

Service is its own reward

Joel Jackson, editor, past president wins Distinguished Service Award for 1992

Joel Jackson, CGCS, has given his heart to his profession. In the summer of 1989, Jackson became the ninth president of the FGCSA, the third editor of *The Florida Green*.

But the bentgrass greens Jackson had been nursing through a severe summer drought that year survived in better shape than his coronary arteries and early in the fall, the 47-year-old (at the time) superintendent in otherwise excellent health underwent a double bypass. He recovered on the fast track, however, and was on hand as president of the host chapter to welcome nearly 18,000 delegates to the GCSAA's International Golf Course Conference and Show at the Orange County Convention/Civic Center in January of 1990.

"That was quite a year," recalls Jackson, who relinquishes his last major FGCSA post — editor of *The Florida Green* — in December.

Exactly three years after that fateful year began, Jackson's peers recognized his solid decade of service by awarding him the association's highest honor, the eighth annual Distinguished Service Award at the Crowfoot banquet at the Bay Hill Club in Orlando Aug. 2, 1992.

"I was totally flabbergasted and speechless when my name was announced," said the superintendent at Osprey Ridge GC, one of the two courses at Walt Disney World's new Bonnet Creek complex.

"I could hardly get the vocal chords to mumble a general — but certainly heartfelt — 'thank you.' I certainly appreciate this honor that my peers have bestowed upon me."

With a few days to think it over, Jackson reflected, "The service that I have been recognized for was not without some cost, but there is no way that I can adequately express how my participation these past 10 years has reaped dividends that have helped me grow personally and professionally. In some ways, it has been so very simple, as I have tried to emulate the professionalism and dedication that I saw in the examples set by Bill Wagner, Dan Jones and Tim Hiers."

Wagner and Hiers were the first two presidents of the FGCSA after the statewide organization was resurrected in 1978. Jones was the founding editor of *The Florida Green* whom Jackson succeeded. Those men were the first three recipients of the DSA.

Jackson is reluctant to engage in self-promotion but in the course of conversation, some themes appear: surround yourself with successful people; look for needs to be filled and fill them; involve your family.

"Much credit must go to my wife, Susan, and daughter,



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Joel and Susan Jackson were honored at the awards banquet at Bay Hill Club during Crowfoot Weekend, 1992.

Jennifer," he says. "Susan has been my chief proofreader and sounding board for editorial ideas. Jennifer did an outstanding job of doing the Central Florida chapter's dues billing during my first two bentgrass summers. She was 14 years old when she started.

"With a team like that with me, how could I go wrong? I share this award with them and thank them for their love, patience, and understanding these past 10 years.

"I also want to thank my Mom and Dad, Dorothy and Albert Jackson, for the basic values and talents that they passed along to me: Dad for his example of honesty, integrity and hard work, and Mom for her creativity, imagination and humor. And my brother and sister, Greg and Debbie, for the love and compassion they have for others."

As for surrounding himself with successful people, Jackson is expansive in his praise for Walt Disney World, where he is on his second tour of duty.

"My initial and current service in local and state affairs has



Joel Jackson, CGCS, in his editor's office at his Orlando home.

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been accomplished with the encouragement and support of the Disney management team. Without them and the outstanding crew members we work with, I could never have felt confident about taking the time off to do the needed work in the association's behalf."

Between his assignments at Disney (he was superintendent of the Lake Buena Vista course at the end of his first tour), Jackson was superintendent at Isleworth CC in Windermere, Arnold Palmer's private playground. Isleworth was the scene of the high and low points of Jackson's professional career.

"From a purely personal standpoint as a golf course superintendent, I think the highlight of my career occurred when I was standing on the 8th green at Isleworth while Arnold Palmer was escorting the CEO of Nestle around the course and Mr. Palmer came up to me and made a point of telling me that the greens were exactly as he wanted them."

Just a little more than a year later came the low point — getting laid off at Isleworth in the wake of the developer's political and legal troubles.

"The darkest hour was having to endure the media accounts of the Lake Bessie/Isleworth lawsuit," he recalls. "The helplessness of not being able to rebut the stories that would resurface every few weeks and seeing the project get battered and splattered over and over again with allegations of pollution and

flooding with no factual proof.

"Then, after the plaintiffs won an obscene financial award, the lake was named to the Top Ten Cleanest Lakes in the county! It was depressing. And it was outrageous! Outrageous!

"However, I was not the only person who lost his position during those tough times for the developer, and there have been some very trying and uncertain moments for those who have remained.

"As for me, there was a silver lining to the dark cloud because I had the immediate opportunity to return to Disney and be part of the new courses."

What has he gained from the 10 years of service to his profession?

"I've overcome my fear of public speaking," he offers with an impish grin.

"I've talked shop with so many outstanding professionals in my field that I never would have had the opportunity to meet if I had not been president of the FGCSA or editor of *The Florida Green*.

"I don't feel like I've accomplished anything singularly monumental. I simply made a commitment to do what was necessary to perform the tasks at hand when called upon and I would not be reluctant to do them again. I am grateful to the association for providing me the opportunity to serve."