

# FIDDLESTICKS COUNTRY CLUB

*Lou and Janet Conzelmann*

## TEAMING UP ON THE LONG MEAN AND THE WEE FRIENDLY

*by Sandra P. Carmouche*

Husband-wife teams are not very common in the golf course operations business, but at Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers, Dale "Lou" Conzelmann and his wife, Janet, have pooled their respective fields of knowledge into a combination that most golf clubs would envy.

Originally interested in becoming a golf pro (he'd been playing golf since he was ten), Lou worked as an assistant pro at several golf clubs, including Palm Aire in Pompano Beach. But after taking a job with a club where he worked both in the pro shop and on the golf course, he decided that he preferred turf management.

He then enrolled in the turf grass management program at Michigan State University and became a golf course superintendent. Janet was a registered nurse when she decided to go back to school. She also attended Michigan State, received a degree in horticulture, and was working toward her masters in plant pathology when the couple moved to Nebraska

"I was looking for someplace I wanted to live," said Lou.

"At the clubs up north, I worked on a ten month contract. When it got slow in the winter, I'd climb the walls."

When the opportunity to work for the Banyon Group at Fiddlesticks arose in May of 1985, Lou took it. "I love it here. This is a great place to live and I think the golf business in Florida is where it's really booming."

Conveniently located in South Fort Myers off Daniels Road near I-75, Fiddlesticks Country Club was developed around a Scottish theme. The three story clubhouse resembles a Scottish castle and incorporates plaid carpet, rich, oak paneling, and a fantastic view from the dining room and bar of the 9th and 18th island greens.

Two championship golf courses, the Long Mean and the Wee Friendly, were designed by golf course architect Ron Garl as part of the 710 acre golf community. One of the most celebrated residents of the community is Bobby Nichols, who represents Fiddlesticks on the

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Senior Pro Tour. And every March, Calvin Peete hosts a pro-am tournament for charity, which is sponsored by Coca Cola.

The Long Mean is ranked 13th this year in Golf Week Magazine's "Florida's 50 Best", which is the highest rating among golf courses in southwest Florida.

One of the dominant features on the Long Mean is the waste areas. "It's a unique look for the golf course and I feel it's important to have them look almost manicured, without having a lot of unwanted growth," Lou says.

The naturally sandy areas contain native plants which include love, fountain, and pampas grasses and sea oats. Lou is hoping to achieve a more clump-type appearance and, toward that end, the waste areas have been thinned out and Janet has bought seed for clump grasses which will be grown in the green house before planting.

But the notion that these waste areas are low maintenance is erroneous. "Because of their proximity to the fairway, they come into play frequently and you can't just let things grow wild. We spend about 60 man hours per week maintaining them."

While Lou is involved with maintaining the golf courses, Janet is managing the landscaping at Fiddlesticks.

"I design a few areas that need to be redone," Jan says, "but basically the landscaping requires maintenance. I plant about 30,000 annuals in the fall and about half that many in the summer."

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Janet Conzelmann at the entrance to Fiddlesticks.

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Not only is Janet responsible for the landscaping at Fiddlesticks, which includes entrance ways, medians, clubhouse and grounds, sales office, golf course, tennis and pool facilities, she also helps out with the landscaping at the Vintage Country Club, another golf community being developed by the Banyon Group.

When things don't move quickly enough for her at work, she gets involved in outside projects. For instance, when the Riverside school for the handicapped decided to renovate its outdoor recreational facilities, Janet volunteered her services for landscape planning, cost estimation, and advisement.

Having studied and worked in a northern climate, the move to a southern climate would appear to require a major adjustment where plants are concerned. But Janet dispels this idea. "A lot of the things that are grown outdoors here are grown indoors up north."

Likewise, the transition for Lou has been easy. "The cool season grasses are extremely susceptible to fungi disease. Anthracnos, brown patch, fusarium complex, dollar spot, the whole gamut; you had to be on a preventative spray program every two weeks. Here, the bermudagrass grows so fast that it outgrows the disease. But bermudagrass uses more nitrogen and fertilizer and is much more susceptible to insect infestation. Things like mole crickets weren't a problem up north because they couldn't survive the winter."

By far the biggest change for Lou was the difference in seasonal output. "Up north, you had three or four

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*L to R: Lou Conzelmann, Assistant Kevin Scott and Assistant Terry Wood, #5 Green Long Mean.*

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months when you weren't mowing grass. That time was spent repairing equipment. Down here you're going at it twelve months a year and the pace is faster. This is the fastest growing grass I've ever seen. In fact, I tell people if they stand still very long, it'll grow right over their feet."

Lou spends most of his time in the office at the maintenance complex. "At the clubs where I worked previously, I used to get out on a mower, I'd do anything just to see what was going on. But with ordering, billing, and all the paperwork that needs to be done, I haven't had the time to do that here. If I leave for an hour, I have 43 phone messages waiting for me when I get back."

"I have two great assistants," Lou adds. "Terry Wood is in charge of the Long Mean and Kevin Scott has the Wee Friendly. They've done an excellent job."

Lou splits his employees so that Wood and Scott each run their own crew. "But I'm on very good terms with all the employees. I try to satisfy their needs and wants and I don't come in here acting like I'm the big boss, yelling and screaming. I try to treat my employees the way I'd like to be treated."

In order to establish a good working relationship with the members of Fiddlesticks, Lou feels it is important to play golf with them. "It's the best way to make them aware of my programs and ideas, and I get to know them and find out what they want. That way, when we get together for a board meeting or a greens committee meeting, I don't have to go in there cold."

"The Banyon Group also has a Director of Golf Operations, Charlie Knowles. When the membership has a suggestion that require major effort, he makes the decision. but since this is a first-class operation, if the suggestion is worthwhile then we follow through with it."

But the question remains, how do two people who live together, work together?

They both laugh when asked this question.

"We enjoy working together," says Lou. "I don't consider myself to be her boss. She's very efficient and knowledgeable and she doesn't need to be told what to do or when to do it."

"Our working relationship was established before anything else," Janet adds. "We have the same interests and share employee problems. He has good taste in landscaping, which helps me. Lou is easy to get along with. He's a fair person, patient and intelligent. And we compliment each other. He's the relaxed person while I'm more busy."

It's understandable how Fiddlesticks is maintained in superior condition. The professional team of Conzelmann and Conzelmann make it so. ■

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