

# BONITA BAY CLUB:

## Black Makes It Green

By Sandra P. Carmouche

"Love what you do!" This, according to golf course superintendent Mark Black, is the most essential ingredient for success.

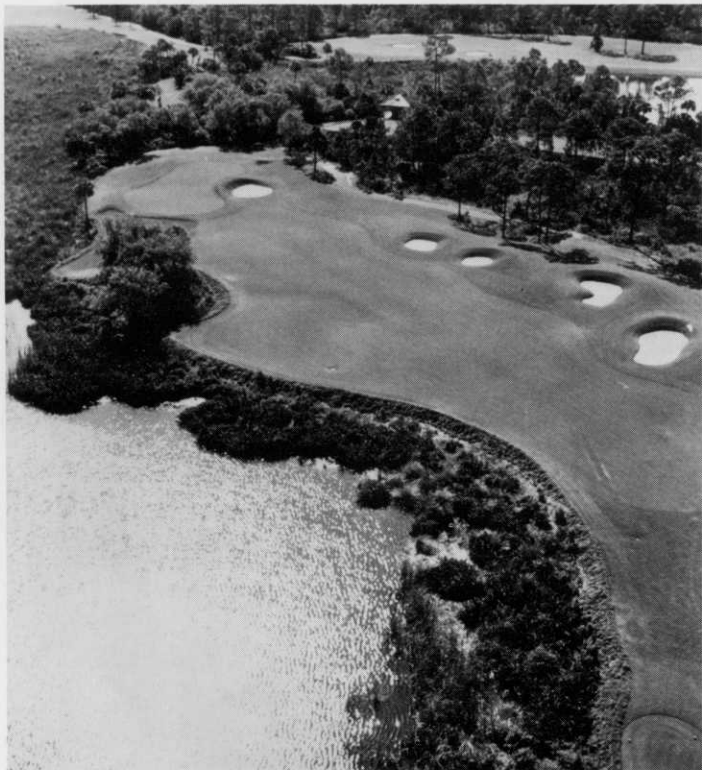
The simple philosophy has paid off for Black, who began his third year as a golf course superintendent in February of this year.

Bonita Bay, the 18-hole championship golf course that he maintains, was ranked 19th in the annual "Florida's 50 Best" by *Florida Golfweek* magazine. This is exceptionally noteworthy because the course was less than one year old.

Since it received the highest ranking among first-year courses in 1985, Bonita Bay's golf course architect, Art Hills, was awarded "Architect of the Year" by *Florida Golfweek*.

These are impressive achievements for a superintendent who discovered the profession "completely by accident".

"My original intention was to go to the University of Florida and get a degree in Ornamental Horticulture," says



Golf course architect, Arthur Hills, was recently honored by *Florida Golfweek* magazine as "Architect of the Year." Hills received this award in recognition of his design of the championship 18-hole golf course at Bonita Bay Club, ranked 19th in the magazine's selection of "Florida's 50 Best." An aerial view of the 13th hole is shown.

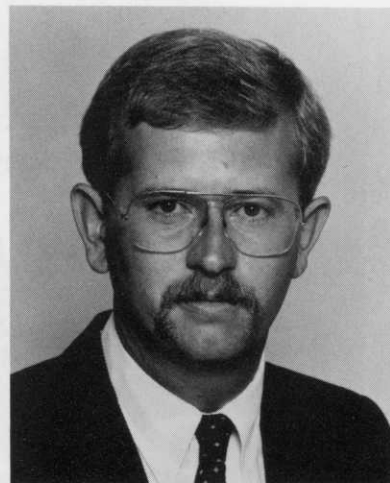


Photo of Mark Black: Black's enthusiasm for his work is reflected by the outstanding condition of the course.

Black, a native of Lake Wales, Florida. "I had five years experience in the nursery business which led me in that direction."

"In 1975 I moved to Orlando," he continued. "I was looking for work when I drove past a sign that said Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club. I didn't think they needed any help, but I turned around, went in and got a job with the golf course maintenance staff. And I just fell in love with it."

A year later, Black went on to receive his Associate of Science degree from Lake City Community College where he majored in Golf Course Operations. In 1980 he landed his first position as assistant superintendent for Dan Hall at Imperial Golf Club in Naples.

"I was very fortunate, being so new in the business, to get a job with Dan," he remarked. "He is a very knowledgeable man."

Black spent four years at Imperial before accepting his present position at Bonita Bay.

"It's very ironic. At one time I entertained thoughts of moving back to Lake Wales. This piece of property (Bonita Bay) reminds me very much of that area."

Located in Bonita Springs, midway between Naples and Fort Myers along U.S. 41, the Bonita Bay community encompasses a unique variety of topographical features. Pine ridges, reminiscent of those found in north and central Florida, give way to marshlands and soughs as the property slopes from 13 to two feet above sea level.

Three separate bodies of water border the project; Spring  
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Creek to the north, the Imperial River on the south, and Estero Bay to the west.

The community was years in the planning stage before ground was broken and every effort was made to protect the natural environment. Even homeowners are required to retain 50% of their lawns in native vegetation.

As a result of the special emphasis placed on preserving the natural environment throughout the 2400-acre development, the Bonita Bay Water management System was one of 14 projects in the nation to be nominated for the Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement Award in 1986, sponsored by the American Society of Civil Engineers. Bonita Bay Water Management System was developed by the engineering, surveying, and planning firm of Wilson, Miller, Barton, Soll and Peek, Inc.

For the golf course, which was built by Wadsworth, the protective measures meant an irrigation system that covers primarily turfgrass areas. Drainage was designed to follow the historical flow of water into a slough, which has been left undisturbed. Telephone poles, used as a foundation for the wooden cart path that bridges the slough, were carried in by hand to prevent any unnecessary destruction of the natural habitat.

Although the environmental safeguards implemented at Bonita Bay required extensive planning and tremendous effort, the results are gratifying.

Golfers who play the course are treated to a panoramic

view that only nature could construct. A large marsh and a sea of cattails separate and define the 11th and 16th holes. To the left of number six fairway, a willow island is surrounded by a man-made lake. Fairway berms create an aesthetic, multilevel playing surface throughout the course.

For Black, building the course was, "the most exciting period of my life.

"We have good turf and I believe this is due to the fact that we worked so hard during construction to eliminate many of the problems you find on some existing golf courses."

But being a new superintendent isn't always easy and Black admits, "sometimes it's hard to know when to stick to your guns."

During construction, the percolation tests on the greens came back at eight inches per hour. Everyone was ready to grass. But due to the excessive amount of rainfall in Florida, which demands faster draining greens, Black refused to give in to pressure and waited until test results showed a percolation rate of just over 12 inches per hour.

With construction complete and the course open for play, Black says his objective now, "is to be tournament ready everyday."

This goal has obviously been accomplished. The quality of turf is clearly outstanding.

Black attributes this to several factors. "For one thing, I  
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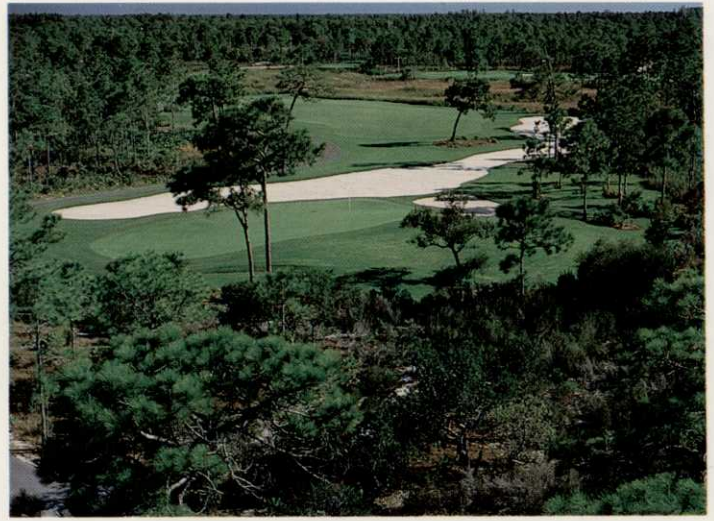
View of hole number two. Undisturbed marshes create an aura of natural beauty at Bonita Bay.

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use as little water as possible. I feel bermudagrass tends to like it on the dry side.”

He also gives credit to his excellent staff and, in particular, his assistant, Randy Godfrey, and his equipment technician, Herb Carlson. “The key to success in management,” Black feels, “is to surround yourself with good people.”

Although he makes the decisions concerning cultural practices, Black leaves the direction of his staff to Godfrey. In this way, the crew answers to only one person.



Slash pines are among the variety of native vegetation found at Bonita Bay. Shown here is hole number three.

Black also believes that by explaining the purpose of cultural practices to his crew, he gets better performances from them. He insists on details, for instance, the “black line,” as he calls it, that denotes the perimeters of the greens, fairways, and tees. “It’s like an exclamation point, it says something.”

And the excellent condition of Bonita Bay says something about Black’s enthusiasm for his work. “In this business, you’ve got everything; administration, management, agronomy . . . I have yet to get up in the morning and not want to come to work.” ■

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