

# Bob Bittner, CGCS - A Man of Many Talents

*By Mark Black, CGCS*

Some time ago I was asked to write a short bio for Robert R. (Bob) Bittner, superintendent at The Club Pelican Bay here in Naples and recent FGCSA President's Award winner for the Everglades Chapter. I was asked to do this since Bob and I both hit town about the same time way back around 1980. At the time we were both straight out of college, both assistants, both green and both in our first positions of supervisory responsibility. Bob worked for Roger Whitford at The Club Pelican Bay. I worked for Dan Hall at Imperial Golf Club. At the time, Roger and Dan were "seasoned" veterans in the turf-grass industry. As I write this, I realize Bob and I are now the "seasoned" veterans. Ouch! We are now referred to as "The Sod Fathers!" Ouch again!

Bob was born in Elyria, Ohio. He moved to Ft. Myers Beach in 1970 where he played football and finished up his last years of high school at Cypress Lakes. For those of you that don't know Bob, I can tell you he's a pretty big boy. If he weren't, we would still be stuck on that sand bar down in the 10,000 Islands. From high school, Bob went to McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La. where he received his bachelor of science degree in horticulture. While there, he met his future wife MaryJo Foreman. Following college Bob returned to Florida, married MaryJo and began his family of three children. They have two daughters Ashley 18, Lauren 17, and a son, Pierce, who is 10.

Bob began his professional career at The Club Pelican Bay in August of 1979. Pelican Bay was a

new Westinghouse Communities development project in Naples. The Club was designed by Arthur Hills. There was no doubt Pelican Bay set a new standard of excellence for golf maintenance in this area. In 1985, Roger decided to move on, and Bob was appointed the golf course superintendent.

In 1988, Bob was promoted to Westinghouse director of golf course operations for Southwest Florida. During this time he managed The Club while simultaneously growing in numerous courses throughout the area, including Pelican Nest Golf Club, Gateway Golf Club, Bay Colony and Pelican Marsh. While in this position,

Bob relocated his office to Pelicans Nest in Bonita Springs, where he stayed and grew in 27 holes designed by Tom Fazio. During this time he also designed and oversaw the construction of numerous maintenance facilities, set up shop and hired all required staff. To say he was busy was an understatement. Obviously, Bob has also been associated with two of the most famous golf course architects of our time, numerous high end golf courses and the demands of producing quality golf conditions on a regular basis.

In 1991, Pelican Bay was purchased by the members and Bob was asked to remain as the director of golf course operations. As we all know in this business, the period of transition from developer ownership to member ownership can, at best, be tricky and often dangerous for our occupation. That was almost 13 years ago and Bob is still there. Not only that, he is working with the same golf professional, John Carroll, who has been there from the beginning as well. I would have to say they have had as fine a superintendent/golf professional relationship as there is in the industry, which is very admirable.

Over the years, Bob has been involved professionally within his occupation. This includes being a GCSAA Member and certified golf course superintendent since 1992; a member of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association and the Everglades Chapter of the FGCSA as a board member (1986-87), secretary/treasurer (1987-88) and vice president (1988-89). He served on the FTGA Special Events Committee 1995-98 and 2002 to present. He is also



*Bob Bittner with his 2003 Presidents Award for Lifetime Service.*

## Bob's Mentors

**Richard Bittner**, my father, was very detail oriented and demanding person. He was a perfectionist.

**Robert Ternes, my grandfather** - A hard-working farmer who taught

me and my brother the meaning of a hard day's work.

**Roger Whitford, CGCS** - The man who taught me how to grow turf-grass and how to maintain an

upscale golf course.

**Ross Obley** - Former president of Westinghouse Communities Inc. He demanded The Club Pelican Bay be the best and gave us the support and

resources to do the job.

**Dr. Max Brown and Wayne Wiemkin** - Both spent many hours helping to determine The Club's soil and fertility requirements.

## Bob's Mentors, cont'd

**Wayne Ragsdale** - Wadsworth Golf Construction, taught me more about golf construction than I needed to know.

**Mark Black and Bob Shevlin** - fellow rookie assistant superintendents and later superintendents. We grew up together. (Thanks Bob!)

### Accomplishments and Goals:

- Managing several golf courses simultaneously for Westinghouse Communities, Inc.
- Hosting PGA Tour golf events.
- Bob hosted three concurrent televised Senior PGA Etna Challenge Tournaments from 1988 to 1990.
- "My present goal is to keep a good job until I choose to retire."

### Greatest Satisfactions in this Business

- Knowing we are providing a superbly maintained golf course each and every day.
- Those rare "special" days when the golf course is absolutely perfect.
- Seeing ex-employees who have become outstanding individuals in the turfgrass industry and still being friends with most of them.

### Greatest Challenges

Working with such a diverse maintenance team and trying to get employees to take pride in their work. Trying to get golfers to understand how much influence the weather has on the ability to manage fine turfgrass.

### Work Philosophy

Work hard and be efficient each day but, don't take work home with you.

involved with the Coastal Conservation Association - Naples Chapter board of directors 1996 to present, and he was named Outstanding Volunteer for 2001 and 2003. He is also a U.S. Coast Guard licensed boat captain.

Bob Bittner has a lot going on. He is busy in his occupation and his family responsibilities. On a personal note I will tell you Bob Bittner is many things. He is a professional and a credit to our occupation. He is honest and trustworthy. He is

### Advice

Be patient: Try to learn from everyone you work with. Everyone has something positive about them.

### Most Memorable Moments

- During the first year of the Aetna Challenge, Brian Henning of the Senior Tour asked me about employees in Naples. He knew Naples was high end but he asked, "How much do you pay your employees? Your cup cutter is wearing a Rolex watch, a Polo shirt and expensive boots." He did not know that fellow superintendents were helping out during the event.
- Many years ago I got a call one evening regarding an irrigation break on the course. It was dark and Roger and I went out to investigate. We found the leak and while I was closing the isolation valves I forgot one thing... to put the truck in park. Luckily the doors were left open and I was able to hop in before it got too far away.
- At Christmas each year Santa and his two elves (I'll give you one guess as to Santa is) visit the maintenance complex and pass out gifts and encourage a good time. It's a fun time for us all.

### Hobbies and Interest:

Fishing boating, rod building, fly tying, coating, golf, pro football and spending as much time in the keys as possible. (I will tell you that Bob has more fishing tackle than Bass Pro Shops!)

### Community Involvement

Coaches Optimist Soccer Coastal Conservation, Naples Chapter

kindhearted and supportive. He is a knowledgeable golf course superintendent and respected as such. He is usually one of the first people I call on when I have a turf problem that has me stumped. He has never turned his back on me. I can count on him. I honestly don't know what better friend or support system I could have in this industry and I know I speak for many when I say this.

Congratulations Bob, you deserve to be recognized by your friends and peers with this award.

## Chapter Round Up Fall Focus: Education, Charities

### Calusa

Our November meeting was rained out, but we bounced back with our first annual Christmas Charity Tournament at the Kelly Greens G&CC Proceeds from the event went to the Lee County Abuse Counseling Center. We instituted a traveling trophy for the event and Cliff Anderson was the first winner.

We also got together in December for a Christmas Cruise on the Caloosahatchee River. The Heron's Glen team of Jerry Belyea, Charlie Better and Brian Lee won our 2003 Superintendent-Professional-Supplier event at Heritage Palms G.C.

### Central Florida

Congratulations to the



NBC's Scoring Line Producer Tammy Proctor poses with members of the Central Florida GCSA at the PGA Father/Son Challenge.

team of Joey Brownsberger, Chris Cartin, Jimmy Lawrence, Joe Ondo and Robert Parmar for winning the FGCSA Championship Team Trophy at Southern Dunes GC. The chapter hosted a GCSAA Regional Seminar on employee safety, the second regional we hosted this year.

Chapter members put on their long Johns and jackets to help NBC Sports televise the PGA Father/Son Challenge by acting as TV spotters and scorers at the chilly but perfect Champions Gate resort. The chapter will be holding its annual FTGA Research Fundraiser at the Interlachen CC in January.

### Everglades

Congratulations to Rudy Geiger, Hole-in-the Wall GC, for becoming a certified golf course

superintendent. The chapter hosted a one-day GCSAA Seminar on water quality assessment and management facilitated by Dr. Ronnie Duncan and Mike Huck at the Naples Beach & Golf Club. Sixty attendees, superintendents and vendors, were present from throughout Central and South Florida. Education on water quality, water treatment options, cultural practices, and correctly reading water-sample information were presented. It was the first of many GCSAA seminars that the EGCSA hopes to hold in the Naples area.

We had great turnouts for



At the FGCSA Fall Board Meeting, the Everglades GCSA answered the call for turf research donations when Matt Taylor, left, presented a check for \$5,000 to FGCSA President Greg Pheneger

our Pro-Superintendent tournament (90) at Palmira GC in Naples, and our first-ever meeting at the Naples National Golf Club. The Children's Home Society will be the recipient of \$4,000 raised at our December golf outing at the LaPlaya GC. Odell Spainhour won the raffle grand prize of a classic 1969 Cadillac convertible. (See sidebar elsewhere in Spotlight)

### North Florida

We had one of our best meetings ever this November with a presentation by Dr. Michael Healy and a panel discussion with Greg Tharp, Fred Klauk, Daron Murrell and Ron Hill entitled "Ultradwarfs vs. Tifdwarf: Has the jury reached a verdict?" The goal was to discuss common denominators and differences in managing both grass types. We will finish out the year with a December golf tournament at the San Jose CC and are looking forward to kicking off the New Year with an FTGA Regional Seminar in January for our chapter education session.

Paul Hamrick, a longtime member of the NFGCSA was honored for his military service during the



Korean War on the recent 50th anniversary of the end of that conflict.

Our annual Christmas Tournament took place at the San Jose CC. This year the money raised was donated to an educational trust fund for the son of Scott Strickland, San Jose's chemical technician who was tragically killed in an auto accident. This tournament will now be an annual fundraiser for a charity of choice by the club that hosts the tournament.

**Palm Beach**

Steve Bernard won the individual title at the FGCSA Golf Championship and earned a berth on the Florida team competing in the GCSAA golf championship in San Diego next February. The USGA Green Section Regional Seminar at Palm Beach Gardens was a success with more than 150 in attendance. We had a great time watching the Miami Dolphins defeat the Washington Redskins on our 15th Annual Dolphins Game trip. Next we will be anticipating our Christmas golf outing at Jupiter Dunes to check out Travis Lincoln's new paspalum greens.

**Ridge**

The chapter put away the golf clubs for a couple of meetings, but the education was great as we toured the E.R. Jahna sand mine in November, and enjoyed a catered lunch from Sonny's Bar-B-Q. In December we toured the Harrell's Fertilizer plant in Lakeland and had dinner at the Red Barn, and we will have a Christmas Party at the Bartow Municipal G.C. In January, Jeff Brown will host the annual Member/Vendor golf outing at his Lake Region Yacht & Golf Club. The annual Ridge Invitational to be held on Monday, March 1, 2004 at the Grasslands C.C. will be renamed the Jack Harrell, Sr. Memorial Ridge Invitational.

**Seven Rivers**

Soil analysis, equipment leasing and Todd Lowe's USGA Florida Green Section update were the topics of our fall chapter meetings. We have donated funds to help sponsor two FTGA Regional Seminars in January, and our board is discussing several new research projects that we might help to fund using reserves in our Envirotron Research account. Planning has already begun on the 2004 Envirotron Classic to be held in

April at World Woods.

**South Florida**

The South Florida Chapter held its annual fundraiser for the Florida chapter of the Missing & Exploited Children's Foundation at the



*Nancy McBride (center) holds a check for \$18,000 from the South Florida GCSA for the Florida Chapter of the National Foundation for Missing and Exploited Children.*

Colony West CC. As emcee Bob Klitz, CGCS presented Nancy McBride, Director of the Florida Chapter, with a check for \$18,000 this year, he pledged the event has set a goal of \$20,000 next year for the 20th anniversary of the fundraiser. McBride thanked the audience for their donations over the years that are nearing the \$250,000 mark.

In January, the Crandon Park GC will host the annual Bring Your Pro Day meeting and golf outing. There will be a panel discussion on pro-superintendent relations. Mark your calendars now - SFGCSA/IFAS Turf Expo, March 18, 2004 at the Ft. Lauderdale Research & Education Center.

**Suncoast**

Chapter co-founder and long time chapter newsletter editor, Jim Svabek, was presented with the FGCSA President's Award for Lifetime service upon his recent retirement from the Bradenton CC. Retirement doesn't mean a rocking chair: Jim is now giving Bob Gwodz a hand over at Sara Bay. You can't just quit cold turkey when you've been doing this job as long as he has.

The chapter did not have a meeting in October due to the demands of overseeding, but in November, Dr. Lee Berndt of Edison Community College came

up to give a talk on Paspalum growth and management. In January, the chapter will celebrate its annual Vendor Appreciation Day with an equipment exposition, golf outing and barbeque. There will be no meeting in February either due to



*Florida Green Editor Joel Jackson presented Coastal Plains GCSA External Vice President Jeff Heggen with a framed copy of the cover of the Winter 2003 issue at the Fall Board Meeting in Orlando.*

a new venue this year at Tampa Palms GC, raising about \$9,000 for turf research and scholarships. Some of the proceeds will also go to local charities.

Frank Hardy of Florida Potting Soils presented a program at our November meeting at Bloomingdale GC on topdressing mixes and the importance of particle size in maintaining good greens percolation. We will hold our Vendor Appreciation Day and Cook Out in December with an equipment demonstration at the University of South Florida baseball fields.

**Florida GCSA**

Controversy over reports of total arsenic levels found in some water and soil samples on golf courses sparked four or five newspaper articles and one TV report in southeast and southwest Florida. The FGCSA has been working with state agencies and other stakeholders to scientifically identify the sources of the arsenic to determine if there are any links to normal, legal turf maintenance practices.

The FGCSA Executive Council and Government Relations Committee are working with our lobbyist Mike Goldie to set up meetings with Florida legislators during committee work days in Tallahassee. Topics to be discussed: water issues, pesticide use and regulations, urban green space, economic impact, and research funding in the budget.

The FGCSA Reception at the GCSAA Conference and Show will be on Thursday, Feb. 12 at the Wyndham Hotel at Emerald Plaza.

many members attending the GCSAA Conference and Show in San Diego.

**Treasure Coast**

Congratulations to Bob Markut, PGA GC, on attaining his certified golf course superintendent classification. Our 2004 Blue Pearl tournament which supports environmental projects at schools and in the community raised \$20,000 this year. The event was highlighted by an appearance by Greg Norman who had some very nice things to say about the GCSAA and superintendents in general and the work that we do. We really appreciated him taking time out of his busy schedule to spend some time with us and for the use of the Medalist Club for our event.

Our board has approved a motion to make all superintendents responsible for maintaining a legal USGA handicap. We will have a six-month grace period and then all members will be required to show proof of a valid handicap to play with strokes in chapter events.

Our annual Christmas Party and a joint meeting and golf outing with the Palm Beach GCSA at the Jupiter Island Club will wrap up 2003 for us.

**West Coast**

We had another successful Bud Quandt Tournament in October at

## Raptor Bay GC Hosts LCCC Alumni Event

By moving the LCCC Endowment Tournament from January to November two years ago, the committee avoided the frost delays that plagued the event several years in a row. In fact it was a downright warm November day at the Raptor Bay Golf

Course for this year's event. With host Superintendent Jason Brod and his staff grooming the golf course to perfection and General Manager Ed Weber taking care of the hospitality, it was a great day of golf and networking for everyone. Next year the event will move to Marco Island to showcase WCI's new Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club. In fact, WCI courses have played host to most of the tour-

naments over the 12-year history of the fundraiser.

This event, originated by the LCCC Alumni Association is designed to provide supplemental funding for the Lake City Community College Golf Operations program to offset budget cuts made by the state.

Thanks to the hard work of the volunteers, the generosity of the sponsors and participation of the players this tournament has donated more than \$110,000 including this year's event.

Even if your golf game lets you down on tournament day, the prize-packed raffle offers plenty of



Jay Smith and Mike "The Hammer" Hamilton won the Low Net division. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Tom Caliguire and Jim Glase captured top Low Gross honors. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Accommodations for the event were provided by Hyatt Regency Hotel seen here overlooking Raptor Bay's 6th hole. Photo by Joel Jackson.



The hard-working 2004 LCCC Committee: (from left) Ed Weber, Scott Hamm, Jason Brod, Roy Bates, Glen Zakany, John Peirsol, David Fry, John Johnson, Odell Spainhour, Jim Lones and Mike Smith. Photo by Joel Jackson.

incentive to show up and buy tickets. Highlighted by resort weekend stays at such places as The Broadmoor in Colorado, The Greenbrier in West Virginia and the Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco there were numerous Florida resorts donating weekends from Amelia Island to Marco Island and points in between. The total raffle package was valued at more than \$16,000.

Raptor Bay's General Manager Ed Weber and Superintendent Jason Brod teamed up to provide superb hospitality and fantastic playing conditions to help make the tournament a smashing success.

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The Everglades GCSA got into the Christmas spirit early this year when they donated \$4,000 to the Children's Home Society at their annual chapter Christmas tournament. From left Mark Shoemake, assistant superintendent, LaPlaya Golf Club; Greg Maze, CGCS, Twin Eagles Golf & CC; Odell Spainhour, Energized Water Solutions, "Cadillac Winner;" Kyle D. Sweet, EGCSA president, The Sanctuary Golf Club; Roseann Albertario, Children's Home Society of Florida, executive director; Wayne Kappauf, CGCS, EGCSA golf committee chairman, Island CC; Brian Beckner, superintendent, LaPlaya Golf Club.

December a total of 800 Cadillac raffle tickets were sold raising \$4,000 in donation money; all proceeds going to benefit the Children's Home Society of Florida, Southwest Florida Division. Odell Spainhour of Energized Water Solutions was the lucky winner of the 1969 Cadillac.

Southwest Florida's local NBC affiliate, WBBH Channel 2, covered the event on the 6 p.m. news, highlighting the association's involvement with the Children's Home Society and showing off some golf play. The news was just in time to be seen by all golfing participants at dinner in the LaPlaya clubhouse.

With over \$4,000 in golfer awards and raffle prizes given out after golf, it was a great time for everyone. The event's great prizes were possible due to an outpouring of generous sponsorships from area sales associates.

To close the night, EGCSA presented a \$4,000 check to Roseann Albertario, executive director of the Children's Home Society of Florida.

Kyle Sweet

## It Was a Good Friday

On Friday, Dec. 12, the Everglades Golf Course Superintendents Association hosted its third annual Members-Only Christmas Tournament and Gift

Drive to benefit the Children's Home Society of Southwest Florida. Brian Beckner, golf course superintendent and his staff hosted the event at the newly completed

LaPlaya Golf Club in Naples.

A full field of 124 golfers provided gift donations at the registration table filling two SUVs driven away by Children's Home Society volunteers. The golfers also participated in purchasing raffle tickets for a 1969 Cadillac Coupe de Ville. Throughout November and

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