

THE PLANTATION GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

Ed Fatica, C.G.C.S. — Pound For Pound

By Sandra P. Carmouche

There's a saying among the plantation's members concerning their golf course superintendent, Ed Fatica: "Pound for pound, he's the longest around."

The statement is made both in jest (Fatica might weigh in at 115 pounds on a good day) and with a great deal of respect. Fatica can really blast them off the tee. "I never saw such a little guy hit the ball such a long way," quips one member. Indeed, while riding around the Plantation's Bobcat course, Fatica receives several invitations to round out a foursome. There are also dinner invitations and requests for Fatica to "stop by sometime."

Clearly the members at the Plantation hold Fatica in high regard. "I've been here four years now so I know them all," says Fatica. "They really are great and I enjoy them."

Yet, just knowing the members and being a good golfer isn't enough to elicit the kind of affection that Fatica receives from his members.

In fact, Fatica's success is the result of his constant attention to how course conditions will affect the member's game and long hours on the job.

"Most of the people here have their private country clubs up north, so they're used to being treated right. And they're down here to have a good time. They don't care if it rained five inches yesterday. If the sun is shining today, they want to play golf. They don't want to hear that the course is closed because it's too wet. So I just get out there and rope it off."

Then there are the special touches that Fatica uses to enhance play for the members. For example, during a tournament he used poinsettias as the ladies tee markers. He planted annual beds on the 15th tee to separate different tee placements. And on the twelfth hole of the Bobcat course, he built a small putting green in front of the tee where golfers can practice when play is slow.

The putting green idea works so well that Fatica decided to add one to the 12th hole of the Plantation's new \$3 million Panther course, which is scheduled to open in the spring of 1987.

"It's something to relieve the tension of just sitting in that cart when you know you've got two groups in front of you. Now you can chip and putt."

Located on Florida's West Coast, three miles south of Venice on U.S. 41, the Plantation's relaxed, yet active atmosphere is not something that just happened.

According to Kathy McEachran, sales manager at the Plantation, "It's an atmosphere that we made a conscious effort toward creating. We've used Bermuda-style architecture because that's how we feel people up north envision Florida. And we've combined a variety of activities and amenities to create an upbeat community."

The Plantation's style of living includes condominiums, attached and detached villas, and single family homes. All exteriors are done in pastel colors and are within walking distance of pools. The clubhouse is also of Bermuda design with hanging baskets and beds of flowers decorating the veranda-type walkways. There are pineapples growing around the patio of the Golf & Racquet Grill while The Manor Restaurant offers outstanding cuisine. Activities include jogging and fitness trails, nine Har-Tru tennis courts, and, of course, golf.

Last year the Bobcat course was host to 60,000 rounds of golf, a good number by any standard.

"I've got lights on all my greens mowers because we have so many 8:15 shotgun starts," Fatica explains. "I put three mowers out when I mow tees. Everything has to be done quickly to beat the play because at 7:30 the gates open and I've got golfers teeing off on the first and tenth holes."

That the Bobcat has been ranked #26 in 1986 by Florida Golf Week Magazine is testament to Fatica's ability as a superintendent. With a degree in Landscape Design and Turf Maintenance from Alfred State in New York, he is well qualified to handle the landscaping around the clubhouse and golf course.

Then there is the construction of the new Panther course which Fatica, along with Director of Golf, Ted Beisler, is supervising. "This is really my first experience with construction," Fatica says, "but I've been around golf all my life (his father was a Golf Pro) and I've seen so many bad things; bad designs, bad cart path and tree placements, bad drainage. I feel confident with my knowledge."

Both the Bobcat and Panther courses were designed around a Scottish theme by golf course architect Ron Garl. Each course incorporates rolling hills (one of the man-made hills on the Bobcat is noted as the third highest elevation in Sarasota County), lakes, and natural terrain to create a chip-and-run game.

"Ron Garl is easy to work with and he's done an excellent job on the Panther," Fatica says. "This could be the best

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36-hole facility on the West Coast. And the 12th through the 15th holes on the Panther are going to be four of the best back-to-back holes in Florida.”

Ramar Group Companies, Inc., the developer of the Plantation is well known on Florida’s West Coast for its outstanding achievements in the development of environmentally sensitive land. “We had to do a tree survey on the Panther course,” says Fatica. “Every palm, oak, and pine tree above a three-inch caliper had to be shown on a map. Then we had to go down each fairway and note each tree that we were going to take out. I replanted a lot of trees from the middle of fairways to the sides.”

There’s also a natural slough into which all the water at the Plantation drains. While building the Panther course, 650 feet of the slough had to be bridged. “We had an environmentalist come out and check to be sure no sensitive plants would be disturbed.”

The result is a beautiful view of the slough’s natural habitat. “It’s a Ramar trademark,” says McEachran. “We really utilize the wilderness areas.”

While nature may have provided the Plantation with some beautiful settings, it hasn’t always been kind to Fatica.

During construction of the Panther, before sprigging was complete, eight inches of rain fell in a seven-day period. I’d just ride up and down the sidewalk and glance at it. The washouts were unbelievable, but at least I know which way the water is going to go and I know my drain-

age is good.”

Other than the rain, Fatica seems to be enjoying his involvement with construction. “I designed all the cart paths. I’d ride around on a cart, the way I would if I were golfing, and I’d stick flags in the ground as markers. Then the construction guys would dut them out and pour concrete.”

Fatica also had some input into the design of the new course. “It was nice because Ron Garl had enough confidence in me to know that I wouldn’t do anything that would be bad for the course. So far, he’s approved all my suggestions.”

Still, all the work adds up to long hours for Fatica. His day begins at 6 A.M. and doesn’t end until after 5 P.M. “First I go over to the Panther and see what’s being done and which contractors are coming in. I get them squared away and then I take a quick spin around the Bobcat and see what’s going on there.”

“It’s easy to do a good job for the members and guests when you work with dedicated people like Curt Conrad (assistant on the Bobcat) and Chip Copeman (assistant on the Panther). I work with my crew and I always try to see their side. If somebody needs a day off for a personal reason, it can be arranged. This golf course will be here tomorrow so it’s not that critical that everybody be here every second; as long as you have a few good people that you can trust.”

“Once a week, Curt and I will get out on the Bobcat and
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ride from tee to green. We'll bring a tape recorder and I'll list what needs to be done. Then I take the tape home, write it out, and give it to Curt. He checks the things off as he gets them done."

"I like the convenience," says Fatica about living at the Plantation, something that a lot of superintendents might feel reluctant about doing. "I am able to just run out and get things done. In the evening, Janet (his wife) and I will take the kids and ride around on a cart. I'll turn on the water and if I see anything wrong, I'll make a mental note of it and get it fixed the next morning."

Speaking of children, Fatica's oldest son, Pat, designed the Bobcat and Panther logos for the flags at the Plantation. At age 14, he is an excellent artist.

Every afternoon around four, after the crew has finished, Fatica heads over to the grill. And on Wednesday, when the men play, he has lunch with them. These are the times when he works at establishing a good rapport with his members. It is their chance to ask questions, give suggestions, or make complaints.

"I guess I'm just a glutton for punishment," he laughs, and then adds in a more serious tone, "Once in a while, somebody will get mad. But it's rare. I try to stay on top of everything because if the members and guests don't like it here, they can always go up the road."

That sentiment sums up Fatica's philosophy at the Plantation. And he really utilizes his abilities in golf and communication to make it work. ■

