

# Edison Community College Brings GCO Program to SW Florida

*By Todd Lowe, USGA Agronomist*

In the golf course management industry, respect is a quality that is earned. Golf course superintendents are a close-knit group of men and women who rely on each other for advice, camaraderie and the development of their profession. It can sometimes take several years for newcomers to feel welcome in the industry, as they earn the respect from fellow professionals. For Dr. Lee Berndt, at Edison College in Fort Myers, respect is earned one student at a time.

Dr. Berndt is the director of the Golf Course Operations Program at Edison College. He earned a Ph.D. at Michigan State University in the department of Botany and Plant Pathology with Dr. Joe Vargas in 1990. His dissertation was on black layer. He also holds a masters degree in crop and soil sciences and a two-year turfgrass management certificate from MSU as well. After college, he was the director of Environmental Services and western regional agronomist for Jack Nicklaus Golf Services for two years. He then started a consulting business, assisting various golf course superintendents throughout the world. Berndt relocated to Fort Myers and



*Perhaps the crown jewel of Dr. Lee Berndt's accomplishments at Edison Community College was the development of a three-hole research and demonstration facility just outside the classroom door. Photo by Todd Lowe.*

began working at Edison College in 1997

From its modest beginnings, Berndt has developed a very respectable program to support Florida golf courses in teaching, extension and research. Perhaps, the crowning jewel of Dr. Berndt's accomplishments at Edison College is the three-hole golf course laboratory that exists just outside the classroom door. The local golf course industry supported the Edison program by donating their time and labor in

designing and constructing the facility.

Local golf course architect Gordon Lewis designed the layout, while Jim Glaze and Glaze Golf built it. Boynton Pump and Irrigation Supply, in conjunction with Rain Bird, donated the Cirrus irrigation system. Watertronics donated the irrigation pump, and Turfgrass America donated most of the grasses. In addition, Wesco turf, in conjunction with Toro, donates the equipment used to maintain the holes and routinely rotates new equipment as needed.

Eight different grasses were installed on the facility, including a Tifdwarf green, a Tifeagle green and a Sea Isle I seashore paspalum green. Additional grasses on the laboratory include Tifway 419 & TifSport bermudagrass, Floratam St. Augustinegrass, zoysia-grass, and bahiagrass. For that reason the golf course is an excellent teaching, research and demonstration facility for the entire South Florida golf course industry. Students utilize the facility for learning about the various grasses, cultural practices and equipment utilized on golf courses. Also, chemical companies perform research at the



*A Plexiglas wall was installed along the putting green edge to demonstrate the layers in a USGA-spec green construction. Photo by Todd Lowe.*

...graduates from the program can transfer their credits toward a bachelor of science degree in turfgrass management at UF. The Professional Golf Management Program at Florida Gulf Coast University, also in Fort Myers, requires students to take GCO classes at Edison.

facility without worrying about burning turf and jeopardizing golf course playing conditions. Finally, Berndt hosts golf course superintendent association meetings and other turfgrass events at the facility each year.

He has hosted several workshops for the Bonita Bay Group and has given presentations at various golf courses and at various golf course superintendent association meetings. Berndt has published several research articles for trade magazines and scientific journals concerning research performed at

Edison Community College and hopes to develop bilingual classes and to host workshops to educate nontechnical audiences like green committees and golf committees on turfgrass management issues.

The college recently partnered with the University of Florida so that graduates from the program can transfer their credits toward a bachelor of science degree in turfgrass management. The Professional Golf Management Program at Florida Gulf Coast University, also in Fort Myers, requires students to take GCO classes at Edison as well.

With hundreds of golf courses in close proximity to Edison Community College, the Golf Course Operations Program cannot help but to be a success. Respect for the program continues to build as students graduate the program and become superintendents. Presently, there are several graduates of the Edison Program working locally as superintendents at top clubs like Fiddlesticks, Gulf Harbor, and Quail Creek, not to mention all of the assistants and technicians that take part in the program each year. In addition, other graduates have found superintendents jobs in Chicago, North Carolina, and Indiana.

## Plants of the Year

Here is the second group in the Plants of the Year series for 2006. The plants selected for this program have been found to be good performers in the Florida environment and require less maintenance and fewer inputs. Here are three specimens for your consideration. Two are palm trees since they seem to weather hurricanes better than many trees. Go to [www.fn gla.org](http://www.fn gla.org) for more information and suppliers who carry these plants.



**Common name:** Florida Thatch Palm  
**Botanical name:** *Thrinax radiata*  
**Hardiness:** Zones 10 -11  
**Mature height and spread:** 20' tall by 5' wide  
**Classification:** Palm  
**Landscape use:** Specimen  
**Characteristics:** An attractive, medium-sized, solitary fan palm with a slender, smooth trunk and green, glossy, circular fan leaves with drooping leaf tips. Salt tolerant and slow growing, this versatile Florida native palm thrives in full sun or shade and is drought tolerant once established. It also has low nutritional requirements.

*Photo by Geoff Stein.*



**Common name:** Dwarf Powderpuff  
**Botanical name:** *Calliandra emarginata*  
**Hardiness:** Zones 9B - 11  
**Mature height and spread:** 5'-6' tall by 6' wide  
**Classification:** Shrub  
**Landscape use:** Hedge, foundation planting in mass or as a specimen plant.  
**Characteristics:** This dwarf shrub produces silky leaflets that are bronze and turn green as they mature. The small flat bloom varies in color — typically deep red — and is produced during warm months. From bud to bloom-fade is approximately three weeks. This cultivar is cold tolerant and requires light pruning. Also is highly drought tolerant.

*Photo from Leu Gardens.*



*Edison's facility is utilized by several chemical companies as well as GCO students. Here is a plot showing the effects of several types of hydraulic fluids at different temperatures on turf health.*

*Photo by Todd Lowe.*