

1993 FGCSA
President's Awards

Hugh Bebout

Dick Blake

Don Delaney

Karl Jacobs

Ed Ramey

Native son shines in Sunshine State

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

Golf course superintendents come to their profession by many paths. Don Delaney's path was short and direct. It ran from the back door of his home in Avon Park, where he was born, right into the second tee of the Rivergreens Golf Club.

The golf course was his playground when he was a kid, and it became his weekend and summer workplace as a high school student.

Don was very involved in junior golf and dreamed of someday becoming a professional on the PGA Tour. Dreams are sometimes tempered by reality. When the necessary level of golf skills didn't develop, Don found himself in the school's guidance counselor's office making other plans for college.

Don told the counselor he liked working outdoors and he loved golf. The counselor looked through his stacks of literature and came up with a course catalog from Lake City Community College, home of an outstanding Golf Course Operations program.

Don's first OJT summer assignment was working for Arlin Grant at the Innisbrook Golf Club and Resort near Clearwater.

"It was my first exposure to a large, first-class golf operation," Don recollected, "It really opened my eyes to the possibilities in this business, and that helped motivate me through the rest of my schooling."

In 1973, Don graduated with an Associate of Science degree in golf and landscape operations, and began his career with a two-year stay at Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head Island, S.C.

He returned to Florida and was the superintendent at Seven Springs Golf Club in New Port Richey for four years.

He moved south to St. Petersburg where he served for nine years as the manager of golf and landscape operations for the Isla del Sol Golf Club and the Ventura Golf Club in Orlando.

Don's service to the FGCSA began as he served on the board of directors of the West Coast Chapter.

That involvement led to six years on the FGCSA board serving several terms as a director and rotating through the chairs of the executive committee. He was president of the association in 1983-84.

Don also served for four years on committees of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. His work on the longrange certification plan helped lay the groundwork for the successful Certified Golf Course Superintendent program.

One of Don's greatest accomplishments for the FGCSA was organizing the voting delegate concept. It took many long hours to secure the participation and proxy votes of the many GCSAA members scattered over the nine or ten chapters throughout the state. With this bloc vote, Florida became a stronger voice in the future of the GCSAA.

In 1988, Don made a career change within the industry. He left Isla del Sol to become the Turf Division sales manager for Zaun Equipment Company in Longwood.

From this vantage point Don offers some valuable but unfortunately troubling observations about the superintendent profession.

"When I was active in the FGCSA and GCSAA, I was surrounded by people who were motivated professionals in this business. It is easy to get comfortable and think this is the way everybody is con-

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Don Delaney

ducting business: professional... dedicated... complying with regulations... attending seminars... continually getting educated.

"I have to tell you that I'm getting a different picture when I visit some golf courses. I see careless and unprofessional operations that are downright scary from equipment maintenance to chemical handling. The image of the professional superintendent that has made such great strides recently may be getting set up for a fall if some of these people don't clean up their acts."

"I also see the growing trend of club owners and members trying to shift all the responsibility of running their clubs onto a management company. This is of course weakening the superintendent's position. They become less powerful and less responsible in the decision making process.

"Purchasing decisions are placed in the hands of a regional manager and bottom-line profit for the management company is placed above quality of product and service. This results ultimately in a decline of the condition of the course.

"Unless the management company is dedicated to quality, and there are precious few who are, they will not attract a strong, versatile, well-trained superintendent. That kind of situation will tarnish the image of the superintendent profession.

"This trend does not bode well for a profession becoming saturated with more turf graduates. Twenty years ago, I left school and took a job as an assistant superintendent. The superintendent left for another job and I was promoted to head superintendent at the tender age of 19!

"I had no business being a superintendent at that age, but I managed to make it because there weren't that many trained people out there beating the streets.

"These turf schools have been turning out students for 20 years. Everybody's educated now. It's going to take a longer time to reach that goal of becoming a head superintendent.

"A new graduate who really loves this profession will take a job as a spray tech, an irrigation tech, a crew foreman, or whatever. Then they need to get involved

into their local superintendent associations and start learning the ropes from the top superintendents in their area.

"The superstars will rise and be recognized, and the others will be weeded out."

"I want to thank the Central Florida Chapter and the FGCSA for my President's Award. I got pretty choked up when Chuck handed me that plaque.

"I had to give Chuck some information for the presentation so it wasn't a surprise. But when the time came to give

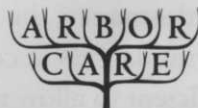
my prepared acceptance speech, I couldn't get much out of my mouth except, "Thank you."

"What made it special to me was that I had left the superintendent side of the business, and I was honored that my contributions were remembered and appreciated. The award also told me that my former peers were telling me that I still had credibility with them and that is very special and important to me."



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