



Keeping The Promise

The Ritz Carlton Golf Club, Orlando

Located less than two miles east of Orlando's bustling International Drive and the Orange County Convention Center, The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club offers visitors and locals a round of golf on a Greg Norman-designed course that thoughtfully complements the natural landscape.

The gently rolling fairways wind through woods and wetlands that border Shingle Creek, which flows south from West Orlando to Lake Tohopekaliga, Lake Toho for short. The 16 lakes on the course capture storm

The par-3, 216-yard 17th hole on the Ritz-Carlton Golf Course at Grande Lakes, Orlando. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

runoff, protecting the ecology of the area. Other than a couple of holes near Central Florida Parkway to the north and John Young Parkway to the east, most of your golf round is spent on a virtual eco-tour of the natural surroundings.

Superintendent Andy Ragsdale has been on the course since construction and grow-in back in 2002. He worked his way up from assistant superintendent to superintendent in 2004, and he's enjoying every minute of it. On our tour of the course for this story, Ragsdale's enthusiasm for the layout, the wildlife, his golf maintenance team and the resort's attention to customer service was infectious.

"This course is designed perfectly for this property," he said, "with wide fairways and subtle movement in the greens. For group outings, golfers of all skill levels can have a great, enjoy-

able round which will challenge the low handicappers, but also won't beat up the average golfer. In the summer time, we also create forward family tees, so even young golfers can play and the whole family can enjoy the experience."

Several other features on the course speak to its uniqueness and playability. The Ritz-Carlton has large approaches and greens surrounds, about 14 acres' worth. TifSport is used everywhere except the putting surfaces, which are TifEagle. The approach and runoff areas are mowed to 1/4 inch and offer unique chip and pitch shots reminiscent of some of the U. S. Open set ups at Pinehurst No. 2.

Eight crushed coquina "waste bunkers" double as natural cart paths. The placement of these bunkers/paths offer softer, playable landing areas for golf shots as opposed to paved surfaces

that can bounce balls into the bordering woods and wetlands. Coquina paths are quite common in the Naples/Ft. Myers area, but not as prevalent on Central Florida courses.

Five sets of tees on each hole total six acres of teeing ground. This gives the staff plenty of room to move the tee blocks around to avoid severe wear and tear. Sometimes group golf outings must fit into tight time schedules. The generous teeing areas give the staff the ability to set up the course appropriately for the needs and abilities of the participants and prevailing weather conditions.

Creating a guest-friendly atmosphere is a central theme at the Grande Lakes Orlando Resort, which is home to both the Ritz-Carlton and J. W. Marriott hotels that overlook the course.

Ragsdale says that training in supe-



With the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in the background on the 9th hole, golfers are challenged to reach the green on the number-2 handicap hole, a 453-yard, par 4. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



Every good golf course has a short-but-challenging par-4 hole. Manicured bunkers guard the 352-yard, 13th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

THE RITZ-CARLTON GOLF CLUB, ORLANDO

Type: Resort and Public Play
Length: 18 holes; 7,122 yards; Par 72;
Slope/Rating: 139 / 73.9
Design/Construction: designed by Greg Norman; constructed by Southeastern Golf; opened 2003
Management: Resort Vice President Steve Contos; General Manager Mark



Keeping the customer service promise. The Ritz-Carlton Golf and Grounds Maintenance Team.

Ferland; Director of Golf Patrick Dill; Head Golf Professional Kirk Baker, and Golf Course Superintendent Andy Ragsdale.
Ongoing projects: Drainage improvements, cart path improvements and removal of scattered common bermudagrass patches.
Total resort acreage: 497. Total acreage of turf under maintenance: 116
Greens: TifEagle, 3.5 acres; HOC .125 - .135 in.; green speed goal 10; no overseeding
Tees, Approaches, Fairways and Roughs: TifSport, no overseeding; Tees 6.0 A, HOC .300 - .500 in.; Approaches 14 A, HOC .250-.350 in.; Fairways 40 A, HOC .400 - .650 in.; Roughs 40 A, HOC 2.5 in.
Bunkers: 66 type 37M sand plus 8 crushed coquina waste bunkers which also act as partial cart paths on certain holes. Golfers may ground clubs on waste bunkers.

Waterways: 16 lakes 104.4 A, maintained by Lake Masters
Irrigation systems: Reclaimed water: Flowtronex pump station for course. Hoover pump stations for resort grounds. Rainbird Cirrus System. 1,500 heads on course, 10,500 on resort grounds; fertigation system.
Water Management

and Conservation practices: Constant monitoring and maintenance of reclaimed water system and adjusting run times for efficient watering.

Staff: Total including superintendent – 33 budgeted 1,100 straight-time hours per week and 60 hours of overtime.

Key maintenance staff members: Assistant Sean O’Brien; Equipment Technicians Mauro Ramirez, Hector Reyes and Jair Sarria; Golf Course Supervisors/Pest Control Technicians Larry Wheat and Dave Schmidt; Irrigation Technicians Flaviano Chumbo and Angel Cruz; Administrative Assistant Karen Nimetz.

Communication: Weekly golf meeting, weekly hotel leadership meeting and daily meeting with grounds team. Not only do we go over daily maintenance assignments, we also review the resort’s 12 customer service values and the employee promise in the Ritz Credo.

rior customer service and employee job satisfaction are as important as job performance. “At our daily crew meetings,” he said, “not only do we go over maintenance assignments but we also review

principles of the Ritz Carlton Credo and Employee Promise to ensure that all of our ladies and gentlemen know what is expected and to make sure they are informed about all resort operations

and opportunities.” As Ragsdale discussed the resort’s attention to detail, I flashed back to my Disney days and the company’s emphasis on guest service and team building.



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SUPERINTENDENT FACTS



Ritz-Carlton's Director of Golf Pat Dill, left, and Superintendent Andy Ragsdale. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Andy Ragsdale, Class A Golf Course Superintendent

Originally from Tarpon Springs

Family: Wife Sylvia and 2-year old daughter Veronica

Education: A.S. Golf Operations, Lake City Community College, 1999

Employment: 2004-present, superintendent Ritz-Carlton Golf Club Orlando; 2002-04 assistant superintendent Ritz-Carlton Golf Club Orlando; 1999-02 assistant superintendent Fox Hollow GC, Trinity.

Professional Affiliations: GCSAA, Central Florida GCSA, and Florida Turfgrass Association.

Goals: 1) best possible course conditions for our guests every day; 2) best possible working conditions for the ladies and gentlemen on our grounds staff.

Advice to new superintendents: Take care of your team – be consistent, firm and have fun. Clearly communicate your expectations to your team. Attention to detail is the key to success. Communicate to the leaders above you. You can't teach what you don't know and you can't lead where you won't go.

Memorable moments: The birth of my daughter and my wedding day.

Hobbies & community involvement: Hiking, camping, playing any sport including paintball. My wife is a terrific children's pastor and I enjoy helping her in her ministry.



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Back on the golf course, guests can also reserve guided fly fishing trips on the lake at No. 9. Ragsdale said they are planning to add spincast fishing also.

I didn't get a chance to wet a line on the tour, but I did get a line on butterfly gardening and was inspired by what I learned to create a butterfly garden in my own back yard.

"We have several formal butterfly gardens on the property," Ragsdale said. "One is on the course near the 13th tee and the others are near the hotels so guests can easily have access to watch the butterflies. The key is to have plants that will attract butterflies to include not only nectar plants for the adults but also food source plants like pipe vine, milkweed vine, parsley and passion vine to name just few for the caterpillar stage. Placement of the plants is critical since the caterpillar plants will get chewed on and can look a little beat up, so they should be near the rear of the garden."

Ragsdale goes the extra mile so guests can fully appreciate the butterfly circle of life. After the adults have laid their eggs and the caterpillars



Tee shots on the par-3, 8th hole must carry over a pristine wetland teeming with wildlife. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

have emerged, he will begin to scour the gardens to look for the chrysalis stage which leads to a new generation of adults. Ragsdale carefully transfers several of the chrysalises to a clear-sided shelter box and mounts them

along a strip of wood in the center of the box. The transparent case is located near a sidewalk so guests can stop and watch in fascination as the new adults emerge and let their wings dry in safety before they fly off to create a

FUN FACTS FROM ANDY RAGSDALE



Superintendent Andy Ragsdale points out some butterfly chrysalises that he has moved to a sheltered viewing box location so hotel guests can watch new butterflies emerge from their cocoons and dry their wings in safety. Photo by Joel Jackson.

1. **Vehicle:** GMC Yukon
2. **Last good movie I saw:** Bourne Ultimatum
3. **I stay home to watch:** UFC Pay per view
4. **Favorite meal:** Charlie's Steakhouse – 20 oz Porterhouse cut and Mom's house dolmades.
5. **Favorite performer:** Steven Tyler
6. **Prized possessions:** Family
7. **Personal Heroes:** Men & women in the U. S. Military
8. **Nobody knows that I:** Once kicked a 50-yard field goal
9. **If I could do it over:** I'd do it all the same
10. **I'm better than anyone when it comes to:** Keeping secrets
11. **I'd give anything to meet:** and spend two weeks on the road with Jesus.
12. **My fantasy is:** To travel the world with my family
13. **The one thing that I can't stand:** Cleaning the house
14. **If I could change one thing about myself:** Wish I liked cleaning the house
15. **Words that best describe me:** Kind, reliable, easy going
16. **My dream foursome would be:** Any of my brothers and/or nephews playing Pebble Beach
17. **My best fish story:** Once caught an 8 lb. largemouth bass at Fox Hollow, while on lunch break.
18. **My most amazing golf shot:** A 150-yard eagle on a par 4 during the Oldsmobile Scramble back in 1997.

new generation.

Ragsdale says there are usually 10-12 species of butterfly on the property at any given time. The butterfly gardens are also a great food source for a wide range of pollinator insects that are critical for survival of our plant life and crops. Several varieties of bees and small wasps could be seen foraging among the flowers.

Ragsdale's enthusiasm for the wildlife on the property isn't accidental. The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club Orlando is a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary that also supports a population of turkey, deer, bobcat, gopher tortoise and all the species of birds we have come to expect on Florida golf courses. The course became fully certified in December and, as reported in *Summer Florida Green*, the Marriott Corporation has pledged that all 34 of its golf properties will become certified cooperative sanctuaries. Two other Marriott properties in Orlando – Grande Pines and Grande Vista – already have reached certified status.

Every golf course has its built-in challenges and the Ritz Carlton is no exception. Soil can sometimes be a challenge if it doesn't drain well. Fortunately a sandy-loam soil profile here drains just fine. But once an open, grassy, pastureland, the site supported common bermudagrass growth, which Ragsdale says has become his number-one continuing management project.

The common bermuda itself is virtually invisible to golfers during the



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warmer seasons, but left unchecked it is an aggressive variety that spreads, so there is a progressive management plan in place annually to select and remove patches identified in the fairways.

The program has generally consisted of an alternating series of glyphosate and fertilizer applications to eradicate the rogue patches of unwanted common bermudagrass. Once a patch has been identified, the sod is cut out in a square pattern and fertilizer applied to encourage and stolons and rhizomes to grow. Any new emergent growth is then treated with glyphosate. The process is repeated three times to maximize control. After a few weeks, the area is resodded and monitored.

While the course drains well overall, there are a few places along some cart paths where settling has either cracked the path or prevented water from draining. The crew installs

“smile” drains and PVC catch basin boxes to remove any possible standing the water and then re-pours the concrete.

Finding time to do necessary routine cultural practices on a golf resort that is open 365 days a year takes creative planning and cooperation from everyone from convention sales staff to Director of Golf Patrick Dill to Ragsdale and the maintenance staff. Dill and Ragsdale try to ride the course together every Monday to discuss conditions, maintenance projects and upcoming golf outings. Communication on a more formal and larger scale takes place in weekly golf meetings and weekly hotel leadership meetings so everyone knows what going on and coming up.

Generally Ragsdale says he gets to aerify greens, tees and fairways three times a year; the approaches once a year and the roughs twice a year. Light greens topdressing is done approxi-

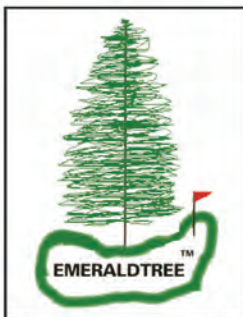
mately every two weeks. During the summer, when play slows down a little, the pro shop blocks a.m. or p.m. start times (depending on play) to provide access for topdressing.

Fertility on the TiffEagle greens is done primarily with weekly light liquid applications, which the turf takes up quickly. Maybe 2 to 3 pounds of granular nitrogen is applied annually. Tees, approaches, fairways and roughs receive a maximum of 8-10 pounds of nitrogen per year, which is on target for bermudagrass recommendations in the Central Florida zone.

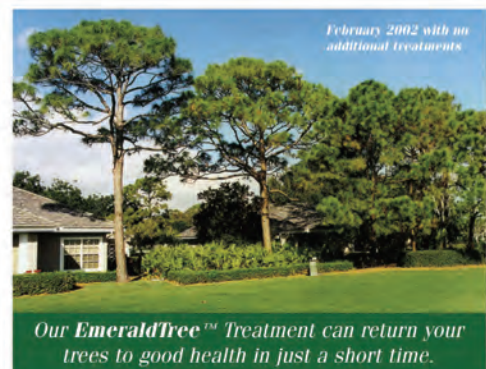
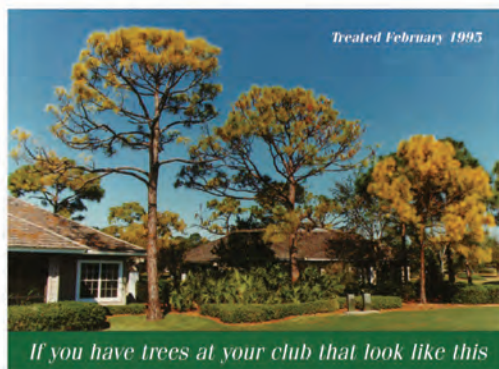
Pest control is not a major issue. Known hot spots for mole cricket and grub activity are monitored and, if needed, spot-treated with Top Choice and Merit and Meridian. The rest of the course is scouted and monitored for pest activity as part of the integrated pest management plan.

(Text continues on page 24)

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The butterfly garden behind the 13th tee of the Ritz-Carlton GC has nectar plants for adults and food plants for the caterpillar stages.

Nature's Nursery

A photo essay by Joel Jackson



A Gold Rim Swallowtail caterpillar feeding on a food-source pipevine growing on a trellis in the butterfly garden.



An Eastern Tiger Swallowtail butterfly with a wing span of 3– 4 inches was the main attraction this day.



The White Peacock butterfly ranges from Florida to southern Texas and feeds on spurge plants.



Butterfly gardens also provide nectar for a wide range of pollinators like this Mason Bee which ranges throughout North America.



A panoramic view up the par-5, third hole reveals one of the 16 lakes on the course, a pine and palmetto habitat and the J. W. Marriott Hotel, which shares the Grande Lakes property with the Ritz-Carlton. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

(Continued from Page 20)

The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club recently was able to switch to reclaimed water for its irrigation of the course and grounds, which is good for conservation of the area's fresh water supplies. Since reclaimed water isn't an infinite resource either, Ragsdale's irrigation technicians constantly inspect, monitor and adjust the operation of the 1500 sprinkler heads on the course and the 10,500 smaller heads around the resort grounds.

Throughout the design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Ritz-Carlton property, Andy Ragsdale was well prepared to fill his current role as superintendent of this premier facility. He developed his interest in this profession while working summers with his father, Wayne Ragsdale, when he was a construction

superintendent for Wadsworth Golf Construction. Andy's keen interest in environmental stewardship may have been kindled when he helped build the Sanctuary GC on Sanibel Island. The Sanctuary exists in the John Ding Darling Federal Wildlife Preserve, proving once and for all that environmental stewardship is alive and well on golf courses.

Ragsdale went on graduate from the renowned Golf Operations program at Lake City Community College in 1999 with his A.S. degree and took a job as an assistant superintendent at the Fox Hollow Golf Club in Trinity, a small community just east of his hometown of Tarpon Springs. After three years at Fox Hollow, he found himself in Orlando helping to build and develop the course he now calls home.

If young Ragsdale is an example of the type of talent and leadership

potential in our industry, then our profession will be in good hands. His observations about work – taking care of your team, communicating clearly up and down the chain of command, and attention to detail – are sage advice for young and old alike. He summed up his personal observations with a phrase that already has found its way into FGCSA communications with members. It is "You can't teach what you don't know and you can't lead where you won't go."

Learning and leadership are two qualities or skills that a successful superintendent needs to meet the economic and environmental demands and expectations facing today's golf industry. From what I observed, The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club is keeping its promise to do its very best for the guests, the employees and Mother Nature as well.