

Billy Wright: A Man of Many Talents

BY DAVID COURT, CGCSA

It was back in 1978 when the South Florida Chapter of the FGCSA consisted of six counties: Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, St. Lucie, Martin and Indian River. At that time it was decided by several key people that the association was too large and needed to be divided into smaller groups. Out of this came a new association called Tri-County GCSA, and one year later divided again into what is now the Palm Beach GCSA.

Leading this change of action were superintendents Bob Strait, George Cavanaugh, Otto Schmeisser, Carl Smith, Carl McKinney, Bill Kriegal and Billy Wright. Billy, a member of the founding board of directors, started out as the treasurer and in the second year of its existence became president of the newly-formed association.

Billy has been in the golf business for some time now. In fact, he was mowing greens for summer work at the Peachtree Golf Club before many of our current superintendents were born. His career was interrupted by Uncle Sam in 1967. For two years he served as staff sergeant in the First Infantry Division Rifle Company. While in Vietnam he earned the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge, and the Air Medal. Perhaps this is where he developed his expertise in bunker construction.

Back in the states, the native Georgian came to work as the superintendent of Arvida's Boca West Country Club, where he constructed and maintained the first two courses. In 1973 Billy headed a few miles north to Delray Beach, where he supervised the construction and maintenance of Villa Del Ray Golf Club. In 1980, it was back to the now Arvida/Disney Corporation at the Boca West Club, this time as the Director of Golf Courses and Landscape Operations. From 1981 to 1985, Boca West was the site of the nationally-televised Chrysler Team Championship, a PGA event.

With the membership purchase of the club, Billy has remained at Boca West. He has taken the courses to their best condition ever. As we know, great leaders have great people working under them,

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Billy Wright

and Billy is no exception. Karen Mital has been his secretary for ten years. Augie Montes, the head mechanic, has been in his position for fifteen years, while Don Kirk has served Billy since 1970 initially as the landscape superintendent and now as shop foreman. Each of the four courses at Boca West has its own superintendent.

In the event he should ever want to leave the turf business, Billy has other interests. Billy can also sell real estate, pilot a single-engine aircraft and captain 100-ton vessels — and he has the licenses to prove it

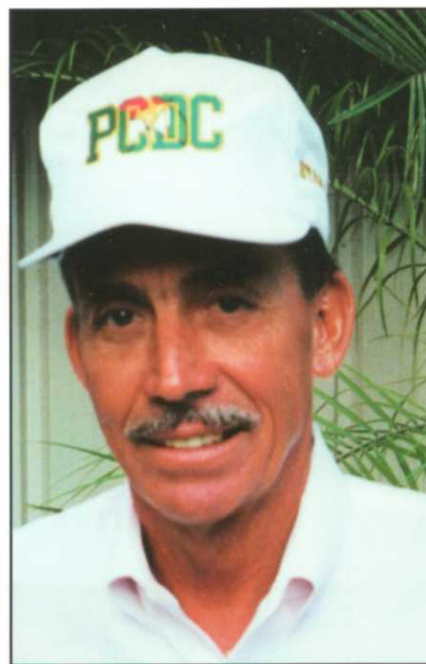
Scott Spara, Paul Housewright, Bill Henderson and Andy Lemmel make up the four who give the courses their individual attention.

Over the years, Billy has had several members of his staff go on to improve their careers and become quite successful. Mark Sigfried took a position with Lesco, Steve LaFrance is the superintendent at Jacksonville's Marsh Landing Golf Club and Randy Waldron is the superintendent at the Golf Club of Georgia, outside of Atlanta.

Construction has been the challenge at Boca West over the past eight years. They have regrassed greens on all four courses, dug lakes, lengthened holes, and completed other similar projects which

the large membership demands. Next year's project will be the reconstruction of the entire #1 course. The club is currently under a \$24 million facelift — at that price you get the whole body, too.

In the event he should ever want to leave the turf business, Billy has other interests. Billy can also sell real estate, pilot a single-engine aircraft and captain 100-ton vessels — and he has the licenses to prove it! I don't know where he found the time to do all this, but I do know that it makes all kinds of careers possible for Billy. Perhaps he could sell intercoastal real estate while being a captain on the water taxi!



Billy Wright

Billy doesn't usually take lunch breaks; instead, he runs to keep in good physical shape. His other pastime is fishing on his boat, aptly named "Shin Splints." Maybe running has taken its toll after all.

Billy is a special person to all of us here in Palm Beach County, as well as to his many friends throughout Florida, Georgia and Alabama. All the people I contacted for this article have only great admiration and respect for him. Congratulations, Billy, on being a recipient of the President's Award. You deservedly join a fine group of individuals who have received this recognition.