



Members and guests enjoy the annual golf course “Bird Walk” hosted by the Grand Harbor Audubon Society in the winter of 2006. Photo by Bobby Wallace.

Communication Can Be a Beautiful Thing

By Shelly Foy

I have been thinking a lot lately about the importance of being able to communicate effectively with others. It seems to be the crux of most problems in the world today and, quite honestly, very few of us do it well. Good communication is difficult at best, and yet it is so very important in everything we do. I encourage each of you to speak out more, write more, reach out more and force yourselves to become better communicators.

The reality is that you can’t just do your job solely on your golf course anymore. Your job has come to be about communicating effectively to those outside of your property about what you do on your golf course and why you do it.

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Talk about finding an effective way to communicate your message!

In my opinion, Bobby Wallace has hit the mother lode.

Wallace is the golf course superintendent at Grand Harbor Golf & Beach Club in Vero Beach. The property comprises 900 acres, with

140 acres of wetlands, 20 water bodies, 50 acres of surface water, 205 acres of turfgrass and a 45-hole golf course with 800 members. Wallace has been at the club for two and a half years. He came from Hilton Head Island, S.C., where he was the superintendent at Indigo Run Country Club for 18 years.

Grand Harbor was already a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary when Wallace joined the management team. Instead of being satisfied with its status, his love of nature and being outside compelled him to do more. Not too long after he came to Grand Harbor, Wallace had a conversation with a member who mentioned that she knew they were a Certified Audubon Sanctuary, but she felt like they could do so much more. Bobby agreed and they set up a meeting to discuss ideas.

Pretty soon, there were so many people showing up at meetings that they were running out of room. The next thing you know, the members at Grand Harbor had decided to form their own Audubon Society chapter, and the Grand Harbor Audubon Society was born. The group currently has 85 members and their goal – which

they believe will be reached soon – is 200 members.

On Nov. 20, they hosted their annual Audubon Open, and raised \$3,800, which they already are putting to use. Wallace and several members, with the help of the Pelican Island Audubon Society, are in the process of installing seven purple martin houses, two osprey platforms, four screech owl boxes, four wood duck boxes, and four boxes for woodpeckers.

One of the first projects they began was naturalizing an area around holes 6, 7, 9, 13 and 14 of the Harbor Course. They have stopped mowing and spraying out-of-play areas along this corridor (allowing Wallace to re-allocate those resources to other areas of the golf course), and members of their Audubon Society have convinced many of the adjoining homeowners to stop mowing and spraying their areas around this corridor as well.

When I visited Grand Harbor, it was 95 degrees at 3:30 p.m. and the area was teeming with dragonflies, butterflies and too many bird species to count. I can only imagine what this area will be like during the actual birding season.

Wallace and the members of the



Grand Harbor Audubon Committee: From left: Robert Wallace (director of golf), Virginia Tulluch and Jim Bercaw (in charge of lakes and buffer zones), Deb Fletcher (original organizer) and Neil Stalter (resident bird expert).

Grand Harbor Audubon Society continually seek new ideas for ways to enhance habitat on the golf courses. Several members made a point of traveling and playing golf on other Certified Audubon Sanctuaries across the country and brought back pictures and ideas of things they wanted to do at Grand Harbor.

Wallace has a shared goal with his membership of enhancing and protecting habitat on their 900 acres. They share e-mails and photos and spend time together making plans and discussing ideas. He is an active member of their Audubon Society, and I am quite sure he is getting more satisfaction from his job now than ever before. Two of his Green Committee members are also members of the Grand Harbor Audubon Society, and this helps garner support for projects on the golf courses. Wallace is quick to give most of the credit for their environmental efforts to his members,

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and they have developed quite a kinship in Vero Beach.

During my visit we were stopped by a couple of his members who wanted to talk about the Egyptian Swans that are now living on the golf course, and where they were last seen. We toured the corridor area they are currently enhancing, and we talked about the plans they have for creating educational signs around several areas of the courses. He even shared his favorite spot along No. 14 on the River Course, which runs parallel to the Intracoastal Waterway. This is where he sometimes escapes to have a few minutes of quiet time to gather his thoughts before he heads off to a meeting.

We talked about the Bald Eagles that nested close by this past year and who raised a fledgling around hole No. 4 of the Harbor Course. Wallace recently told me that the eagles are already back this year. We talked about the manatees and the dolphins and even the bull sharks that have been seen around the property. We came around corners where rabbits were munching on grass and did not seem bothered by our presence. They have even installed an escape ramp for turtles to use when the water levels are too low in the effluent irrigation pond.

If you have ever spoken to Wallace you know immediately that he is a good communicator. You hear the tone in his voice, the excitement about programs, and the mention of all of the people helping him to spread his message. As I left Grand Harbor late that afternoon, I couldn't help but think, "How can I bottle some of this up and share it with the rest of the world?"

Wallace has used the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program as an effective communication tool and it has worked beautifully for him and for the Grand Harbor membership. I encourage everyone who has not yet made the decision to enroll their golf course in this program to take the time to do so. You can enroll online at www.auduboninternational.org.



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