

# Gainesville Country Club

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by LARRY KIEFFER





**W**hat happens when a new face takes over at an old-line club? Particularly when the superintendent you are replacing has been a popular fixture and a respected professional... and you have no choice but to make some obvious changes?

"It can be a challenge," says Jeff Hayden, 38-year-old superintendent at 64-year-old Gainesville Golf and Country Club, a very old club by Florida standards.

Hayden became the superintendent at Gainesville last May, just as the club's current 25-year-old, George Cobb-designed golf course was beginning to wear out.

It's a beautiful, mature course with wide, rolling fairways lined with huge, old oaks, excellent routing and very little water. Except for small ponds on four holes, the course can be played on the ground all the way.

"It had been very well maintained," Hayden says. "But no improvements were made as new techniques were developed. This course was built in the early 1960s and that's exactly how it was maintained and that's how it looks today.

"That's no reflection on my predecessor," he quickly adds. "He did what the members asked him to do."

Hayden, who has been in the business for 30 years (he started helping out of the

family-run golf course in Michigan at age 8), is reluctant to talk about problems of any kind.

Ask him about drought, freezes, ball marks or nematodes and he is likely to preface his answer with the comment, "Let's see how we can phrase this in a positive light . . ."

Ask him about political problems and he doesn't have any.

"I work for the members," Hayden says. "If I don't make sure that my first priority is to make those members happy, then I'm not doing my job. My most important concern is to be concerned about the members' priorities, not mine.

Ask him about drainage and he'll concede there is a slight challenge.

"We have to be careful how we phrase this," Hayden says. "I wouldn't want to create the impression that the course is wet all the time.

And he's right. Gainesville G&CC is an excellent private golf course that

supports more than 35,000 rounds a year from 500 members who are quite proud of their facility. Discussion of problems should be put into that perspective: even the finest hand-crafted automobile needs overhauling from time to time.

Still, no matter how it is phrased, Gainesville G&CC has a drainage problem. Particularly in summer, the course occasionally must be closed because of wet conditions. Closing the course even one day is more than the members would like.

Because the course is built on clay and water can't percolate directly into the underground aquifer, surface runoff must be directed into a lake bordering the property. That lake, in turn, overflows into Payne's Prairie, the huge wetland south of Gainesville that once was Florida's second-largest lake.

Some of the water won't move fast enough and, from some places, it won't move at all.

One problem is the greens and tees; another is the design and construction of the system of ponds, swales and ditches

that is supposed to carry the water off the property.

"The greens are in pretty good shape for 25-year-old greens built the way they were," Hayden says, "but they do need renovation."

"I wouldn't be surprised if they weren't just a bunch of dirt piled up," say Chuck Brasington, Gainesville G&CC head professional for the past 22 years.

Construction is not quite that unsophisticated, but Hayden has found that the drain tiles on at least one green simply end beneath the surface, about 30 yards from the green. The water had no place to go except to work its way up through the sod, creating a quagmire.

He solved the problem temporarily by cutting a small ditch from tile's end to the nearest swale.

"It's amazing how quickly Jeff won over the membership just by doing little things," says member John Hoce.

"Won over" might be too strong a word. Still, Hayden's predecessor had

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been very popular, particularly with the older members. When he left to tackle new challenges, his successor -- no matter who he was -- was going to have a tough time filling his shoes.

The situation was aggravated by the increasing influence of a younger generation of members who were not particularly happy with 1960s-style golf. So long as they had to replace their superintendent, they wanted the maintenance level upgraded to the 1990s at the same time.

"I'm sure he could have done it," say Hayden, speaking of his predecessor. "It's just that they never asked him to."

But if ever there were a superintendent prepared to step into that potentially hazardous political situation, it was Jeffrey Paul Hayden, a man with an impeccable course-management pedigree, outstanding credentials . . . and the added advantage of having served many of the members at a different facility a decade earlier.

Jeffrey is the son of John Hayden, famed superintendent of Augusta National GC. It was he who teased the magnolias into bloom at just the right time as the Masters Tournament developed into golf's biggest television show in the 1970s.

In the late '50s, however, the senior Hayden leased the nine-hole Diamond Lake Golf Course in Cassopolis, Mich.

"specifically because he thought teaching his children how to run a golf course was the best way to bring them up. He leased it and my sister and I worked it."

By the time he was 16, young Jeff "was pretty much running it, although you couldn't have called me the superintendent or the manager or anything like that."

He entered the local community college, dropped out and got drafted, serving three years in the U.S. Army, including a stint in Vietnam.

When he got out in 1972, he went to work as a laborer at Inverrary CC in Lauderhill. His stay was brief, however, because his dad found room for him at August National as an irrigation technician.

While at Augusta, Hayden met Dr. Gene Nutter, then head of the school of golf course operations at Lake City Community College. He entered Lake City in the fall of 1972 and, less than two years later, found himself superintendent at Beau Clerc TGC in Jacksonville while still finishing up his coursework for his associate of science in golf course operations.

"Dr. Nutter wasn't exactly thrilled about the situation, but he also recognized that it was too good an opportunity to pass up," Hayden says. "There are a lot of us today who owe a lot to that man."



*Jeff Hayden, superintendent.*

In 1977, Hayden accepted the challenge of growing in the golf course for a new private club to be built north of Gainesville, Turkey Creek. He stayed five years before moving on to ultra-posh and private Avila G&CC in Tampa.

"After five years at Avila, I decided that I needed to test some other waters and, if I was ever going to do it, that was the time," Hayden says. He became turf equipment sales manager in Florida for Lesco, Inc. in 1987.

## SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

**NAME:** Jeffrey Paul Hayden

**AGE:** 38

### EXPERIENCE:

Diamond Lake GC, Cassopolis, Mich. (9 holes, public) 1958-68; began as helper at family-leased golf course at age 8, was "pretty much running things" from age 16-18. Beau Clerc GC, Jacksonville (18, semi-private), superintendent 1974-77. Turkey Creek G&CC, Alachua (18, private), superintendent 1977-82. Avila CC, Tampa (18, private), superintendent 1982-87. Lesco Co. (turf maintenance

equipment), Tampa, Florida sales manager 1987-88. Gainesville G&CC, superintendent, 1988 - .

### RESPONSIBILITIES:

Golf course, grounds maintenance and landscaping. Total staff of 9 full time and 5 part time.

### PERSONAL:

Married (Sandra 1979) with one stepdaughter (Stephanie 16) and one son (Benjamin 8); hobbies are golf (12 handicap) and bass fishing.

### EDUCATION:

Associate of Science, Golf Course Operations, Lake City Community College, 1974.

### PROFESSIONAL:

Member of GCSAA, director Florida Turfgrass Association; member and past president of North Florida GCSA.

### PHILOSOPHY:

You've got to remember that the only reason you have this great job is because those members have paid a lot of money to play golf. No matter who you report to, ultimately the members are your boss. 🍏



*Photo by Larry Kieffer*  
 Jeff Hayden, left, and Chuck Brasington, head professional, discuss problems with spike marks on the green.

Interestingly enough, his assistant at Turkey Creek and successor at Avila was none other than current FGCSA President Cecil Johnston.

And it didn't take Hayden long to return to the profession of his breeding.

"I'm sure it was easier for me to come here than it would have been for almost anyone else because a lot of the members here were members at Turkey Creek when I was there. They knew what they were getting, and if they wanted me, well, I figured the situation would work out."

Hayden is the fourth member of the greens committee, which meets officially once every six weeks. He confers informally with one or both of the co-chairmen, John Darr and Bill Koons, at least once a week.

Gainesville G&CC has no general manager. Hayden, Brasington and Club Manager Betty Sauls each works directly

for a committee of members who serve at the pleasure of the club's president and board of directors. The three managers meet "at least to chat" two or three times a week.

"We are on the same team," Hayden says. "If we don't communicate, we won't know the signals."

The team concept is the way Hayden approaches management. He notes proudly that he had no turnover when he took over as superintendent "except for one person who was going to leave anyway."

"One of the first things I did was have a meeting with everybody and explain that we had to work as a team," he says. "I told them that I was the quarterback, but the quarterback can't do it without linemen, running backs, receivers and a defensive team. And they can't do it without the quarterback."

Hayden met with each of his full-time employees (now nine) and part-timers

## GAINESVILLE GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

### FACTS & FIGURES

#### LOCATION:

Southwest of Gainesville at southwest corner of I-75 and SR121 intersection.

#### DEVELOPER:

Members

#### MANAGEMENT:

Member-owned. Betty Saula, club manager; Chuck Brasington, head professional; Jeff Hayden, superintendent. Each works for a separate committee of members; greens committee co-chairmen are John Darr and Bill Koons.

#### SIZE & SCOPE:

Golf course occupies 190 acres. Single-family housing surrounding the golf course is not connected with club membership.

#### PLAYING POLICIES:

Strictly private for 500 members and occasional guests; open all year, 35,000-plus rounds per year. Annual Gator Pro-Am is only outside event.

#### COURSE ARCHITECT:

George Cobb

#### CONTRACTORS:

Unknown

#### TERRAIN:

Rolling to moderately hilly.

#### SOIL:

Clay

#### HISTORY:

Club founded in 1924, moved to current site in 1962. Golf course completed in spring of 1963. No remodeling or renovation since.

#### COURSE LENGTH:

5303 (rating 69.5, Slope 110) to 6800 (rating 72.1, Slope 120) yards.

#### TEES:

Most holes have two tee boxes, each with two sets of markers. Turf: Ormond bermudagrass cut to 3/8 inch, overseeded in winter with rye.



Jeff Hayden checks the ball washer on No. 17 tee, as seen from the tree-shaded cart path from No. 16 green. Not many courses can claim oaks as mature as these.

*Photo by Larry Kieffer*

**FAIRWAYS:**

Wide, rolling and tree-lined. Turf: Ormond bermudagrass cut to 1/2 inch; not overseeded.

**GREENS:**

Average 5,500 square feet (range 3,500 - 7,500). Stimpmeter averages 7.5-8.0. Turf: Tifton 328 bermudagrass cut to 3/16 inch; overseeded in winter with a mixture of rye and saber.

**ROUGHS:**

Ormond bermudagrass cut to about 1-1/4 inches; bahiagrass in some natural areas.

**TREES:**

Oak (several varieties) and pine.

**WATER:**

Four small ponds created during construction, each coming into play on only one hole. All are linked to drainage system.

**OTHER HAZARDS:**

67 bunkers filled with DOT sand; no transitional grasses.

**IRRIGATION:**

From deep wells out of Florida Aquifer through single-row system with laterals in landing areas; 288 sprinkler heads.

**DRAINAGE:**

Surface runoff into lake between golf course and Payne's Prairie.

**MAINTENANCE STAFF:**

9 full time, including one assistant superintendent and one mechanic; five part-time interns, including one mechanic, from Lake City Community College School of Golf Course Operations and the University of Florida.

**EQUIPMENT:**

Toro hydraulic valve & head system; 4 Toro triplex greensmowers; 1 Toro Parkmaster five-plex mower, 2 John Deere utility tractors; 2 Jacobsen utility tractors; 1 Massey-Ferguson back hoe; 1 Olathe sweeper.



*Azaleas in bloom shows natural beauty of Gainesville Country Club.*

(now five) to determine their professional goals and make sure they understood how to fit their goals with the goals of his department: to make each round of golf the most enjoyable round the member has ever had.

"I have a great crew," he says. "Once there is trust on both sides and each has confidence that the other guys will do their part, there aren't any employee problems.

All part-timers are student interns, either from Lake City or from nearby University of Florida. In addition, his assistant, Tom Grover, is completing his course work at Lake City.

"I enjoy teaching," Hayden says. "It's one of the nicest parts of the job. And working with the students has an added bonus -- it keeps me current with the latest developments in the field. I learn from them, too."

The opportunity to teach and take advantage of the two educational institutions are two of the side attractions of his current post.

"I like the atmosphere of a university town and all it has to offer," he says. "I haven't missed a Gator game in eight years."

Hayden's principal hobbies are golf and fishing. He hasn't had time to play since coming to Gainesville, even though he and his family have full membership privileges. (He and wife Sandra have two children, Stephanie, 16 and Benjamin, 8). He puts his game at "nine to 12" when he plays as often as he likes, which is once a week.

As for fishing, he likes to go after bass in natural lakes (as opposed to phosphate pits). He's taken in a seven-pounder. "I'm still looking for my first big one," he says. He recently was introduced to tarpon fishing, an activity he says could become habit-forming.

But maintaining the golf course occupies most of his time.

"I was raised on a golf course," he says. "The work ethic on the golf course is the way I grew up. I learned early how to be my own boss and establish a good

working relationship with the crew. This is really what I enjoy doing."

How is he going to handle the delicate problems with members as he sets about upgrading the maintenance level at Gainesville G&CC.

"There aren't any problems, really," he says. "Just challenges and solutions."

"The important thing is just to show them what I can do . . . just solve some little problems here and there. They know that some of the greens have to be redone. I think if I show them what can be done with the greens and tees on a couple holes, I won't have any problems setting up a long-term program."

"These are very easy people to get along with. You just have to remember that they paid their money to join this club to be away from their jobs and be with people they like. And they want to do it playing golf. It's my job to make golf pleasant for them."

"Nobody is going to get mad at me for doing that." 🍏

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