Mr. Certification: Fellman leads 2nd course in Audubon

By MIKE JAMISON

LONGWOOD, Fla. — Adam Fellman can’t remember when he decided to become a golf course superintendent, but he knows exactly where his special relationship with the environment began. It all started, fittingly enough, at church. “My Dad was a Baptist minister, and I kept up the grounds at the church when I was younger,” said the 29-year-old native of Moultrie, Ga. “I really enjoyed that. That’s when I found out that maintenance was much more than mowing grass.”

Fellman is currently head superintendent at the semi-private The Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes, a new Tom Fazio design in this Taylor Woodrow Communities development just north of Orlando, which opened Sept. 1.

The Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes is a registered member of Audubon International’s Signature Cooperative Sanctuary Program, and the management expects full certification soon. That means, among other things, that the developer spent approximately $150,000 extra on construction and man hours to take special care of the natural environment. Audubon International has established enough standards and requirements to fill a pair of one-inch spiral notebooks, and the work, which starts at the very beginning of development, is monitored monthly throughout the life of the project.

Although Fellman is only seven years into his career, he has been the head superintendent at two of the first nine golf courses worldwide to achieve the Signature status. Prior to The Legacy Club, he was head superintendent at Champions Club, a Signature status club in south Florida.

Why go to that kind of expense and trouble? “Obviously there is the benefit of doing the right thing for the environment,” said Fellman, who majored in agronomy at the University of Georgia. “We also did it because of the recognition of being one of the top-notch semi-private facilities in the country. This goes hand-in-hand.”

Sarasota-based Taylor Woodrow Communities gave Fazio plenty of land on which to work, allowing ample natural buffer between fairways and homesites. As a result, two positive golf course qualities were born. Each hole became its own stage. On only one place in the routing is one hole completely visible from another. Nos. 9 and 18 share a tee, a lake and a stand of trees as they deliver golfers toward the clubhouse. The other holes are all framed by oaks and pines, wetlands and other natural areas.

Therein lies the second positive result of the land planning. The natural habitat, which includes 158 acres of wetlands, was left basically untouched. It’s one of the many reasons why The Legacy Club met stringent Audubon standards for Sig-

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Retiring circumstances for two famed supers

Dan Jones resigns his post in Florida for job as regional sales rep, while...

By MARK LESLIE

W EST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Golf course superintendents, especially in the South, are on a “collision course” with job pressures — pressures that are forcing them beyond their own personal capabilities, and pushing their turfgrass beyond its ability to survive.

That is the assessment of Dan Jones, who after 33 years has retired as a superintendent in Florida, where he once served as president of the Florida Turfgrass Association and South Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association (GCSAA).

The pressure on superintendents is getting more and more every day,” said Jones, who has left Banyan Golf Club here after 18 years of service to take on a position as sales representative for Toro Co.’s Liquid Ag Systems Inc. in Florida. “It’s like a locomotive gaining steam all the time. It has to be lower cuts, no weeds, perfect conditions, like Augusta National every day.

“Our job has gotten much more volatile in the last few years,” he added. “Twenty-five or 30 years ago, we used to do our jobs, which we take for granted. But today’s pressures are much different.”

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visit each other, and it was fun. The fun is going out of it now. The pressure is tremendous, and something has to give."

Burnout, Jones said, has become an increasing danger among superintendents. "I see even young superintendents getting burned out," he said. "I talk to superintendents in their 30s who say they won't last another five years."

The pressures for high maintenance, especially in the South, have increased to the breaking point in many instances, he said, adding: "Either you're preparing for overseeding, or you just finished overseeding, you're in transition, or have summer programs going on, or it's at the height of the winter season and all your members are here. The pressure is there all the time — one type of pressure after another."

The phenomenon, he said, began to take form 20 years ago and has skyrocketed in the last 10.

The demand for lower and lower-cut greens, the Augusta National manicured look seen on television, and high-tech equipment have all driven the locomotive faster, Jones said. "And now they're making titanium bedknives that can cut at .95 (1.25 equals 1/8 inch)."

"We're [superintendents] our own worst enemy," he acknowledged. "Manufacturers won't make anything we won't use. And, naturally, if we keep making the greens faster and faster, and practices like that, they are going to keep bringing out equipment that will give us what we want."

The pressure, Jones added, is driving superintendents from the profession and, in many cases, costing them their jobs.

Ninety percent of commercial salesmen in Southeast Florida, he said, are ex-superintendents, whereas years ago few were superintendents.

"Good superintendents," he said, "will try to give their members what they want, but it's killing them. They are being driven into the ground to produce more and more."

Jones said he recently visited a golf course that was "immaculate." Yet, the superintendent shortly thereafter was told to start looking for a job because members "had found a weed patch and thought the housekeeping was terrible," Jones said. "But it looked to me like he was ready for the U.S. Open. That's the kind of pressure superintendents are under now."

Jones's recommendation to superintendents?

"Go to a resort or public course," he said. "At a resort, they're happy just to have green grass. At Dorado Beach in St. Croix people come and play for a week and are happy."

His recommendation to the industry?

"I would say that golf is a game to be enjoyed. You can have as much fun, and probably more, putting on a green cut at 5/32nds as you can at 0.95, and on fairways cut at 5/8 instead of 3/8 inch. You can have a beautiful green golf course, enjoy it and still play the game great, too. Bobby Jones and Ben Hogan played on greens that we 'shaved' down to 3/16 inch and broke all kinds of records."

"The pendulum needs to swing back. We need to get back to basics again, grow healthy grass, let people enjoy doing their job and let golfers enjoy playing the golf course as it is."

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-- Dan Jones

In the meantime, the profession is losing one of its best, according to colleagues. "Dan is the consummate golf course superintendent," said Tim Hiers of Collier's Reserve in Naples. "I think as highly of him as anyone in the business. He's everything you would look for in a citizen, a superintendent, a pro-

Continued on next page
Westmoreland Country Club turf equipment technician Al Bitterman shows off his racing lawn-mower, which powered him to national runner-up in the U.S. Lawnmower Racing Association’s season-ending points race.

Westmoreland’s Bitterman Gets Honors

ROCKFORD, Ill. — Al Bitterman of Lake Zurich, Ill., a turf equipment technician at Westmoreland Country Club in Wilmette, Ill., finished the season in second place in points after the running of the Sta-Bil Nationals, a championship race for riding lawn mowers held at the Rockford Metrocentre here.

Bob Cleveland of Locust Grove, Ga., a designer for Snapper, won the championship race to lock up first place in the national points race. The field of 14 lawn mowers reached speeds exceeding 45 miles per hour. The races are sponsored by the Gold Eagle Co., makers of Sta-Bil Fuel Stabilizer, with proceeds benefiting the Les Turner ALS Foundation for Lou Gehrig’s Disease.

ARKANSAS TURF SHOW IN JAN.

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The Arkansas Turfgrass Association will host its 11th Annual Conference and Trade Show, Jan. 11-12, here at the Arkansas Statehouse Convention Center and the Arkansas’ Excellor Hotel.

Contact Angie McSwain at 501-664-8045, or write to Arkansas Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 250270, Little Rock, Ark. 72225-0270.

Jones leaves

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