

Long Trip



**AS I SEE IT
BY JIM WALKER**

September 30 has been circled on my calendar since January. That is the last day of my employment managing golf courses with Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation. I have been crossing off the days one day at a time. There are only 33 more X's to make.

I have been working since I was 16 and 35 of those 48 years were spent on golf courses from Florida to Texas. My first job on a golf course was in 1957 when, as a 13-year-old, I walk-mowed greens for Paul Turcotte at Miami Springs CC. That was a nonpaying gig Mr. Turcotte gave me to keep me off the course hawking golf balls for green fees and lunch money. That job lasted three years.

My next job on a golf course came in 1971 when I worked for legendary superintendent Earl "Red" Jacobsen at Pecan Valley CC in San Antonio. I mowed greens, did prep work, and filled in for the night water man when he was off, sick, or on vacation. I was in heaven. I lived in a condo on the ninth fairway and got to play one the great courses in the

world free. Pecan Valley was built in 1960, designed by J. Press Maxwell, son of the great designer Perry Maxwell and Julius Boros beat Arnold Palmer there to win the 1968 PGA Championship at 2 over par. It was a brutal test of golf.

In 1973, I landed in Ocala and went to work for Jim Yancey, (Bert's brother) at Ocala GC. It was the only public 18-hole course in town and hosted about 70,000 rounds a year. I was the "working superintendent" and did everything. It was a great learning experience for the two years I was there and, through Mr. Yancey, I met and got to know his brother, Frank Beard, and Deane Beaman.

Now this may sound strange, but in 1975, I left Ocala GC to take the assistant's job at Silver Springs Shores just south of Ocala. It was a private club and the superintendent, Mel Sligh, was a UF graduate under the Godfather of Turf, Dr. GC (Granny) Horn. I took the job because I knew I would learn a lot from Mel, and I did. The biggest lesson I learned, which made me very sad, was that superintendents are always looking for better jobs. That was especially true in 1975 when they were building courses faster than you could blink. So there I was sitting with Mr. Sligh, when he told me he was leaving to take the job at Palma Ceia CC in Tampa, and he had recommended me to take his place.

Holy crap, I'm the new superintendent with only three years of fulltime experience at a big-time club that hosted a Florida Winter PGA Tour stop and a club full of mostly retired New

York and Pennsylvania golf nuts. The Shores was a monster designed by Desmond Muirhead on 220 acres. Well, I had a great crew and between them, my hard work and the free consultant I had in the person of my Par-Ex representative Bob Rehberg, I did a good job and didn't get fired. Bob, I'm so sorry I didn't call you when you won the "Wreath of Grass" award, but perhaps you'll read this and know how much your help meant to me. I will always remember our fishing stories and lies. I guess that's why they call them "fishing stories."

To Alan Weitzel who hired me in 1978, looked after me and helped guide and advise me through my 30 years with Dade County, thank you so much. Your friendship has meant more to me than you'll ever know. To Carlos McKeon who allowed me to come back to Briar Bay when I was sick, thank you. I would not have made it without you.

Most of all, to my wonderful wife Susi who has endured more than any human being should, thank you for your love, understanding, and friendship. You are truly "the wind beneath my wings."

I'm not going to miss getting up early almost every day. I will not miss mowing, watering, fertilizing, applying pesticides, or worrying about the weather... whether it's too hot or cold, too wet or dry. I'm going to be like John Lennon, who, when people used to bust his chops about not writing or recording enough songs, referred them to his song "I'm just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round, I just love to watch 'em roll." ■

**Green CAN
Be Easy**



**GREEN SIDE UP
BY JOEL JACKSON**

Well, it may not be easy for a flannel frog puppet in a static-cling world, but it doesn't have to be difficult either. Given the political climate we are living in right now, Muppets and turf managers need to throw some fabric- and opinion-softener into the media machine.

Being green doesn't mean you have to be rich and revamp your whole operation. It will take the investment of some elbow grease and common sense and finally determination, documentation and education to move the public opinion and local government rule-making needle.

Review and revise your management practices when it comes to fertilizer and pesticide applications, but more than that, clearly state in no uncertain terms the intent of your golf club to preserve and protect the environment. Call it a mission statement, a pledge and manifesto, I don't care, but create an Environmental Plan for your course. You can use Audubon International literature and guidance or the checklist from the back of the 2007 Golf Course BMP manual or

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maybe the USGA has some language you can borrow.

The point is, everyone has to make a conscious commitment to observe best management practices, document them and announce them to the world. You can start by practicing on your own golfers; you don't have to book an interview with the media. Get results first and then get comfortable talking about them. You may not be the public spokesperson for your club, but you are the ultimate source for the leadership of practicing good stewardship by your staff.

First thing – and this is like dieting to lose weight – make the commitment. Clean up the maintenance compound, the shop, storage facilities, wash-down areas and your offices and locker rooms. First impressions set the tone. Brooms, blowers and paint brushes aren't that expensive. Take small steps and set fixed goals, and keep at it until it becomes routine. Just do it.

Buffer zones need to be phased in around all water bodies. Cease fertilizer and chemical applications within the immediate area adjacent to them. Several courses have done this successfully and, by raising heights of cut wherever possible, they mitigate the possibility of compromising water quality on or off the course.

Don't assume members or players will rebel against

tall rough or slope cuts near water, or recoil from aquatic plants on the littoral shelf. One of the best filters and nutrient-removing tactics is anchored floating islands of aquatic plants promoted by Beeman's Nursery. Steve Beeman recently read off the amounts of nutrients and heavy metals that these plant islands take out of the water. It exceeds the ability of shoreline plants. The islands may work if members or the designer are dead set against creating a "wild-looking" lake bank.

One of the most successful trends in course conservation measures has been the conversion of out-of-play areas into non-irrigated natural areas. Removal of maintenance inputs like water, fertilizer and pesticides are a real positive statement and tangible evidence of a golf course's stewardship commitment. Doesn't it make sense in these tough times to reduce operating costs wherever possible?

Considering the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, ADA requirements and growing local regulations, following best management practices won't really be voluntary. Many courses already get it but I think documentation, public outreach and education could be improved.

Go to that checklist in the back of the BMP manual and see how you stack up. Don't you already fulfill some of those basic practices? Have you taken any steps to put it on the record? Do you have a written plan? Get ahead of the curve now and avoid being behind the eight-ball later. ■



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