

Two South Florida Teams Win Big!

Essays Win Trips to John Deere Event for Supts. & Bosses

BY ROBERT G. KLITZ CGCS

General Manager
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In 1998, John Deere and the GCSAA developed a partnership to enhance the relationship between the Certified Golf Course Superintendent and the superintendent's employer or supervisor: the GCSAA/John Deere Employer-Superintendent Recognition program.

Twelve two-person teams are selected randomly from superintendent-written essay entries to describe how their employers support or recognize their efforts to increase business efficiencies, enhance agronomic improvements, elevate professional development, support environmental leadership, or improve the image of a professional golf course superintendent.

The winning entrants then participate in a program held in conjunction with John Deere's sponsorship of the PGA Tour's John Deere Classic at the Tournament Players Club at Deere Run in Silvas, Ill.

For my first entry in this program in 1998, I submitted several paragraphs describing my relationship with David Lottes, the vice-president of our company, Golf Hollywood. I did not win. In

1999 I intensified my efforts, assembling a stunning two-page literary masterpiece. This resulted in a phone call from Cathy Hut of the GCSAA. "Did I win?" I asked excitedly.

"No I'm sorry Bob, but we really enjoyed your letter, and would like you to come to New Orleans and speak at the national conference & show about your experiences making the transition from superintendent to general manager?"

A trip to New Orleans? Not bad for



From left: Robert Klitz, CGCS, Orangebrook G.C.; David Fearis, CGCS, GCSAA past president; Alan Weitzel, president of Golf Hollywood, Inc.; and Jeff Gredvig, brand manager for John Deere Inc. team up for the John Deere Charity Scramble at the Rock Island Arsenal Club in Moline, IL. Klitz and Weitzel were selected for their essays entered in the GCSAA/John Deere Superintendent/Employer Recognition Program.

runner up. Finally, I made my third entry attempt with a different strategy. I drafted a letter describing how the president of Golf Hollywood, Alan Weitzel, has supported me through my three years with the company.

Again the phone rang from GCSAA and Cathy Hut very excitedly said, "You won, you won!" I asked if I would be speaking in Dallas and she said, "No, you are going to Moline!"

Sunday, July 23 was our travel day to Illinois. Alan and I met at the airport, and were among the last group of people to board the airplane (that is Alan's style). As we squeezed through first class, gazing longingly at the ice cold beverages these distinguished people were enjoying, we saw a familiar face.

David Court CGCS and his general manager, Gene Paul Stifter, CCM from Boca Lago Country Club in Boca Raton also were among the 12 teams chosen.

How did they get in first class? This was my first of many lessons learned during four days with the amazing Gene Paul

This guy should be running a seminar on how to deal with people. It was

truly amazing to watch this gentleman work a room.

Our flight was on time and uneventful, which is a good thing these days. We arrived at The Radisson Hotel across from John Deere Commons in Moline in a courtesy bus with several of the other participants. Partly cloudy skies, temperature in the low 70s, and minimal humidity — a welcome relief from the heat and humidity of South Florida.

We were greeted by GCSAA staff, Deere company coordinators, and overwhelmed by a huge presentation of our tournament and event amenities: shirts, hats, bag tags, CD-ROMs of Deere Run, leather bags, golf shoes. We were going need larger luggage and a bigger bus to get this stuff back to the airport! We were very impressed.

As we made our way to the hotel counter to check-in, we again had the opportunity to watch the amazing Gene Paul at work. He makes people smile, laugh, and eventually they give him whatever his heart desires. It's no wonder David Court loves his job so much!

The week before we embarked to Moline I had reviewed our itinerary and

noticed that we would have a few hours to kill on Sunday afternoon. I contacted Cathy Hut and she recommended playing a warm-up round of golf at a nearby course. She mentioned that another team from Mira Vista CC in Fort Worth, Texas would also be arriving early on Sunday and that we could join them for a nine-hole friendly competition.

Alan and I met Brian Cloud CGCS and Brian Keelan, general manager in the hotel lobby, hopped in the hotel shuttle bus, and took the scenic route to Highland Springs Golf Course in Rock Island. Thomas L. Hergert is the golf course superintendent of this beautiful golf course. The hills and elevation changes were a good test for the four Southern boys. We wished we had time for the full 18, but we were on a tight schedule, and needed to be back in Moline for the big kick-off reception.

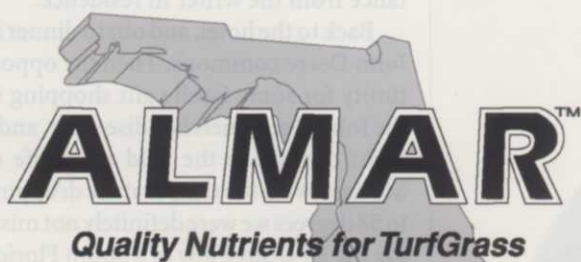
Sunday evening we boarded the bus for our reception at the Deere & Company Administrative Center. The beau-

tifully landscaped setting, and striking iron-and-glass structure was nestled in a hillside in the woods. The reception provided all 12 teams an opportunity to meet and share experiences as the PGA Tour professional pairings were announced for our teams of four.

We were fortunate to be teamed with Brian and Brian again, and our golf professional was Steve Goetze. Ken Edwards from the Deere & Company Golf & Turf Products Division and Clair A. Peterson, manager of Deere & Company's golf event marketing, were introduced to the very excited group of superintendents and their employers. Food and beverages were provided as we met our competitors and toured the Deere & Company Center.

Monday morning started at 7 (hey, we got to sleep in!) with a breakfast on John Deere Commons. We were welcomed by R. Scott Woodhead, GCSAA president, Steve Mona CAE, CEO of GCSAA, and Edwards and Peterson of

It was quite an overwhelming experience. With our caddies assigned, it was off to the practice range, and the putting greens. Walking past John Daly as he blasted his range balls to the far reaches of the driving range was very impressive.



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John Deere. Then we were treated to some very entertaining comments regarding several previous Ryder Cup Matches by former PGA of America President Mark Kizziar.

Back in the bus we were, and on our way to the Tournament Players Club at Deere Run in Silvas. As Weitzel said throughout the day, every superintendent should have the opportunity to feel the thrills we felt as we made our way through every step of this wonderful event.

Driving up to the beautiful clubhouse, pulling up in front, I walked to the caddy table to meet the lucky individual who would be carrying my bag. It was quite an overwhelming experience. With our caddies assigned, it was off to the practice range, and the putting greens. Walking past John Daly as he blasted his range balls to the far reaches of the driving range was very impressive.

The pressure was building as our tee time approached.

11:00. Tee-off on No.10 tee. Pose for the ceremonial photo. Three of the four amateurs place the ball in play (yes, I did hit a good shot in play). Unfortunately our touring pro yanked his shot into the four-foot-deep prairie grass (uh-oh). With Weitzel's birdie on our first hole, we were off to a great start.

John Newtal CGCS and his staff had done a tremendous job growing in the golf course on a piece of property with some very dramatic elevation changes. It's a beautiful golf course, in tournament condition, and we had a good group of guys, a great foursome of caddies from area high school golf teams, and a fun PGA Tour professional with a helpful caddy. It was really an experience that will provide us with the memories of a lifetime.

After golf, it was time for the awards reception in the John Deere 18th hole Trophy Suite Sky box. What a fantastic way to finish the day. Our team came in third place due to poor scoring assis-



FGCSA Secretary/Treasurer David Court, CGCS (shown here) and his general manager, Gene Paul Stifter from the Boca Lago C.C. comprised the other Florida superintendent/employer team selected to participate in this year's John Deere Classic. Photo by Joel Jackson.

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tance from the writer in residence.

Back to the hotel, and out to dinner in John Deere commons. Then the opportunity for some family gift shopping in the John Deere merchandise store, and a night out to see the wild night life of Moline. With the temperature dropping to 58 degrees we were definitely not missing the 80-degree low of a South Florida evening.

Tuesday morning started with another wonderful breakfast on John Deere Commons, and then back to the bus. Tuesday's golf event was the John Deere Charity Scramble held at the Rock Island Arsenal Golf Club. This historic property was laid out along the Mississippi River and provided outstanding views of the river traffic and the historical buildings on the property.

We again played in a five-man format with four amateurs and a local PGA club professional. The amateur groups were composed of our 12 teams, area John Deere staff, and John Deere distributor representatives from across the country.

Alan and I were paired with David Fearis CGCS, past-president GCSAA,

and Jeff Gredvig, a brand manager for John Deere who explained the significance of John Deere's logo change in 2000, and how powerful and recognizable the John Deere logo has become around the world.

Following an awards luncheon on the front porch of the clubhouse of the Rock Island Arsenal Club, it was back on the bus to get ready for dinner on the Celebration Belle riverboat as we toured the Rock and Mississippi rivers through the early hours of the evening. Then it was back downtown to the renovated historic district for some after dinner entertainment.

Kenny G had been performing in the arena behind our hotel, so the downtown district was filled with locals. This was our last night in town and Alan and I spent our remaining time with Brian, Brian, David and Gene. The locals (Gene Paul referred to them as "The

Molinians") were very friendly, with just about everyone describing some work experience with John Deere.

During our visit we were overwhelmed by the effort that John Deere had put forth on our behalf to make this such an enjoyable event. Deere & Company was entertaining a very large group of people this week, and still they made our small group feel that all of their energies were focused on us. Every detail was covered from transportation, and outstanding service, to smaller details such as a \$50 donation to each caddie's high school golf program.

As Clair Peterson said, "The real value of this program is allowing the employer to understand the significance of the golf course superintendent. The benefit of the relationship is what we're after in this partnership with the GCSAA."

It was obvious from my employer's reaction, that John Deere's efforts had

helped my employer reach the goal Peterson was emphasizing. If Alan told me once, he told me 25 times, "Thank you for writing that essay Bob."

The travel time, and all the activities present participants and their employers the opportunity to improve their communication skills, and get a better understanding about each other's point of view. The only challenge that David, Gene Paul, Alan and I are facing now is how to get invited back next year.

But I'm not worried. I think Gene Paul is working on it.

Editor's Note: David Court CGCS and Gene Paul Stifter's teamwork has resulted in Boca Lago becoming the first club in Florida to sign up for the Golfer's For A Better Environment joint grassroots effort by the Florida Turfgrass Association and the University of Florida.

Call for Articles

This is a call for articles for the 2001 issues of the Florida Green.

Contact Joel D. Jackson, Editor for more information. Phone: 407-248-1971. Fax: 407-248-1971. E-mail: FLGrn@aol.com. All slides and photographs should include identification of persons in the picture and the name of the photographer.

HANDS ON TOPICS: Share your best practices and tips for these upcoming topics. Slides or photographs are encouraged.

- Spring 2001 - Fertility Programs
- Summer 2001 - Utility Vehicles
- Fall 2001 - Computers as Management Tools

SPOTLIGHT: People and events making news in Florida. From award winners to chapter tournaments and other accomplishments. Send in your story.

SUPERINTENDENT'S JOURNAL: Personal observations or experiences related to any phase of the turf management profession.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

General management topics beyond turf. Examples: Education, facilities, personnel, computers, training, etc.

INDUSTRY NEWS: News items of interest to Florida superintendents from allied associations in the turf/ horticulture industry.

OPINION: Exactly what it means! Articles voicing a personal point of view on any topic concerning Florida superintendents.

RESEARCH: A section reserved primarily for university and technical authors to report on research results within the turf industry. Also reports of practical on-course testing.

RUB OF THE GREEN: Articles and anecdotes with a humorous twist.

STEWARDSHIP: Superintendents are invited to submit ideas and articles about environmental issues and initiatives at their courses.

Wanted: Slides and photographs to help tell the stories!

Letters to the Editor

Dear Joel:

I just read the summer copy of *The Florida Green* and just wanted to express my admiration to you for its quality.

There's little fluff and the writing is excellent. Much better writing, in fact, than *GCM*. I looked on the frontispiece to see who edited it and was surprised that it was a working superintendent. It must take a lot of your time to keep it so good.

Just wanted to let you know that someone appreciates what it takes.

Jim DeReuil, GCS
Kelly Plantation GC
Destin, Fla

Many thanks for the "atta boy" for the *Florida Green*. While myself, Dan Jones and Tom Benefield all wore the editor's hat while being full time superintendents, I have been able to take "early retirement" recently and make this my full time/ part time job. For the record Marie Roberts our advertising manager and our publishing consultant are also in the trenches with me to make *The Florida Green* golden!

Joel Jackson, Editor