

Reach Out and Teach Someone

ACSP UPDATE

It takes a long time to build trust and only a second to have that trust destroyed

By Kevin A. Fletcher

Golf course managers across North America have long expressed a desire for the general public, as well as their members, to understand what it really takes to manage a golf course. They've also struggled to highlight the environmental stewardship efforts they're taking on their courses. This is especially true in Florida. Faced with negative stereotypes about golf courses as polluters of the environment and wasters of water, superintendents need to find ways to communicate their commitment to good stewardship and help people appreciate the value that a well-managed golf course can provide for wildlife and the environment. Focusing on outreach and public education can help you achieve these important goals.

The Benefits of Reaching Out

You need to start thinking about your golf course as just another type of business in the community. Any business, with a vision of its place in the community, cares about the relationships it has with a wide variety of stakeholders. This includes customers, local government officials (elected and professional), neighbors, regulators, reporters, other businesses, community leaders, etc.

The best businesses also understand that it's better to define their relationship with their communities and the messages they want these stakeholders to hear, rather than wait for someone else to do so and tell an inaccurate story. Remember that it takes a long time to build trust and only a second to have that trust destroyed. Promoting your environmental stewardship efforts is a great way to build trust and manage how the people in your community think about you and your golf course's role in the community.

Communicating with your stakeholders about your environmental efforts can also help you gain recognition and support from:

- your golfers
- your members
- your bosses, and
- your community.

Increase golfer understanding of the wildlife on your golf course and why you're doing the things you are to protect and enhance the environment.

Let the public know that environmentally-managed golf courses can be valuable community resources - whether or not the public ever gets to step on the course.

Facing Concerns

Reaching out to public golfers, members, guests, and the local community is not always easy. Superintendents from private clubs are often concerned about keeping a low profile, while public course managers often feel their golfers are too transient to care about what's happening beyond the green. Both may be reluctant to invite more oversight or input from golfers or the public. Most of all, taking that first step - picking up the phone and reaching out - is often the hardest obstacle to overcome.

All of these concerns have been successfully dealt with by golf course superintendents -



Students at Spring Lake Elementary School in Altamonte Springs install a butterfly garden and a bird feeder in a protected area on campus. The project was coordinated by Bob Karnes, superintendent at Disney's Bonnet Creek Golf Club, where his wife, Rose, teaches gifted students. File photo by Joel Jackson

remember that you're simply helping to operate a business in your community. Outreach and education can take many forms and you can choose projects that are best suited to your course. By taking one step at a time, you can build support and effectively communicate your environmental management strategies.

Identifying Support

The first logical step is to designate one person who will take primary responsibility for communicating your environmental goals, objectives, and projects to patrons, staff, decision makers, and community members. This person may be the superintendent, manager, golf professional, or someone in a respected position who can comfortably communicate with a variety of people. This also could be someone from your Resource Advisory Group - created through the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

Start by contacting golfers at your course. Inform them of your involvement in conservation projects and invite their participation. A newsletter article or announcement on the bulletin board requesting help from individuals to assist with projects, such as wildlife surveys, nest box construction, or monitoring, may result in more positive responses than you may think.

Prepare a list of organizations, agencies, and people from the community who might be interested in helping with conservation projects on the course. This list could include a local schoolteacher, scout leader, or garden or bird-club member. For larger projects, consider college interns, local Fish and Wildlife agency personnel, Cooperative Extension agents, or members of your town conservation committee or local board. Some people may be interested in helping with specific projects, while others may be willing to get involved in all aspects of project implementation and communication.

Remember, achieving public input doesn't mean you have to have an open house for your community or base decisions on what your neighbors want. Think of "the public" as members of the local community who can help you with publicity, habitat enhancement, water monitoring, native plant selection, or other environmental projects.

Choosing Outreach Projects

It goes without saying that every golf course is different, but this is especially true when it comes to choosing outreach activities that are best suited to each course. What works for one golf course may not be appropriate for another. Some courses may have greater flexibility in inviting community participation, while others may be bound by labor union contracts or club regulations that prohibit certain types of activities.

Listed in this section are a variety of outreach activities that have been successful on a number of golf courses that participate in the ACSP. Your Resource Advisory Group can help determine which activities will be most appropriate for your course.

Request help with nest boxes - As a good starter project in the Wildlife Habitat Management section of the certification program, nest boxes may also serve as a catalyst for ACSP involvement. Here are a few suggestions:

Invite golfers to "adopt-a-box" by donating money for one or more boxes and agreeing to check and maintain them throughout the spring and summer.

Make a few extra birdhouses every year. Donate the boxes to golfers, schools, or the local cemetery association to stimulate interest in your stewardship activities.

Invite a local Scout troop or Eagle Scout to make and monitor your nest boxes.

Sponsor a workshop for members' children or resort guests to make nest boxes for the golf course. Extra boxes can be given away.

Place a few nest boxes within view of your property border. These boxes will subtly communicate a message that the course is concerned about local birds and wildlife.

Create a garden - If you choose to create a garden for butterflies, hummingbirds, or songbirds, invite gardeners at your course to help with planting. A local school class, Scout troop, or after-school program may also like to help. You can expand garden activities to include a brief lesson about connections between plants and wildlife. Invite a local newspaper to visit on planting day to garner positive publicity.

Inventory Wildlife - A great way to get

people involved in inventorying wildlife is to provide wildlife inventory cards to golfers as they pick up their scorecards. You can even encourage people to fill out these cards by creating a raffle. Each filled-out card can serve as one raffle ticket. Alternately, you can simply post a wildlife inventory list in the pro shop or in locker rooms. Provide books on natural habitat, building nest boxes, butterflies, bird identification, or environmental issues as a service to your golfers. These can be checked out at the club or offered in a lounge area.

Create a nature guide - Create a simple hole-by-hole environmental guide for golfers. At each stop, you can point out interesting natural features or environmental projects. This can include native plants, nest boxes, unique trees, habitat areas, common wildlife, IPM practices, and water conservation measures. For example, at Gainesville Golf and Country Club, natural areas on the course were highlighted on the scorecard.

Host nature walks - Ask golfers who are knowledgeable about birds to host an early-morning walk to look for birds and other wildlife species on the course. People who attend can add their sightings to the club's wildlife inventory. Providing refreshments is a nice way to conclude the walk. The Old Marsh Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, for instance, organized a nature walk and a subsequent nature-oriented poster contest for local schoolchildren.

Lead a golf course tour - Very basic golf course tours have a great impact on public perception. A successful outing demonstrates goodwill and will

spread by word of mouth. Consider hosting an outing once per year for members or regular golfers, or extend the invitation to specific golfing groups (e.g., seniors, ladies), grade school children, young adults, biology clubs, Scout groups, college students, local golf course superintendents, or even local media. Your tour should showcase various aspects of your stewardship efforts.

Use tournaments to showcase environmental aspects of the course - If you are hosting a tournament, use the opportunity to educate people about the environmental quality of your course. For example, highlight your ACSP involvement through the media or put up a simple display to show some of the environmental projects you've undertaken. Create a simple media fact sheet that highlights stewardship accomplishments and key natural features of the course.

Teach good stewardship to golfers - If your course offers golf lessons or has a junior golf program, include lessons on how golfers can support good environmental stewardship while they play. Repairing ball marks and divots are just the beginning of what golfers can do. Discuss how golfer demands for fast greens and perfect conditions can stress turf and pose risks to turf health and the environment. Encourage people to view natural areas as integral to the nature of the game and to respect wildlife and natural habitats on the property. Use the Golf & Environment Summit "code of ethics" as a starting point (*see sidebar*).

Offer a workshop - A wonderful way to develop communication skills is to begin talking to

syngenta



Consider Primo MAXX® the turf's personal trainer.

Get your turf in top shape. Primo MAXX PGR makes turf thicker and stronger. Preparing it for summer's toughest challenges, like heat, drought, and disease. Not to mention everyday wear and tear. So it can be in prime condition all season long.



To learn more about Syngenta products, contact:

Vera M. Gasparini at 1-407-699-7710, Lee Bloomcamp at 1-352-495-3405,
Michael Owen at 1-352-242-9733, or Kevin Wasilewski at 1-863-644-1467.

Important: Always read and follow label instructions before buying or using this product.
©2002 Syngenta. Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, NC 27419. MAXX®, Primo®, and the Syngenta logo are trademarks of a Syngenta Group Company.

www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com

small community groups. You might speak with a local school class, garden club, homeowner's association, or superintendent's association. Choose a topic you're comfortable with, such as tree and shrub care, integrated pest management, environmental quality on your golf course, or your involvement with the ACSP.

Encourage neighborly stewardship - Write a letter to course neighbors to encourage participation in environmental stewardship activities in their own backyards. This may tie in well with nest box giveaways, providing garden or lawn care tips, or a seasonal golf course tour.

Host kids projects - Get kids involved by making bird feeders or houses for the course or their own backyards, hosting a fishing derby, or leading a school tour. You can also get kids involved with planting gardens, creating nature guides, or tracking wildlife on the course in the winter. Getting kids involved in environmental activities pulls parents into the golf course for non-golf activities and helps people begin to see the property not just as a golf course, but as a community asset.

Sponsor a school - Sponsor a local school in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Schools. This is a sure way to let the community know you care about the environment. You might also offer one field trip to your course as part of your involvement with the school. To date, nearly 250 schools have been adopted by ACSP member courses as part of their outreach efforts. (To receive a school program brochure, just write or call Audubon International.)

Being an Environmental Community Leader

By coming out from behind the bushes and engaging the community, you might find yourself serving a special role. A reporter for CNN recently covered a story about Eufaula, Ala. and this city's efforts to become the first Certified Audubon Sustainable Community in the world. The entire city has embraced an environmental ethic and people of all walks of life are involved in a master-planning process that will look to blend economic, environmental and social goals. It's an exciting story, and one that began because of the efforts that the three local golf courses were taking through the ACSP. Once town officials learned about the superintendents' efforts to enhance habitat, protect and conserve water and reduce resource use, they became intrigued with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary approach for all of Eufaula.

You have a unique opportunity to serve as environmental leaders in a community - a catalyst for interest and action by people of all walks of life. You can get others - homeowners, schools, and businesses - involved in the types of actions you're taking and create a community network of environmental stewards. You may even inspire your entire town to get involved. So start doing things to help the environment and your course and don't forget to tell someone about it.

For information about the author, see the inside cover.

Environmental Code of Ethics for Golfers

The American golf community is dedicated to preserving golf's treasured links to nature. We recognize our historic tradition of integrating the game with the natural heritage, character and challenges of the landscape on which it is played. As golfers, we accept our responsibility to ensure that golf courses are managed in harmony with the environment.

We commit to...

- Use and protect natural resources on the golf course in an environmentally responsible way.
- Foster wildlife and natural habitats in non-play areas of the golf course.
- Respect designated environmentally sensitive areas within the course.
- Support golf course management decisions that protect and enhance the environment.
- Encourage maintenance practices that promote healthy turf.
- Plan long-range conservation efforts on the golf course.
- Educate others about the benefits of environmentally responsible golf course management for the future of the game and the environment.

Adapted from "Environmental Principles for Golf Courses in the United States," March 1996, Golf & the Environment Summit, Pinehurst, N.C.



Foliar Fertilizer & Nutrients

Bulk Liquids

Custom Liquid Blends

Wetting Agents, Stickers, Defoamer, Indicator Dye

TEE-TO-GREEN TURF PRODUCTS, INC.

P.O. Box 2224
Palm City Florida 34991

E-mail: Tee2green2001@aol.com

Fax: 772-692-4887

Mobile & Voice mail: 561-719-3462

1 - 800 - 900 - 6444

***Superior Solutions for Turf Professionals*®**