

In a water war, golf will come in second

The FGCSA's 1990 Distinguished Service Award winner believes water will determine which golf courses survive

BY KIT BRADSHAW

The future of Florida's golf courses may lie no further than your kitchen faucet. The availability of water will determine who builds courses and which established courses will survive.

This is the assessment of Kevin Downing, the FGCSA's Distinguished Service Award winner for 1990 and the property and landscape manager at Willoughby Golf Club in Stuart.

"For years, we've been at seminars where they've told us to reuse this and recycle that, and now it's come to pass," says Downing. "The water management districts, the cities and towns are going to reduce the amount of water that you can use on a course. If communities such as Jupiter and Tequesta, which are in a critical water situation, are looking at permits for drilling wells, they will use those wells for their own public drinking water, not for golf courses.

"There's a golf course just down the street from us that is in the permitting process right now. If they don't get effluent water, that party doesn't fly,"

Downing says. "There's another course which was allowed to put in two wells on the site. But when the new water treatment plant is

Distinguished Service Award

Every year, the FGCSA shall recognize a deserving FGCSA Superintendent who has performed outstanding achievements as a golf course superintendent and who has given his time unselfishly in promoting golf course management and unification of the Florida Golf Course Superintendent.

1985 ... William Wagner
1986 Tim Hiers
1987 Dan Jones
1988 Mark Jarrell
1989 Tom Burrows
1990 Kevin Downing



completed, the water from the wells gets transferred to the plant and the golf course gets back the effluent. If they couldn't make that swap, I don't think the project would have been built. Today, water is the number-one criterion for golf courses."

At Willoughby, Downing is aware that there will be no more well drilling to supply water to the course. He is already taking the necessary steps to use effluent on the course.

"When our project was permitted, we were approved for effluent but it wasn't available. Recently, I met with the City of Stuart on its effluent water situation, and we'll be signing a letter of intent shortly. In our situation, we'll pay for a prorated percentage of the cost of the plant improvement and for a percentage of the pipe to get it to the course. This will be built into the cost of the water. It will be expensive — about 40 cents a gallon — which will add \$35,000 to our budget.

Water, says Downing, is only one issue. One of the key problems for golf course superintendents is to get out the word on the positive aspects of golf courses.

"Effluent usage is only one way we help the environment. The GCSAA has a list of other things a golf course does to put oxygen back into the atmosphere, to percolate water, to provide natural habitats for wildlife — a whole list of things. Right here at Willoughby, we saved 40 acres for two families of scrub jays. There were sandhill cranes that stayed in one of the protected wetlands all during the course construction. Now the Canadian geese are here and they are nesting.

"People think that because we work with chemicals that we are harming the environment. We need to spread the word about the good we do. After all, we are right in the middle of the environmental crunch."

Downing's involvement with issues affecting golf courses and the environment go back to the early 1970s, shortly after his graduation from Lake City Community College. After working for a brief time at Doral Country Club, he went to Port LaBelle as the golf and property manager.

"I first became involved with the FGCSA when I was at Port LaBelle," Downing says. "It was so remote from the rest of the state that it was good to be able to meet with

other people in the profession and to keep in touch with what was going on."

He continued his involvement when he became superintendent at Atlantis Golf Club in Lake Worth, and during that time, he served as secretary-treasurer and vice president of the FGCSA.

In 1982, Downing moved to Mariner Sands in Stuart and that same year he was president of the FGCSA.

"Erling Speer was my boss at Mariner Sands — he's also one of the partners at Willoughby — and he encouraged me to

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stay active in the superintendents association."

For three years, Downing has been involved with the creation of the research green at Fort Lauderdale. He sees it as a perfect locale to test various products.

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During the same time Downing was working to help establish the research green, he also became involved in the initial planning of Willoughby.

"The collaboration with course designer

Art Hills from the beginning of the project had a tremendous impact on the eventual playability of the course. I wish that every golf course superintendent would have the same chance," Downing says.

Because of this collaboration, Downing was able to do several things:

He knew Willoughby's dues structure and eventual maintenance costs and was able to keep these costs in mind during the developmental stage of this project.

He was able to bring golf course superintendent Roy McDonald into the project early in the developmental stage.

Downing, Hills and McDonald were able to work actively to implement new policies required to preserve wetlands and drought prairies and to integrate these areas into the total look of the golf course.

He was able to work with the water management representatives to create a band of littoral zones near the golf course where the zones could be maintained, rather than near the homesites where the residents could damage them. As a result of this cooperation, the site plan was redrawn to satisfy both the water management representatives and the developer.

Downing and McDonald used xeriscape throughout Willoughby, with the goal of preserving water and using the right plants in the right location.

Finally, Downing says, his ability to interact with Hills during the planning process meant that the needs of his clients were considered in the development of the course.

"This is a residential, member community," Downing said. "We worked with Art Hills to make sure the homesites were located to capture a view of the course without interfering with the course design, and that the course itself was interesting and playable for our homeowners, who golf more than four times a week. As a result, we ended up with an enjoyable, playable course."

Downing estimates he spends half his time in property management and the other half overseeing the golf course.

"Having Roy McDonald here is a tremendous asset," Downing says. "I have a lot of confidence in his ability to take care of the golf course when I'm involved in other

parts of my job.”

Not only does Downing depend upon McDonald, but he has a small army of retirees who are the mainstay of his staff.

“I’ve always had the philosophy that it would be valuable to hire retired and semi-retired people. This is especially true on the east coast of Florida, where there’s more available personnel. I have about 10 people working here who are 55-plus. They are dependable, they do great things here. There is one man who worked with us at Mariner Sands. He puts up the mailboxes, changes the cups on the greens, does the barbeque for the crew when we have crew lunches. He even fixed Christmas dinner for us. You can’t beat that!

Downing says most of his members are between 55 and 65 themselves, which makes it more difficult to please everyone and having the older staff people has helped as well.

“We have a good rapport between the staff and the residents. I think part of it is that the residents like seeing some faces they can relate to rather than just always seeing younger staff members.”

Poa Annua Classic features two different courses

Buddy Carmouche, CGCS, president of the Everglades GCSA, reports that May 18-20 are the dates for the 1991 Poa Annua Classic weekend.

The Naples Beach Club once again will serve as headquarters for the majority of the weekend's activities, but this year the 17th annual Poa Annua Classic Golf Championship on Monday will be held at the Flamingo Island Club.

Golfing tradition will be observed at the Naples Beach Club GC when participants tee it up for the G.C. Horn Memorial Golf Tournament on Saturday afternoon.

Proceeds from this tournament are placed in the G.C. Horn Endowment Fund with the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation.

Funds raised by the other functions held over the weekend also are dedicated to educating superintendents and funding scholarships and research in the golf industry.

POA ANNUA SCHEDULE

Saturday, May 18

8:00 AM FGCSA Board of Directors meeting

12:30 PM G.C. Horn Memorial Golf Tournament, Naples Beach Hotel Golf Course

Sunday, May 19

7:30 AM FGCSA Seminar “The Thinking Superintendent,” a panel discussion on some of the best turf tips from around the state.

Monday, May 20

8:30 AM 17th Annual Poa Annua Golf Tournament at the Flamingo Island Club.

Registration materials were mailed out to the various chapters in March.

New Seven Rivers Chapter to serve northwest-central

The Seven Rivers Chapter is being formed to serve the area north of the West Coast Chapter and south of the Big Bend Chapter. It will draw members principally from Alachua, Citrus, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hernando, Lake, Levy, Marion, Pasco and Sumpter

counties.

While the new chapter will take some current members from the North Florida, Central Florida and West Coast chapters, it will bring new members into the participation process and reduce travel time for some members who were having to drive great distances to attend meetings.

With the growth of some of the chapters, it will probably help in finding meeting sites by spreading out a little.

Al Ellis, superintendent of the Seven Rivers CC, is the membership chairman of the new chapter. Superintendents in the area can contact him at (904) 795-6665 or P.O. Box 1146, Crystal River, FL 32629.

South Fla. Expo April 17 features Dr. Houston Couch

The Fourth Annual South Florida Turfgrass Workshop and Exposition is scheduled for April 17 at the Rolling Hills Resort in Fort Lauderdale from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Featured speaker is Dr. Houston Couch of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and a veteran GCSAA seminar instructor with a wealth of knowledge to share about fungicide tank mixes and application techniques.

Product displays and equipment demonstrations under working conditions will follow the workshop.

