

# The Oak Bridge

*If you can  
score on this  
course, you  
can play the  
game of golf.*

— Eddie Snipes, CGCS



## Superb design in water and sand

BY LARRY KIEFFER

**W**hen Eddie Snipes landed a \$2.50-an-hour job as a laborer with the city of Jacksonville Beach in June 1974, he just wanted to support himself while completing a degree in psychology at the University of North Florida.

“I’ll never forget my first day,” he says. “I was standing there and this guy drove up in a pickup truck and asked me if I knew what a tee was. I said I wasn’t sure. Then he asked me if I knew what a green was and I said I thought so.”

“‘Then why do you want to want to work on a golf course?’ he asked. ‘I didn’t know that’s where the job was when I applied for it,’ I replied.”

That was Snipes’s introduction to golf and John Hayden, a winner of the 1991 President’s Award for lifetime achievement



# Challenge —



**Photos by Brian Everhart**

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as a golf course superintendent. Hayden was superintendent of the Jacksonville Beach Municipal Golf Course and he became Snipes's mentor.

"My first job was to ride around the course in the back of a '63 Dodge pickup truck with another guy and rake all the traps by hand," he recalls. "They wouldn't even let me drive the truck."

And now Eddie Snipes, CGCS, is well into his third year as superintendent of the Oak Bridge Club, one of the posh, private Arvida clubs at Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach and host of the 1992 GCSAA Championship.

From hand-raking the traps, Snipes "picked up on things and sort of became the utility guy — I could do just about anything that needed to be done." He was the course mechanic when he left Jacksonville Beach Muni after four and a half years.

He'd also learned how to play golf with the help of a set of Hogan Apex clubs he bought for \$60 "from a guy who sold them out of the back seat of his car."

"I'm one of the people who enjoy golf strictly for the sake of playing a game and being out of doors," says Snipes, who lists golf as his principal leisure activity. An achilles tendon injury early this year ended a budding career in flag football.

"I guess I'll concentrate on being a good father and uncle," he says.

When Hayden became superintendent at San Jose Golf Club in Jacksonville in 1977, Snipes went with him as "utility man."

## Oak Bridge Golf Club

**Ownership:** Arvida/JMB Partners.

**Playing Policies:** Private; 28,000 rounds a year (some tee times reserved for guests at Marriott Resort)

**Design & Construction:** Original design by Bill Amick in late 1960s. Renovated in 1987 by Ed Seay and Eighteen Construction. 6,383 yards from back tees; par 69, course rating 70.3, slope 126.

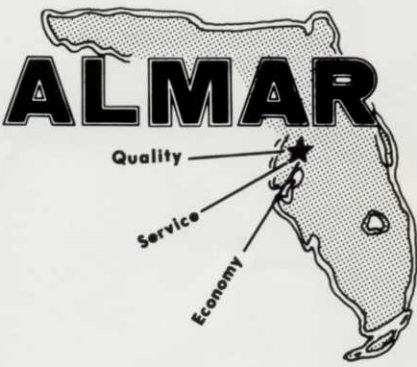
**Turf:** Greens average 4,000 square feet, Tifdwarf overseeded with poa trivialis and bentgrass (14:1); tees and fairways (28 acres) in Tifton 419 bermudagrass overseeded with perennial rye; roughs in Tifton 419 maintained at 1½ inch.

**Hazards:** 72 sand bunkers; water from one lake and meandering canal comes into play on 13 holes.

**Irrigation:** Toro Vari-Time II electric system with "about 600" heads. Source is treated effluent.

**Maintenance crew:** 14 including superintendent, assistant, mechanic, two landscape technicians, spray technician, irrigation technician.

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When Snipes was graduated from UNF with a B.A. in psychology in 1978, Hayden offered him the job as assistant superintendent.

"I had thought I was going to make a career in criminal justice, possibly counseling offenders, but as I talked to people

in that field, it seemed to me that they weren't getting much accomplished. Most of their time was spent pushing papers around, documenting facts."

He accepted Hayden's offer and has never regretted the decision.

In 1983, he became superintendent at

Selva Marina CC and on July 17, 1989 — two months after earning his certification — he took over at Oak Bridge.

"This is a great golf course," Snipes says with unabashed pride of the course designed by Bill Amick in the late 1960s and redesigned by Ed Seay in 1987. "If



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you can score on this course, you can play the game of golf.”

Although it's short — 6,383 from the tips — the course carries a USGA course rating of 70.3 and a slope of 126.

“The front nine is pretty straightforward, but you'd better not go to sleep,” Snipes says. “You'd better be conscious when you make the turn because the back side comprises the best nine holes of golf I've ever played.”

Two holes — the par-five 11th and par-three 17th — were included in North Florida's “Dream 18” selected by the *Florida Times-Union*, Jacksonville's daily newspaper. Keep in mind that the area includes the likes of The Ravines, Amelia Island Plantation, the TPC and several other famous courses.

Speaking of the neighboring TPC, also part of the Sawgrass complex, superintendent Fred Klauk, a perennial member of the Florida team in the annual GCSAA Championship, is club champion at Oak Bridge.

The challenge at Oak Bridge comes from two factors common to Florida courses but more abundant here than at most: sand and water. The course sports 72 bunkers and water comes into play on 13 holes.

If the golf challenge is typical of Florida, the maintenance challenge isn't. The high organic clay soil of the area limits percolation.

“Water management is a real challenge,” he says. “In winter, it can become a nightmare, especially with our shady greens and fairways. It takes minimal amounts of rain to really get water moving and since seven-eighths of this place is surrounded by water, we have to be extremely careful when we spray anything.”

Even if water movement weren't a problem, however, Snipes says he is “not one to spray just for the sake of spraying. I try to use a minimum of chemicals and wait until there is something we really need to go after and can't get at it any other way.”

“Just because the label says you *can* spray every 14 days doesn't mean you *have to*,” he says. “Often a mechanical or cultural treatment will do just as well.”

To help combat the problems created



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by his unique soil conditions, Snipes double-spikes the greens weekly in winter and runs a light topdressing program through the spring.

Oak Bridge is irrigated with treated effluent it gets free from the St. Johns Utility Service. In fact, Arvida's contract with the service requires it to provide a means of disposing of all wastewater created by its developments.

“I think (FGCSA President) Tom Benefield has hit the nail on the head with his campaign against charging golf courses for using treated effluent water,” Snipes says. “It's double taxation.”

Snipes manages the golf course with a crew of 14, counting himself. He reports to General Manager David Glass, who also supervises Arvida's Jacksonville Golf and Country Club and a beach club.

Although managing Oak Bridge is

challenging, Snipes wouldn't have it any other way.

“I like the nature of this beast,” he says. “This job gives you everything you could want — challenge, responsibility, opportunity for leadership. Every day I learn something and I'm an educator at the same time.”

“This job is a life style. You give up your weekends and holidays but it makes you a more complete person.”

“Sometimes, when I'm riding the course in the afternoon before going home, a group of members — often a family — will flag me down and tell me how much they appreciate what we do.”

“To see them out there enjoying something you have helped produce — how could you have a greater reward than that?”