

President Profile

Resident President



View of the 18th hole and Indian Creek clubhouse. Photo by Joel Jackson

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

No, Joe Pantaleo isn't a native Floridian. Actually he's from Wisconsin where he majored in business management. He also earned a master's degree in human resource management/sports business at Biscayne College with an eye to perhaps becoming an athletic director at a college or university some day. The residency refers to the fact that he lives with his wife Lila in the center of his golf course, the Indian Creek C. C. in North Miami Beach.

Indian Creek is a golf club, an island and a community with its own zip code and police force. The 300-acre island lies in

north Biscayne Bay and this year the club celebrates its 75th anniversary. The golf course occupies about half of the island with residential lots taking up the rest. Movers and shakers in business, entertainment and sports make this gated community their sanctuary. While there are only 30-40 homes on the island, there are several hundred club members. Pantaleo stepped onto this secluded but seasonally active island in 1996 and was greeted that first year with the beginning of a long-range plan to restore the original 1920s look to the golf course. The renovations continue today.

Because he was very sports minded and loved golf

already, Pantaleo became interested in classic golf-course architecture. Spending hours with golf-course architect Ron Forse, a specialist in Donald Ross course restorations, fueled his desire to learn more and it has become a hobby that serves him well in his role as a *Golf Digest* panelist who plays and rates courses across America.

"As panelists, we have very specific details and questions that must be noted and evaluated," Pantaleo said. "This isn't just a golf road trip with your buddies. The fun comes in seeing and playing some of our country's greatest tests of golf, but it is also serious work with timelines and schedules that must be met."

Indian Creek was designed by William Flynn, a Ross contemporary, and built by the firm of Toomey and Flynn. Howard Toomey was a civil engineer who specialized in railroad construction.

"The site was an architect's dream and nightmare at the same time," Pantaleo said. "Created from scratch — dredged up from the bay — Flynn had a blank slate to work with to recreate elevations and contouring. The big negative was access, which meant everything from mules to manpower had to be barged in. We are working with Geoff Shackleford and a couple of other writers who are working on a book about Flynn's contribution to American golf. He hasn't really



The beach along the par 3, 12th hole is preserved as a reminder that seaplanes once ferried people to the island. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Joe Pantaleo



Joe Pantaleo literally lives on his golf course and loves it. Photo by Joel Jackson

24th President of the FGCSA

Originally from: Beloit, Wis.

Education: B.S. in business management, U. of Wisconsin Eau Claire; M.S. human resource management/sports business, Biscayne College

Employment history: 1996 to present, superintendent, Indian Creek CC, Miami; 1995-96 superintendent, Delaire CC, Delray Beach ; 1990-95 superintendent, Ft. Lauderdale CC; 1989-90 superintendent, Eagle Trace GC, Coral Springs; 1984-89 superintendent Key Biscayne Links; 1980-84 superintendent of various parks and golf courses for Dade County Parks and Recreation Department

Professional affiliations: GCSAA, FTGA, FGCSA

(director, and all officer chairs), South Florida GCSA (past president 1989-90)

Philosophy/Advice: Those who know me know I don't satisfy easily. I'm always looking to improve myself in my current position and for the future. I always try to elevate the facility where I work to new levels of excellence. I encourage team effort and only consider myself the "head coach" of the operation. My players do all the work and should have share of the credit. Since I didn't have a formal turf education, it was necessary for me to be aggressive early in my career. I couldn't stand mediocrity and I could see early on that getting to the top wasn't going to be easy. Hard work, long hours, patience, perseverance, and many questions later, I've arrived here. That formula for success has stayed with me for my entire career. Anyone knows that staying on top requires intense effort. The down side from this effort is the strain it can put on family relationships. It cost me my first marriage. I only knew one speed coming up, full ahead! Be careful to keep the big picture in perspective, especially with your family and friends.

Memorable moments: Sports: High finish in state high school golf tournament; state championship in 1975; winning the Poa Annuu Classic in 1993, the FGCSA State Championship in 1997 and the GCSAA Golf Championship in 2003. Playing historic golf courses and meeting people as a *Golf Digest* course-rating panelist. Hosting pro golf events, Senior

PGA Tour's Royal Caribbean Classic and the PGA Tour's Honda Classic. Last, but not least, is the valuable construction and renovation experience at Ft. Lauderdale CC, Delaire CC and now at Indian Creek.



Candid camera caught Joe at the 2004 Poa Annuu Classic in a rare miscue on the course. This watery recovery attempt cost him a bid for a second Poa Classic title. Photo by Joel Jackson

been recognized like Donald Ross a few others of that era.”

That first year in 1996 found Pantaleo growing in new greens complexes that Forse had restored complete with redan greens and risk-and-reward approaches. (*A “redan” green is wider than it is deep, is angled so that the left is further away than the right, and slopes front to back and right to left. The name comes from The Redan, the 192-yard 15th hole at North Berwick Golf Course in Scotland.* -Ed)

Fast forward to 2004 and Pantaleo and staff are still at it as each year they tackle a few fairway bunker complexes and tree removal or relocation as shot values are compromised by the growth of well-intentioned but misplaced trees in the past. Pantaleo said, “Not all the renovation is on the course. The clubhouse is also an historic landmark. Ongoing restorations on the Maurice Fautio design are aimed at preserving the heritage of the architecture and interior design of the 20s.

“There are always pros and cons to living on site. The members can find you pretty easily, but then it sure comes in handy to make adjustments to irrigation programs based on the weather and I don’t have to commute in our heavy south Florida traffic.” The superintendent residence on site is a vestige of many of the golf courses built in southeast Florida during the early 1900s.

Teamwork is essential at any golf club and Pantaleo has general manager Michael MacDonald, CCM in his corner when it comes to his participation in the Florida GCSA. MacDonald himself is a director of the Seminole Region of the Club Managers Association of America. MacDonald said, “We totally support Joe’s participation in the association. In fact I would like to see the various Florida golf industry groups have more joint meetings so we can strengthen the

industry and support the issues with a united effort.”

Pantaleo’s management style is highlighted by his thoughtful and analytical approach to fact gathering and decision making. He is a careful listener and asks lots of questions and that applies from agronomy to association business. He credits south Florida superintendent Jim Walker for nudging him into the superintendent ranks.

Pantaleo said, “I was working in the pro shop at Greynolds Park back in 1980 and asking all those questions about the golf course. Jim got tired of me bending his ear every day, so he gave me my first book on turfgrass management. He has been a true friend and mentor over the years, and I appreciate his inspiration and advice that helped to launch and sustain my career.”

All work and no play makes Jack (or Joe) a dull boy, so Pantaleo is a devout sports nut. Even though he’s from Wisconsin, he somehow became a Chicago Bears fan. “I am considered the black sheep of the family because I got turned onto the Bears,” he said. Pantaleo is no idle couch-potato athlete however; he also loves to play basketball, billiards, all water sports including fishing, which he admits he hasn’t done that much of lately. Of course there is also golf.

A collegiate golfer at University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, Pantaleo is a veteran of many amateur tournaments at both the state and national levels. He won the Florida GCSA State Championship in 1997, and perhaps his proudest golf accomplishment was in capturing the GCSAA Championship in February 2003 at Hilton Head, S.C.

Pantaleo had never placed higher than 13th at seven previous championships and had no reason to expect a victory this time around. Pantaleo indicated in a GCM magazine interview that his game was rusty because a tough winter that year had demanded all

his time on the course and gave very little opportunity to hone his game. He thought a nagging hip injury might keep him from playing his best and he questioned whether he should even make the trip, given the busy time of year in south Florida.

After shooting four-over-par on the first day at the Palmetto Dunes G.C., Pantaleo played solid golf in the final round on Pete Dye’s Harbour Town G.C. The leaders in the final group, perhaps focusing to on each other, began to self-destruct, but Pantaleo buckled down on the back nine and made several par saves from bunkers. A key birdie on the 14th hole put him firmly in command of the tournament.

Buckling down and getting the job done is perhaps a fitting keynote to what Pantaleo hopes to accomplish during his Florida GCSA presidency.

“We have been blessed with some forward-thinking leaders in the recent past, who have set in motion ideas and goals that will strengthen our association’s future,” he said. “Using the input from a recent FGCSA member-needs survey and ideas from a GCSAA chapter-assessment tool, I plan to carry those goals forward and build on them to better serve our members.”

As It Lies

Reflections: Objects in the rear view mirror may be closer than they appear

By Jim Walker

The day before yesterday it was 1962 and I was an 18-year-old hotshot golfer and baseball player who, when asked what he planned on doing after college,



responded: “I’ll either play major league baseball or be a professional golfer.” No wonder the phrase “youth is wasted on the young” was coined.

During that summer between graduating from high school and entering college, I was rear-ended by a 1960 Ford station wagon which was larger than some of the ships the Japanese sank in Pearl Harbor.

After fiddling around for some years not wanting to give up the ghost of my dreams, I finally realized you don’t get guys out with 84 mph fastballs and you had to hit it 250 yards off the tee to be a real player.

So, in 1971 at the tender age of 27, I took my first job as a “working superintendent” for Jim Yancy at Ocala Golf Club. Damn, I’ve been getting up early for 33 years growing and mowing grass.

What prompted this rambling preamble is twofold: first, my wife is planning my “Oh NO, the Big 60” birthday party next month, and second, was the August 2004 issue of *Golfdom* magazine. On the cover is a wonderful picture of David Swift, the superintendent at Whistling Straits, which just hosted a very successful and exciting PGA Championship.

Now you may be asking yourself why Mr. Swift would trigger old memories. He’s 27 bloody years old!! Are you kidding me? I’ve got socks and tee shirts older than that.

He was born in 1977. Think about it. Before he was born, we fought wars in Korea and Vietnam, color TV came into existence, and we put men on the moon and brought them back. Eisenhower created the federal Interstate highway system, Tricky Dick at al succumbed to the Watergate scandal, a Peanut farmer with very large teeth was elected President. The Miami Dolphins had won two Super Bowls, the AFL merged with the NFL, the ABA merged with the