

Number 18
Johns Island Club South
Photo by Daniel Zelazek



JOHNS ISLAND CLUB

Three Courses and Two Different Environments

By Joel Jackson

The Johns Island Club isn't on Johns Island at all. It is located in the middle of Orchid Island halfway between Sebastian Inlet on the north and Ft. Pierce Inlet to the south. Orchid Island is one of several barrier islands situated along the Atlantic coast of Florida. Johns Island is a smaller island in the Indian River Lagoon just west of this private community. Vero Beach is the nearest major city.

The 36-hole club opened the South Course in 1969 and followed soon after with the North Course in 1971. These courses were designed

by Pete Dye with the collaboration of Jack Nicklaus. It was one of the Golden Bear's first forays into course design. The property was originally a live-oak-hammock, riverine habitat along the Indian River and west of Highway A1A and the beach dunes. The indigenous oak trees have played a major role in the growth, development and management of the property.

Twenty years later as the residential community built out and club membership grew, a third course was built on the mainland. The West Course, designed by Tom Fazio in 1988, sprang up amid the sand pine, palmetto and scrub oak lands west of U.S. Highway 1 near Wabasso. Although the

property is 150 acres, only 80 acres hold maintained turf, the rest is native vegetation with special attention given to preserving scrub jay habitat.

Leading the golf and grounds department at Johns Island is ten-year veteran, Golf Course Manager Greg Pheneger. Pheneger just assumed the presidency of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association in July. A graduate of Ohio State University's turf program, he spent his first ten years in the business at the PGA National Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens rising to director of golf course maintenance before coming to Johns Island in 1993.

Pheneger says his experience at PGA



Number 10 West. The rolling terrain and entirely different native plant palette of scrub oaks, pines and palmettos on the West Course offer members a completely different look from the more residential oceanside courses. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Number 6 South. Many holes on the North and South courses are surrounded and framed by native oak trees. Shade management is a top priority. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

National preparing for the 1983 Ryder Cup, eight PGA of America Championships, and the PGA Tour Championship in 1987 were great training for man-

aging multiple courses to the high standards expected at Johns Island.

But seniority has its privileges, so we

begin our tour of the Johns Island Club courses with the eldest of the three courses, the South Course, and superintendent Chuck Calhoun who has been here from day one more than 26 years ago. Says Calhoun, "I've been here when this place was just dirt, and I've been part of six or seven renovations since then; the most recent being the complete rebuild in 2000 and the change from Tifdwarf to TifEagle on the greens."

I asked Calhoun, who has worked on all three of the Johns Island courses, why so many renovations? He relied, "Primarily for playability, drainage and shade. The water table was only 18 inches below the surface originally, but we still drained pretty well. As the homesites were developed, the runoff from the streets and lots drained onto the golf course.

"Tim Hiers was here at that time and we installed 35 wet wells or sumps around the golf course. Each one had an electric pump and moved the water to our lakes. I thought it was pretty innovative at the time. But the system didn't have enough capacity to be effective after really big storms and the continued development, so some of the early renovations were done to raise the fairways and improve the drainage system."

Later enhancements tied both courses to a drainage network of lakes and subsurface drains to what Calhoun calls the Hurricane Lake which has a pump with a 23,000 gpm capacity to move water.

That brings us to playability and shade issues. The playability of any golf course is, of

course, a function of the design. On a barrier island, space is at a premium, so routing a course through all the existing oak trees was no easy task for Dye back in 1969. But trees continue to grow and 15 to 20 years later, shot angles were gone and encroaching tree roots and canopies were wreaking havoc on the turfgrass especially on closely mowed greens.

Phenegar says, "Vero Beach has a very strict tree ordinance that governs the cutting down and trimming of all trees and especially those of specimen characteristics. Once our shade and playability problems got so severe that we couldn't maintain a healthy playing surface, we petitioned to have 200 trees removed during a renovation to relocate some greens into sunnier locations and alter routings to open up the playing of the holes. Some of these were only three feet off the collar of a green, and we were root pruning the trees every six months to no avail.

"Naturally, there was some initial concern over the removal request, but once the person in charge of administering the tree policy for the city came out and rode the courses and saw what we were trying to accomplish, there was no problem. They understood that their policy was based on a residential model and they could appreciate the agronomic differences and needs to maintain a viable golf course."

"We still have certain holes where shade continues to challenge our ability to grow turf, so it is an ongoing process. We hired Arbor Com to come in and study a couple of our worst holes and by plotting the shade patterns throughout the year, they found another 30 trees that needed to come down to give us a fighting chance to grow good turf on the greens. We aren't on some crusade to just cut down trees. We approach shade management in several alternative ways."

"We have two arborist crews that work year-round to thin out the canopies to get as much sunlight through as possible while keeping the trees healthy. We have installed a fan on No. 6 green to help dry it out and prevent disease and will likely add another and look at doing the same on other shady greens. In out-of-play areas where dense shade prevents the establishment and maintenance of healthy turf, we are planting shade-tolerant ferns and other native plants that can succeed in lower-light environments."

While shade is the number one agronomic challenge on the South Course, Tim Nolan, another 26-year veteran of Johns Island, is busy growing-in his new TifEagle greens on the North Course. Nolan cites shade and its impact on overseeding transition in the spring as his most pressing challenges to growing turf.

Like his counterpart Calhoun, he aerifies his course three or four times per year and maintains a regular verticutting program on the greens. With the installation of more native plant beds in the shady and non-play areas, comes more hand labor to grub out the never-ending oak seedlings that pop up and keep intrusive weeds at bay.

Nolan lists hawks, rabbits, bobcats, parrots and otters among the wildlife inventory on the North Course which is addition to the red cockaded



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Johns Island Club



North & South Courses on Orchid Island

Location: Vero Beach

Ownership: Member owned

Playing policy: Private

Number of holes: 36. South Course - 6,592 yards, Par 71, Course Rating 71.9/Slope 136. North Course - 6,941 yards, Par 71, Course Rating 73.8/Slope 136.

Designed by: Both courses originally designed by Peter Dye with the collaboration of Jack Nicklaus. South Course opened in 1969 and the North Course in 1971. Design renovation in 1998-99 on the North Course and in 2000 on the South Course by Craig Shriner. Construction by Barbaron, Inc.

Management: President Brian R. Kroh; Club President Peter P. Graham; Green Chairman Heather Colhoun; Head Golf Professional David Marad. Golf Course Manager Gregory A. Pheneger.

Major renovations/Ongoing projects: 1998-2002 renovation of North Course tees, fairways, roughs and irrigation system; 2003 greens rebuilt and planted to TifEagle. South Course - Complete rebuild of course and regrassing of greens to TifEagle in 2000.

Total acreage under maintenance both courses: 190 acres (South 105 acres, North 80 acres)

Greens: TifEagle. Avg. Size 5,500 - 5,800 sq.ft. Total 4.6 acres. HOC = South: .09-.105; North: .110 depending on season and weather. No overseeding. Green speed goals: 10-11.

Tees: Tifway 419 Bermudagrass, Combined 6 acres.

HOC: .425 South, .400-.500 North. Overseeding: Ryegrass @ 20 lbs/1,000 sq. ft.

Fairways: Tifway 419 Bermudagrass, Combined 56 acres (Roughs 110 acres). HOC: Fairways South .600, North .475-.500. Overseeding - Ryegrass: Fairways -

South @ 350 lbs/A. North @ 375 lbs/A. Roughs-Both @ 250 lbs/A.

Native areas: South 32 acres of deciduous oak hammock. North 7 acres planted in native grasses, ground cover, shrubs and flowers.

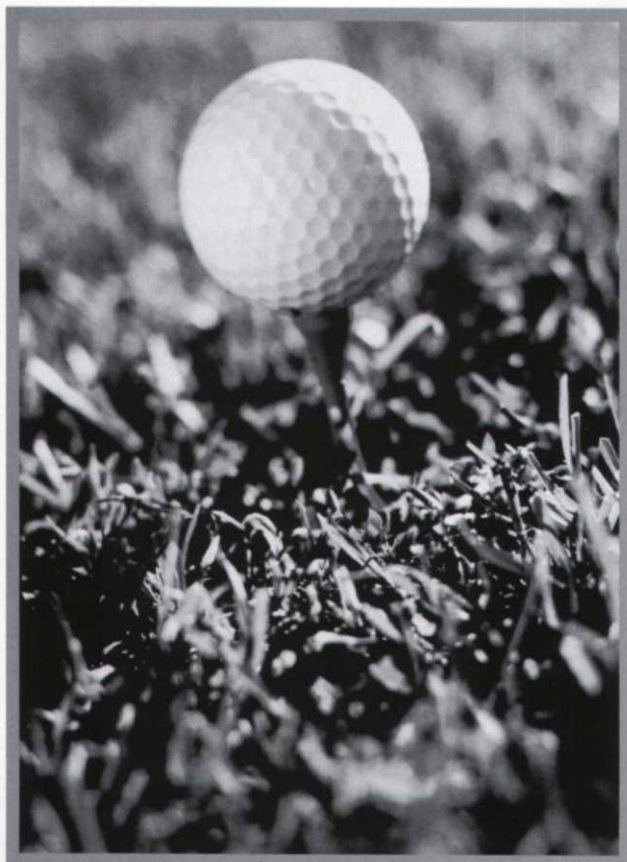
Waterways/Lakes: South 9 lakes (7 acres fresh water, 35 acres brackish). North 5 lakes. Contracted aquatic maintenance.

Irrigation: Flowtronex VFD 2400 gpm pump station. Source: Deep well on mainland and stormwater retention. Rain Bird Cirrus control system. Rain Bird heads triangular spacing. Fertigation system. Currently no watering restrictions in the South Florida WMD.

Total staff including superintendent: South 18 and North 20 full time. 40 hours per week. 6 hours overtime.

Leadership: Administrative Assistant Barbara Tierney. Head Mechanic Gary Petzold; South Course - Chuck Calhoun, Superintendent; David Harrer, Assistant; Ted Cushman, Chemical Technician and Mike Roske, Irrigation Technician. North Course - Tim Nolan, Superintendent; David Beachem, Chemical Technician and Tony Jarrell, Irrigation Technician.

Communications: Entire crew meeting every Monday and weekly management staff meetings every Friday. Monthly safety meetings.



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Johns Island Club

Johns Island Club - West Course on the mainland

Location: Wabasso

Ownership: Member owned.

Playing policy: Private

Designed by: Tom Fazio. Construction by Central Florida Turf

Management: President Brian R. Kroh; Club President Peter P. Graham; Green Chairman Heather Colhoun; Head Golf Professional David Marad. Golf Course Manager Gregory A. Pheneger.

Major renovations/Ongoing projects: Greens reconstructed in 1999 and converted to TifEagle. Irrigation system replaced and upgraded from Rain Bird Maxi to Cirrus. Heads were converted from hydraulic to electric.

Total acreage under maintenance: 80 acres of turf, 70 acres of native area.

Greens: TifEagle Avg. Size 5,000 sq.ft. Total 2.5 acres. HOC .085" - .110" depending on weather conditions. No overseeding. Green speed goals: 10 for daily play, 11 for special events.

Tees: Tifway 419 and Zoysia, 2.5 acres. HOC .275" - .400". Par 3 tees are overseeded with ryegrass @ 500 lbs/A.

Fairways: Tifway 419, 34 acres. HOC .375" - .550". No overseeding.

Roughs: Tifway 419, 40 acres. HOC: 1.0" - 1.75".



No overseeding

Bunkers: 60 native sand. Maintained with 2 John Deere and 1 Smithco rakes. Hand rake small bunkers.

Native areas: 70 acres. Sand pine, palmetto and scrub oak habitat.

Waterways/Lakes: 4 lakes total 9 acres. Maintenance by outside contractor 2X per month.

Irrigation: Flowtronex VFD pump station. Source: Deep well. Rain Bird Cirrus control system. Rain Bird 700 series heads on 70 ft. triangular spacing. 3 fertigation tanks with 2 pumps. Currently no watering restrictions in the South Florida WMD. Water

management/conservation: Greens are watered once per week automatically and supplemented by hand watering.

Total staff including superintendent: 26 full time. 40 hours per week. 6 hours overtime.

Leadership: Superintendent John Curran; Assistant Superintendent Lucas Harvey; Second Assistant Barry Balavender; Head mechanic Anthony Seals; Assistant Mechanic Rusty Meyer; Chemical Technicians Tom Caldwell and David Ramsey; Irrigation Technician Jose DeLapaz.

Communications: Weekly crew and club staff meetings.

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Number 18 West. The 150-acre West Course has 80 acres of turf and 70 acres of native areas. Managing proper nutrition and moisture levels in the sandy soil and keeping invasive plants out of the native areas are the biggest challenges. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Greg Pheneger, Golf Course Manager



Originally from: Granville, Ohio

Family: Wife Gail; Sons Alec (11) and James (8)

Education: AAS Ohio State University

Employment history: 1980-1993 PGA National Golf Club as assistant superintendent, Champions Course 1981-86; superintendent 1986; director of GC maintenance 1988-93. 1993-present, Johns Island Club

Professional affiliations and awards: Member GCSAA, FGCSA (current president), FTGA, Treasure Coast GCSA - all offices and chapter delegate 2001, 1999 and 1998

How did you get into the business: My father is a retired club professional and I became involved in the golf course industry at an early age.

Mentors: My parents - Their love and devotion to family life has been a steady influence on my life. Paul Lombard - My football coach who taught me

that I could be a leader. Luke Majorki (PGA National) - He had a very strong work ethic, but family came first.

Accomplishments: Being involved in the preparations for major golf championships - 1983 Ryder Cup; 1985-93 PGA Seniors Championships and 1987 PGA Championship.

Philosophy of work/Advice: We are in a service industry and our job is to serve our customers. Our customers may be multimillionaires or someone like me. No matter who it is, their opinion counts and should never be ignored.

Memorable moments: This may sound corny, but it was definitely the birth of my two sons. I do not cry often, and probably never did before their births. However, I cried tears of joy on these two occasions
Hobbies/Interests: Golf and snow skiing. I coach soccer for the local youth league.



Number 16 North. This challenging par 3 is enough to test the mettle of even the most accomplished player. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

woodpeckers, ducks, wading birds and occasional bald eagle seen by Calhoun on the South Course.

Speaking of wildlife takes us to the West Course on the mainland, and a different habitat but one having some of the same critters like bobcats, rabbits, hawks and otters. In addition, Superintendent John Curran, a Penn State graduate and six-year veteran of Johns Island lists endangered or threatened species like scrub jays and gopher tortoises along with armadillos, alligators, owls, ospreys and raccoons making homes or foraging on the course.

The West Course doesn't have the drainage and shade challenges presented by the courses on the island. But sandy, well-drained soils have their demands as well, Curran explained.

"We have to manage our nutrient and moisture levels very closely. Because the soil profile drains so well, we only fertilize as needed, keeping the turf healthy but not lush. We basically spoon-feed the turf the nutrients it needs, putting out only small amounts at a time to prevent leaching. We maintain adequate moisture levels by infrequent deep watering and supplementing by hand watering when and where needed."

The sandier soil provides a good habitat for the pesky mole cricket, one of Florida turf's major nemesis, at least until Chipco Choice came along. Curran says, "We apply Chipco Choice to the fairways approximately every three years. The roughs are spot-treated with baits and Orthene. In general we only treat insect infestations if they exceed a tolerable threshold level. Our goal is to minimize pesticide application. All of our weed-control

programs are done by handgun spot spraying."

Reducing pesticide use is also one of the goals of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and all three of the Johns Island courses are nearing completion of achieving certified status in the program. Since nearly half of the acreage of the West Course property is native vegetation, a very intensive program is in place to maintain the natural look by constantly keeping after the invasive plant species that try to take over.

Besides the challenge of managing the unique and sometimes demanding habitat, Curran and his staff had the honor of hosting a U.S. Open Qualifier in 2002. This brings us back the honcho of this operation, Greg Pheneger, who earned his spurs preparing for special events.

Pheneger, a dedicated family man, who admittedly wept tears of joy at the birth of his two sons, cites his parents' constant family devotion and the family-first, but strong work ethic of mentor Luke Majorcki as major influences in his life and career. He says his football coach Paul Lombard taught him that he could be a leader, and Greg has shown every indication of that trait as he brings new ideas and challenges to the Florida GCSA.

"We are in a service industry and our job is to serve our customers. They may be business owners, professionals, multimillionaires or someone like you or me. No matter who it is, their opinion counts and should never be ignored."

If you read Pheneger's "President's Message" in the front of this issue, you will see that he is not ignoring anyone and he's trying to include everyone.

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Number 12 North. Architect Craig Shriener renovated the original 1971 Pete Dye design to relocate features to enhance playability as the trees and course matured and changed shot angles. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

Fun Facts



Here are some things you may not know about our cover story superintendent

1. Car: Volvo S80
2. The last good movie I saw: Not "G" Rated would be "The Sixth Sense"
3. I stay home to watch: 24 Hours
4. The book I've been reading: Harry Potter & The Order of Phoenix
5. Favorite meal: Alaskan King Crab, baked Potato, corn on the cob; & a cold Becks Light!
6. Favorite performers: Robin Williams and Eric Clapton
7. Prized possessions: Grady White Boat and Golf Ball Collection
8. Personal Heroes: My father
9. Nobody knows that I: Like the Road Runner (but

- really pull for the Coyote)
10. I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Working through concerns
11. If I could do it over: I would learn to play the piano
12. I'd give anything to meet: Abraham Lincoln
13. My fantasy is: To win the lottery and travel the world
14. The one thing I can't stand: Very pushy people
15. If I could change one thing about myself: I wish I were a better writer, especially now that I am going to have to write more articles
16. My most irrational act: Jumping off of a cliff into a quarry lake.
17. The words that best describe me: Trustworthy; committed; responsible (I would make a good pet dog)

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Number 18 South from behind the green. The lakes on the North and South course aren't just for aesthetics and challenging golf shots. They play a key role in stormwater management. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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The constant easterly sea breezes sculpt and shape the landscape on the coastline and the golf course.

Johns Island Tour

Photos by Joel Jackson.



An oscillating fan was installed on No. 6 South to combat shade induced dampness on the green.



Are rotary mowers becoming a trend in turf management?



Converting thin turf areas to fern beds in shady areas just makes environmental sense.



Johns Island Club Golf and Grounds Management Team. From left, front row: Barbara Tierney, administrative assistant; Chuck Calhoun, South superintendent; Gary Sampsen, North assistant superintendent; Barry Balavender, West second assistant superintendent and David Foster, landscape director. Back Row: John Curran, West superintendent; David Harrer, South assistant superintendent; Lukas Harvey, West assistant superintendent and Tim Nolan, North superintendent.