

Hole #11



Photos by Brian Everhart

Winter Pines Golf Course

A good, everyday golf course for good, everyday golfers

BY LARRY KIEFFER

Joe Ondo, CGCS, is a working superintendent.

With four full-time employees and three part-timers, he maintains the 18-hole, 5,400-yard Winter Pines Golf Course, a par-67 public facility that gets 90,000 rounds a year. He's a part-time mechanic and sprayer technician, and a full-time member of the crew.

And he wouldn't have it any other way.

"Everybody can't be at the prestigious places," says the 39-year-old Ohio native and 1975 graduate of Lake City Commu-

nity College's School of Golf Course Operations.

"I enjoy not having to be in the office all day. I not only get to see my golf course up close and personal every day, I get the chance to do something about it. You see things when you're riding the sprayer that you wouldn't see while making an inspection tour.

"What we have is a good, everyday golf course for good, everyday golfers."

And Ondo, with a three handicap and several state championships under his belt, is a pretty good everyday golfer himself. He learned to play golf at 15, when a public course, Bronzwood

Golf Club owned by James and Natalie Bronson, was constructed across the street from his Kinsman, Ohio, home.

Kinsman is about 50 miles east of Cleveland and not much further southwest of Erie, Pa., home of the current Winter Pines owners.

After watching the course grow in, Joe and his dad thought golf might be fun. So they walked across the street and tried it. They liked it... and became pretty good at it.

The Bronsons's son, Carl, was Joe's age. Soon the two teenagers were tearing up the local junior tournaments.

After high school, Carl Bronson (now superintendent at East Lake Woodlands GC in Palm Harbor, Fla.) went to Lake City Community College while Ondo entered Youngstown State University on a golf scholarship.

"I thought I knew a lot about math until I started taking engineering courses," Ondo recalls. "I changed my major to physical education."

Although he toyed with the notion of becoming a golf professional, Ondo dismissed the idea because "I didn't have the resources. Sponsors weren't readily available back then."

So he followed his buddy, Carl, to Lake City, and graduated with the class of 1975. He then landed the assistant's job at Sharon (Pa.) CC.

In the fall of 1978, he came to Florida as assistant to John Lapikas at Lost Tree Club in North Palm Beach. Six months later, he took the Winter Pines post. There was an E(e)rie connection.

Lapikas had been superintendent at Winter Pines before moving to posh Lost Tree and the Winter Pines owners were

"seven guys from Erie, Pa.," near Ondo's hometown and the wellspring of Ondo's career in golf.

"It was a different world, that's for sure," said Ondo, comparing Winter Pines to Lost Tree. "Down there, everybody was under scrutiny every moment. Every member was everybody's boss. At Winter Pines, we have only the owner to satisfy."

As a public golf course operated for profit, Winter Pines could not be described as "manicured." But it gets as much tender loving care as the staff and budget will allow.

"It's not a difficult course to maintain," says Ondo "but it takes quite an effort to get everything done before each weekend, particularly when we try to make it at least a little bit better every week. We put in a lot of 10-hour days."

At Winter Pines, as at most public courses, weekends are the source of profits and profits are the source of funds for improvements.

"We pretty much gear up for weekends," Ondo says.

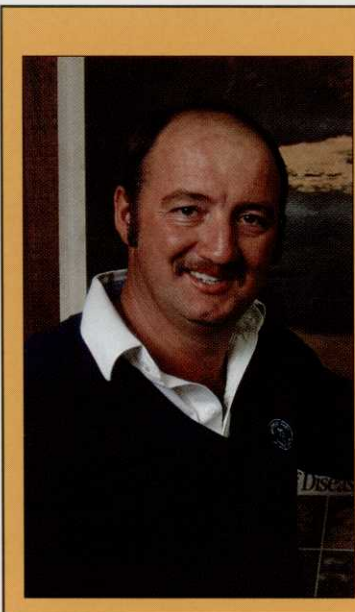
One of the things that helps the profit picture at Winter Pines is free treated sewage effluent from the city of Winter Park.

"It's a good deal for the city because we are getting rid of the effluent at no cost to the city and it's a good

deal for us, too." Ondo says. In the future, the golf course may pay some of the energy costs of treating and pumping the effluent.

At 5,400 yards, the Winter Pines is short, but not as easy as it looks, says Ondo, a former Florida Publinx GA state champion and member of the FGCSA national team several times.

As a concession to maintenance economy and speed of play, Winter Pines has only 21 bunkers, but three lakes and a canal



Joe Ondo, CGCS

Employed as Golf Course Superintendent at Winter Pines Golf Course, Orlando.

Originally from Kinsman, Ohio.

Attended College at Youngstown State University and Lake City Community, Class of 1975.

Previously employed as assistant superintendent at Sharon (Pa.) CC and Lost Tree Club of North Palm Beach.

Earned CGCS designation in 1986.

Married to Kathy, eight years.

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bring water into play on 12 holes and a tree-planting program has tightened the course into a challenge. Three par-threes are longer than 200 yards.

"There's not a lot of room out there. You've got to score well on the front side if you want to leave happy," he says.

"Of course, there aren't too many courses where you can shoot 12 over par and still break 80," Ondo adds. "A lot of golfers like that."

If Ondo is a working superintendent at a working man's golf course, he is thoroughly professional, with the complete support of owner Ed McMillin (another resident of Erie, Pa., who bought the course eight years ago) and his son Jon, the course manager and Ondo's boss.

"Every time I have the opportunity to learn something, they are willing to let me. In fact, they encourage me to attend all the seminars and workshops," he says.

In 1986 Ondo was one of the first golf course superintendents in central Florida to become certified. And he has served the FGCSA for years as a director (external vice president of the Central Florida GCSA) and as golf chairman.

Between his professional responsibilities and his passion for golf, there is little time for other recreational activities.

"Weekend golf tournaments are pretty much our vacations," says Ondo, who gets (and takes) three weeks of vacation every year. Taking long walks with Kathy, his wife of eight years, is a major source of relaxation.

"There is not a private club atmosphere here," Ondo says. "And I like that. I like knowing that we're doing the best job we can do and the fact that we are helping all kinds of people—from

kids to senior citizens—enjoy themselves and this great game. "I'm happy."



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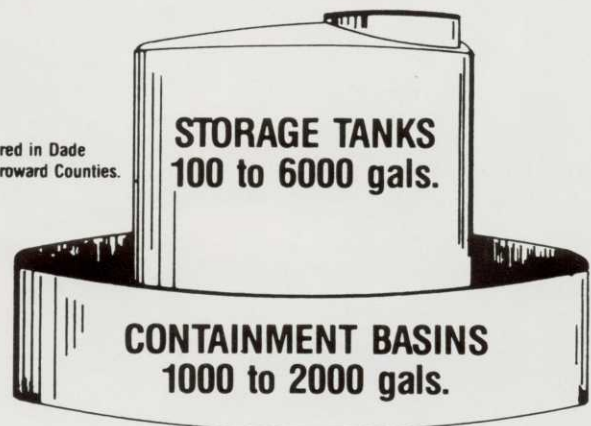
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Number 13

Winter Pines Golf Course

Location: 950 S. Ranger Blvd., Winter Park, FL 32792

Ownership: Ed McMillin, Erie, Pa.

Playing Policies: Public; 90,000 rounds a year.

Design & Construction: Built in 1967 as par 62 executive course; designer unknown; Five holes lengthened late 1970s by Bud Timbrook and Gardner Dickenson; 5,400 yards, par 67.

Turf: Greens average 5,000 square feet in Tifdwarf bermudagrass (three are Tifton 328 bermudagrass); overseeded in winter with blend of perennial

ryegrass; maintained at 3/16-inch year-around. Tees average 2,000 square feet in Tifton 419 bermudagrass cut to 7/16-inch; overseeded in winter. Fairways (about 20 acres) and roughs also Tifton 419 bermudagrass, not overseeded.

Irrigation: Griswold controller and valves; heads by Rain Bird, Thompson, and Toro. Treated effluent from city of Winter Park.

Maintenance Crew: 4 fulltime and 3 part-time. No assistant superintendent. Mechanic is part-time.