

Giving Back!

When doing just a little can mean so much to so many

By Jim Colo

At first glance you may just see a field. With a second look, it looks very much like a golf course. In 1995, a 23-acre parcel of land in Dyer Park (Palm Beach County) was leased to the Children's Golf Foundation (CGF), which is the only chapter of The First Tee program designed for mentally and physically challenged children.

Palm Beach County leased the land for the next 100 years at \$1/year solely for the purpose and mission of the foundation. That mission is to teach mentally and physically challenged children life's lessons through the game of golf.

The objective for the foundation is to increase socialization skills, increase their range of motion, build confidence, and to provide them a game they can participate in for the rest of their lives. The kids hear only two phrases as they are taught: Great swing or great shot.

Keith Stuhler, president and CEO of The Children's Golf Foundation, had volunteered for two years and then was asked to help design and build this facility in 1999. After seeking assistance from local companies in 2001, Stuhler called on superintendent Bryan Plummer from Fort Lauderdale CC to help transform the property into a golf course.

Through countless weekend hours, Plummer and Stuhler cultivated the land and managed to change the grounds into a golf course with limited funds and using equipment donated by various vendors and golf courses.

Stuhler comes from a background rooted in the golf industry. Having six uncles, all PGA professionals and his father, who owned and operated a golf course, Stuhler made his career out

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of being a PGA professional himself. He has recognized high standards and values within the PGA organization and feels proud of the accomplishments with the Children's Golf Foundation and his small part in designing and building such a facility gives these incredible children game of a lifetime.

Six years ago I was introduced to The Children's Golf Foundation through Plummer. I became involved because I saw something special. In my 13 years of golf course maintenance, I have been given many opportunities. I have worked at Old Marsh Golf Club since 1994. I have met many people who have influenced my career.

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The foundation serves 200 children

during the school year and more than 300 children in the summer. Each child who is a member of the club is given his or her own set of golf clubs. The children are taught by PGA professionals and assisted by caring, dedicated volunteers. The golf course has an 8,000 sq.ft. putting green, an 18,000 sq.ft. practice tee and four fully functional "target" greens on which to either practice or to play conventional golf. The course can be converted into 15 possible golf holes that the children can play and it carries a slope no higher than 2 percent, which is a requirement for The Americans with Disability Act.

The Tam O' Shanter clubhouse finishes off the property with its warm setting and comfortable "back porch" feel for parents to watch their children learn the game of golf.

Their "superintendent," Zach Stuhler, is learning emergency medicine by night and working very hard by day to keep the golf course looking great. With the devastation of four hurricanes, times were real tough. Donations were being distributed among many other organizations. The CGF needed all the assistance they could find. Through talking with the Stuhlers, I was able to come up with a few solutions.

When times get tough, people need help. The CGF's golf course needed a boost. Following hurricanes Jeanne, Frances, and Wilma, things at the foundation struggled. After explaining to my crew the needs of The CGF, they all agreed to volunteer their time. We put together a group of guys to help them get back on their feet. My two assistants, Eric and Donovan, my common grounds superintendent, Carlos and 18 crew members from Old Marsh and five members from Emerald Dunes G.C. gave their time on



Volunteers from the Old Marsh and Emerald Dunes golf courses pose in front of the Children's Golf Foundation clubhouse. Superintendent Jim Colo is kneeling on the right.

a Saturday in June. We accomplished quite a bit in one day. Our crews pulled weeds, fixed irrigation heads, planted new flowers around the clubhouse, patched weak areas with sod, edged, trimmed and fertilized the turf. Just one day's effort made a big difference for the foundation.

Recently, the foundation was infested by mole crickets and invaded by fire ants. After explaining the situation to Brian MacCurrach, southeastern sales representative from Bayer Environmental Sciences, he donated 14 acres worth of Top Choice. Two days later I applied it with one Lely spreader. Thanks to Bayer and MacCurrach, the CGF is clean of fire ants and mole crickets

Much of my involvement includes

assisting with fertilizer and chemical applications, irrigation needs, cultural practices, and consulting with Zach on weekly activity. We talk about timing of fertilizer applications, weed control techniques, and mowing practices. My time spent with the foundation is 10 – 20 hours a month in phone conversations and site visits.

Currently, the CGF continues to look for assistance in labor, equipment, fertilizer/chemical resources and most of all, money. Jack Nicklaus is one of the foundation's major supporters through public service announcements and other endeavors. Also, through The Loxahatchee Club, Dottie Pepper will name The Children's Golf Foundation a major charity for an LPGA event in January.

If any of you or your crew members would like to assist us in maintaining The CGF's golf course please call me. If you are physically unable to help and would like to financially support the Children's Golf Foundation, please contact Keith Stuhler.

This organization shows that despite the capacity and limitations of individuals, everybody should be able to enjoy all the opportunities possible in life. Through very small efforts of many people, not only can we make a tremendous difference for the children, but also for the parents who see and feel the strong effects the program has on the kids.

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