

1993 FGCSA President's Awards

Hugh Bebout

Dick Blake

Don Delaney

Karl Jacob

Ed Ramey

The FGCSA has its own 'Papa Bear'

Though not a media legend, Hugh Bebout is the FGCSA's version of Norman Schwartzkopf

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

Operation Desert Storm made General Norman Schwartzkopf a media legend. We learned the big, burly general's nickname was "The Bear" or "Papa Bear." Meanwhile, the FGCSA has its own version of "Papa Bear" in the person of big, burly Hugh Bebout. He may not be a media legend, but he certainly is a man to look up to in our business.

There are several parallels between the two men besides their imposing size:

- They lead by example.
- They display devotion to duty and attention to detail.
- They show genuine concern for the people who work with them.
- They understand the mission and they know how to accomplish results.
- They are consummate professionals.

The FGCSA President's Award for Lifetime Service was established in 1990 to honor those superintendent pioneers who were instrumental in state and local affairs but who may no longer be actively involved in the FGCSA. Qualifications include 20 years or more of service to the turfgrass industry, 10 of which were as a superintendent.

After 47 years in the business, Hugh Bebout still goes to the golf course seven days a week.

"Sometimes, it's just a ride-through on days off. I feel better the rest of the day if I've seen what's going on," he said

during a recent interview. "I'm still a hands-on type of superintendent. I guess that's a holdover from my beginnings in the '40s and '50s. The equipment and the procedures were all manual in those days."



Hugh Bebout has the grip of a grizzly bear and the demeanor of Gentle Ben — and he earned The President's Award the old fashioned way . . . he earned it.

Manual labor was no stranger to this farm lad from Decatur, Ind., including his bag-toting days as a caddie at the Willow Bend CC in Van Wert, Ohio, where his family had moved when he was 11 years old. After a couple of years of begging the superintendent for a maintenance position, he finally got his wish in 1946.

Hugh recalled, "I love the outdoors. After life on the farm, and seeing the work on the golf course, I knew this was what I wanted to do the rest of my life! I worked on the course for the next four summers and graduated from Van Wert High School in 1950."

"I wanted to move to either California or Florida to escape the ice and snow so I could work year-round on the golf course. The owner of Willow Bend, Mr. Gaylord Leslie, just happened to be friends with Mr. Bernie Powell, owner of the Bellevue Biltmore hotel in Bellair.

"Mr. Powell visited Willow Bend during the summer of 1950, and we talked about the possibility of my coming to Florida. That December, I reported to Harvey Meeks, the superintendent and worked with him for two seasons.

"I will never forget Harvey. He was a soft-spoken man who stood at the door of the maintenance building each morning and greeted every employee as he arrived."

"After two seasons at the Bellevue Biltmore, I entered the Army and spent a year and a half in Korea. In 1955, I returned to Willow Bend CC and became the superintendent in 1956. That same year I met and married my wife, Iola. We have four children, two boys and two girls, all golfers.

"Our eldest son, Shane, is my assistant superintendent here at Sunrise. Our other son, Duke, is a veteran of Desert Storm. He is currently in his second year at Shawnee State in Portsmouth, Ohio. He is also on the golf team.

"Our oldest daughter Pamela has given us a granddaughter, Feather. Pamela owns and operates a curio shop in Portsmouth. Our youngest daughter, Michelle, is a 10-handicap golfer. She is a professional waitress, and she had the pleasure of serving Jack Nicklaus during a visit to White Sulphur Springs in West Virginia.

"From 1956 to 1960 I attended several

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turf seminars at Purdue University under the direction of Dr. Bill Daniels. During these seminars, I met Dr. Burt Musser, director of agronomy at Penn State University.

"Dr. Musser once told me, 'Young man if you stay in this business for the next 10 years, you'll be able to name your own price!' Well, I stayed in the business, but let's just say the ladder of success has always seemed quite steep."

"In 1960 we moved to Largo and I worked another season at the Biltmore, this time under Harvey "Red" Phillips. Well his hair used to be red!

"Coincidentally, Harvey and I started at the Biltmore at the same time under Harvey Meeks. Red was the kind of guy who didn't believe in idle time during work hours. If it was raining, Red would have the crew re-stack the fertilizer. Red and I have been great friends through the years."

"In the spring of '61, I grew-in the East Bay CC in Largo. The following year, the PGA moved from Dunedin to their new headquarters in Palm Beach. I took over the Dunedin CC and spent the next six years there.

"It was during my tenure at Dunedin that I joined the Board of the West Coast GCSA. That was an exciting year. I became the secretary/treasurer of the West Coast and also won the annual FTGA golf tournament. I eventually served as vice president and finally president in 1967.

"I spent two years at the Pine Crest GC in St. Petersburg and then moved down to the Sara Bay CC in Sarasota in October 1970. I was there for some 17-plus years."

During his stay at Sara Bay, Hugh helped found the Suncoast Chapter of the FGCSA. He has been an active member ever since, serving on the golf committee for over 15 years. After he left Sara Bay, he grew in the Serenoa GC and then in 1990 he began his current position at

the Sunrise GC.

Besides conditioning golf courses, one of the things that makes Hugh proud is the number of people who have worked for him that have gone on to become Class A superintendents.

Bill Profit, who just recently retired, took over Willow Bend when Hugh headed south. Suncoast superintendents Gary Mull and John Roxburgh learned their craft under the tutelage of Royce Stewart at El Conquistador and Hugh Bebout at Sara Bay.

Gary recalls, "Sara Bay was a great traditional Donald Ross course, and I think Hugh was just the right type of person to bring it along. He always had a great attitude. He was a super teacher. He always took the time to answer your questions and show you things."

John echoed Gary's comments and credited Hugh with showing him the do's and don'ts of southern turf management.

"Hugh had a knack for getting the most out of a crew. He could bring the best out in each person and help them find their niche where they helped the team the most. He knew the value of surrounding himself with good people and he sought them out and trained them accordingly.

"I never felt like I was working for Hugh... I was working with him. He was always on the course doing something."

Bob Allen, superintendent of the Hibiscus GC in Naples, worked with Hugh at Sara Bay and Sunrise for 10 years. Bob said, "I can sum up Hugh Bebout in four words: Tough, Fair, Friend, and Professional."

Others who passed through the doors of a Hugh Bebout golf course include Mike Schroeder, Jim Sullivan, and one David Barnes. David is a former superintendent and is now with Agronomic Resources and a director of the Florida Turfgrass Association.

"I was a third-year Ag student at Gainesville in 1971," Dave recalled. "I was getting married and I needed work that summer. Hugh gave me a job, and he really put all that book learning into perspective for me. He was a no-nonsense, class act. He was always a gentleman. He was always upbeat. I can't ever recall seeing him get down over work problems."

From students of their craft to peers, Hugh has earned their respect over the years for his service to the profession and his willingness to share his knowledge and inventiveness with others.

Jim Miller, external vice president of the Suncoast Chapter and superintendent at the Waterford CC remembers his early days in Sarasota.

"I had just come to Foxfire CC from Gator Creek, which had been my only other southern golf course experience. Gator Creek had never overseeded and I didn't have any practical experience in overseeding a southern course.

"Sara Bay had the reputation for the best overseeded greens every year, so I gave Hugh a call. He didn't hesitate to share his whole program with me telling me the pros and cons of every step.

"My rookie overseeding year was proclaimed the finest ever at Foxfire by the members. That's the type of person we have all come to respect over the years."

Jim Svabek, superintendent of the Bradenton CC, had this perspective of Hugh and what he has accomplished, "Forget for a moment that he developed the mower-mounted, plug-pusher blade that helped revolutionize aerifying core removal. What Hugh Bebout did for superintendents in this part of the state is to elevate us from the old straw-hat image to that of a respected businessman.

"Hugh's physical stature and well-dressed appearance commanded notice and attention. With his neat appearance, good manners, and gentlemanly conduct, Hugh became a goodwill ambassador for the profession.

"To top it all off, he always had superbly manicured golf courses. I think he was the best overseeder I've ever seen. I know that he was one of the first people in our area to join the GCSAA and set an example for the rest of us. And you know what? He's just a plain, nice guy to boot."

Reflecting on his own career, Hugh credits growing up in the '40s and '50s with learning the virtue of hard work. "I guess besides seeing some of my co-workers succeed in the business," he said, "I like to bring a golf course up to its full potential.

"This past year we have completely renovated 14 greens to replace the turf and re-graded and re-contoured 6 fairways to solve a severe chronic drainage problem. We did it all in-house which saved us a lot of money, and gave us a lot of satisfaction."

When asked about the challenges of managing people in today's workforce, Hugh doesn't encounter many problems. "I turned over maybe 15 people in 18 years, and only one person in the last three years," he remarked. His formula is simple, "I treat people who work with me like human beings. I show them what I want done and I don't stand over them while they do it. If the results are not what I want, I show them again in more detail if needed. One thing that I think helps

our crew to be successful is that they are all golfers. We all play the game, and I think that helps instill pride in our work."

Hugh shared another of his secrets to success: communication. Hugh believes that communication must be one of the most important skills that a superintendent possesses.

Once again, he leads by example.

He takes his general manager and golf pro for a ride every day to point out any problems or unusual conditions on the course. He also accepts any comments about the course that may have passed through the pro shop.

When asked about receiving the President's Award, Hugh said, "It is a humbling experience to receive this award and have the honor to be mentioned alongside the other recipients."

Hugh, you have received this honor the old fashioned way... you earned it. Hugh Bebout, the man with a handshake grip of a grizzly bear and the demeanor of a Gentle Ben. He's our own "Papa Bear."



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