We applied the Primo on a Thursday and Friday. It was starting to take effect over the weekend. Then we got a four inch downpour and nearly 48 hours of cloud cover. The wet conditions spawned an outbreak of *Helminthosporium* on the fairways, and with the Primo kicking in we couldn’t mow and grow out of it. You could see bright green blades looking down into the turf, but the tips were discolored for about two weeks. Now the members love how they look!”

“As you can see from our fact page, we don’t oversee anything but our greens. Some members expressed concerns over

the periods of cold weather discoloration during the winter, but they are now comparing our spring look with those area courses that are having some transition problems with bare spots. It is one of the superintendents biggest jobs to communicate to his members the pros and cons — the actions and reactions — of every process and procedure we employ. Sometimes, they need validation from another source and Joe Lee has been very helpful in that regard, explaining some of the results and performance expectations of the turf under different regimens.”

“Another aspect of The Hamlet’s organization is the key role my Green Chairman and Co-Chairman play in communicating with our members. Every member who joins the board serves for three years and that really helps in long range planning, continuity of effort and explaining reasons for changing conditions.

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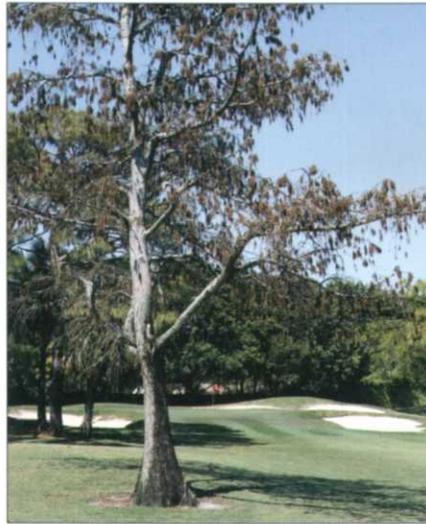
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*A cypress tree guarding the 7th hole is just one of a wide variety of trees and plants at The Hamlet. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

We stay in touch constantly to avoid any surprises."

While riding the course with Robin, I had the opportunity to watch a true professional in action as he introduced me to his crew, explaining who I was and what I was doing there that day. I watched him meet and greet member after member by name as we rode, and I marveled at how he could possibly remember the names and faces of several hundred people! I watched him give hands-on instruction to a crew member on how to accomplish the latest bunker lip modification. He spent a few minutes with Juan, the clubhouse gardener, asking how his recently ill father was doing. It was a good example of a person "walking the talk" of a leader.

"Honing your communication skills



is one of the most important aspects of being a professional no matter what the specialty. One fun thing I remember was the assistant superintendent at Muirfield when I worked there. He was a real "people person." Unless he was under pressure from a project or special event, he would

make it a point on his second tour of the course to spend a few minutes with each employee to see how they were, if they had any problems and how things were going. It satisfied an emotional need and kept folks upbeat! I believe that you inspire others by treating them the way you would like to be treated. Everyone likes to hear a compliment once in awhile. After all, your staff is made up of human beings!"

"Also, you need to be happy with what you accomplish. If you're not, then the members and the staff certainly won't be. You can't and won't please everyone all the time. That's why having a good relationship with your chairman is so important. I believe that setting high standards that exceed your members expectations will greatly improve your chances for success."

On this trip, I found it did indeed take a village to raise a superintendent. For him to grow and mature like the golf course. Like the village itself.

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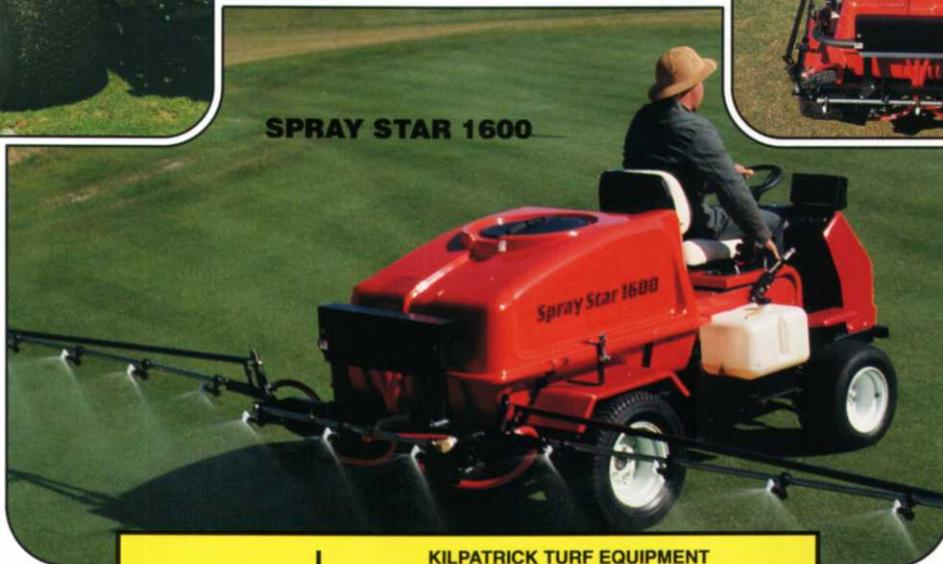


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*The Goodell family. Robin(left), Jodi(right), Jonathan and Christopher.*

## Robin Goodell

**Originally from:** Columbus, Ohio.

**Family:** Wife - Jodi Debra; Three year old twin boys - Jonathan Grant and Christopher Robin.

**Education:** Ohio State University - Bachelor's degree in Agronomy/Horticulture.

**Employment History:** 1988-present Superintendent, Hamlet C.C.; 1985-88 Superintendent, Royal Palm Yacht & C.C.; 1982-85 Superintendent, Miami Lakes Inn & C.C.; 1980-82 Assist. Supt. Doral Hotel and C.C.

**How did you get into the business?** Mr. John Oliver, Golf Pro taught me the game. When he also became the Superintendent, he hired me to help run the golf course.

**People in or out of the industry who have influenced your life and career:** Mr. Richard Lemmel gave me the opportunity at Doral to move to Florida. He also gave me the chance to learn and grow as a potential superintendent. My wife, Jodi, has always supported me in high and low times. She has been a terrific partner to grow and expand our lives.

**Memorable moments: Good, bad, humorous!** (1) The early mornings riding around a quiet golf course when the course feels and appears to be a total unified product. (2) Cutting a cup with the help of a real live snow monkey! The first golf course I worked on was next to the Columbus Zoo. A snow monkey had escaped and was living in the nearby woods. One morning I was cutting a cup when I turned around to find the monkey watching me from 10 feet away. After my initial surprise, he lost interest and wandered back into the woods. It was a different experience!

**Goals/Accomplishments:** (1) Working to help produce PGA Tournaments: The Memorial at Muirfield Village; the Doral/Ryder Open at Doral. (2) Building/rebuilding a golf course: the greens at Miami Lakes Inn & C.C.; renovating remodeling the Hamlet C.C. under the direction of legendary architect Joe Lee. (3) Want to expand my managerial skills to improve production in quantity and quality of our work. Continuing education in agronomy, horticulture and environmentalism.

**Personal philosophy of work and life:** Work - I have never envisioned my career as work, but rather a profession in which personal growth and learning should never stop. Growth and learning provide excitement and satisfaction that can be used to promote pride and confidence in your employees and yourself. Life - Always strive to find positives in anything you do. Life is too short not to take time to enjoy your accomplishments.

**Advice to prospective superintendents:** (1) Hone your communication skills! You win with people! Your employer and your employees! (2) Never stop learning! Only through learning from all people and situations can you enhance yourself to be a better professional and citizen.

**Professional affiliations:** PBCGCSA, FGCSA, FTGA, GCSAA.

**Hobbies & Interests:** The twins. Sailing my Hobie Cat. Golf!