



PALMETTO GOLF COURSE

Growing the Game

Number 4. Water comes into play on 11 holes on the Palmetto Golf Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek

By Joel Jackson, CGCS

Five miles south of downtown Miami on 120 acres of land at the corner of US Highway 1 and SW 152nd Street sits the Palmetto Golf Club, one of six golf courses operated by the Miami-Dade County Parks & Recreation Department. As the crow flies, the course is located halfway between the Metropolitan Zoo and Biscayne Bay. One of the many flood-control canals in the Miami area meanders through the property looking more like a river than what one might picture as a straight-line canal.

This wandering water hazard comes into play on 10 holes of this Dick Wilson-designed course, which will be celebrating its 50th birthday in 2010. Other Wilson layouts of note include Pine Tree just up the road in Boynton

Beach and the original Bay Hill design back when all the homes were still orange groves.

Over those past 50 years a lot of golf history has been written at Palmetto, thanks mainly to the

“growing the game” mentality that has been fostered by the people who run the public golf courses in Miami. Marcus Prevatte, the golf course manager/superintendent of the Palmetto Golf Club, learned how to



A crocodile makes a rare inland appearance and a interesting entry on the Palmetto G.C. wildlife inventory. Photo by Marcus Prevatte.

SUPERINTENDENT/FUN FACTS

Originally from: Frankfurt Germany

Family: Joanne, Janina and Jan.

Education: Miami Sunset Sr. Florida International University BS Biology

Employment history:

2001 to Present

Superintendent and Manager, Palmetto Golf Course/Briar Bay;

1999-2001 Assistant Superintendent, Indian Creek Country Club,

1989-99 Technician

University of Florida/IFAS) Ft. Lauderdale Research & Education Center

Professional affiliations.

SFGCSA, FGCSA, GCSAA

and USGA. Current Vice President South Florida GCSA.

Goals: Up to date greens renovation.

FUN FACTS:

Best Golf Shot: Hole-in-one on Christmas Day 1985

The last good movie I saw: The Reader

I stay home to watch: The Majors

The book I've been reading: Brunelleschi's Dome by Ross King

Favorite meal: "Steak and Potatoes"

Favorite performers: Beatles, Pink Floyd, Nirvana, Robin Williams, Top Gear.



Course Manager and Superintendent Marcus Prevatte is also the South Florida GCSA vice president. Photo by Joel Jackson.

play the game on Miami's public courses while in school and working on the courses.

Prevatte also shared the names of some professional golfers you might recognize who played in or won the Palmetto Junior Open during their junior golf development years. The likes of Sergio Garcia, Nick Thompson (winner), Chris Couch, Christy Kerr, Eric Kompton, Dudley Hart (winner) comprise a commendable alumni list. Another bit of golf trivia

and history that I learned was that the first head pro at Palmetto was Jim Yancey, brother of former PGA Tour star Bert Yancey. So Palmetto has lots of golf tradition running deep in its roots.

"Growing the Game" has been the latest catch phrase in the golf industry to rally the troops to help get more people into the game to offset the flat participation numbers of the past few years, but Miami-Dade County and the Palmetto Golf Club



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Palmetto GC's beautiful and fun miniature putting course. Photo by Marcus Prevatte

have never stopped being promoters of the game. As Prevatte says, "Our mission is and has been to develop our own clientele."

Prevatte sees public courses as the ideal venues to facilitate entry-level players learning the game and developing their skills. At Palmetto there is a mini-putting course which is beautifully landscaped and completely devoid of windmills and gimmicks. No carom shots off the sideboards here. It's all about putting. But it's not intimidating and it's family friendly, so kids and adults can enjoy the challenge of putting competition.

Of course the route to the mini-course just happens to go by the practice range and the management offers all sorts of specials and coupons to entice folks to learn how to hit full shots as well. The course offers summer golf camps, and parents who already play golf utilize those programs to help the kids develop



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Palmetto Golf Club Maintenance Staff

Location: Miami

Ownership: Miami-Dade County, average rounds per year: 53,000

Number of Holes: 18; 6,648 yards; par 70; Slope/Rating: 136 / 71.7

Designed by: Dick Wilson; opened: 1960

Management Team: Golf Professional Phil Arginias; Golf Course Manager Marcus Prevatte; Park Facilities/Pro Shop Manager Susi Walker

Ongoing projects: Tee top expansion and leveling. Fairway irrigation improvements.

Total acreage: 120. Turf acreage under maintenance: 100

Greens: Bermuda; avg. size: 7,500 sq. ft. total 2.5 acres; HOC .150 in.; green speed goal 8.0-plus; when overseeded, poa trivialis at 6-8 lbs/1,000 sq.ft.

Tees, Fairways and Roughs: common & Ormond bermudagrass, some 419 and Celebration on tees. Tees 3.2 acres, HOC .50 in.; fairways 27 acres and roughs 32 acres, no overseeding on fairways and roughs.

Bunkers: 81 Trap 100 sand; machine raked with Toro Sand Pro.

Waterways: One canal winds through the property; 2 lakes total 5 acres, maintain banks in-house.

Irrigation system: Source three wells; customized pump station by Sullivan Electric; Rainbird satellite controls; 400 heads; no fertigation.

Water Conservation: Making sure watering only when needed; relocating and replacing heads around greens to increase efficiency of coverage.

Staff: 12 total including superintendent.

Key maintenance staff members: Equipment Technician Domingo Morua; Pest Control Technician Juan Serrano; Irrigation Technician Tony Mateo; Forman Jose Morales; administrative: Susi Walker gets purchase approvals and does the ordering.

Crew members: Jeffery Clark, Jeffery Dennis, Donald Gemmel, Ben Jackson, Richard Miller, Pedro Moreno, Robert Salazar and Carlos Trumax.

their skills. There are also evening leagues in the summer and ladies' leagues and Wednesday leagues also for adults.

Public golf courses often have a little more flexibility in their scheduling to create these leagues and special outings to accommodate new golfers. They offer another

important benefit to beginning golfers – affordable golf in a sport that is often criticized for being too costly for the common man. Miami Dade's Golf Division offers plenty of good golf for everyone.

Budgets for public golf courses can be just as variable as any golf sector depending on the mindset of the

city and/or county fathers. Prevatte and his counterparts must be just as creative and adaptable as the next superintendent down the street. Purchasing “nice-to-have” items with a centralized purchasing department is not an option. So programs need to be agronomically solid with not much room for extras.

But being frugal doesn't mean public courses are stagnant. Currently Prevatte is evaluating the performance of Mini-Verde ultradwarf on his putting green for possible conversion of his Quality Grass Bermuda greens.

With 53,000 rounds of golf on average per year and a mixture of Common and Ormond bermudagrass on the fairways and roughs, traffic control is a big part of the turf management program at Palmetto during the busy winter season. Most golfers must have flunked geometry, because Prevatte has had to resort to installing wall-to-wall ropes and stakes at the 200- and 100-yard markers to get golf cars back on the cart paths and stop them from running up the small fairways at will and wearing out the turf.

As Prevatte also noted, “We do not have lots of personnel to get very elaborate with our cultural maintenance programs. We do lots of scouting and monitoring of the playing conditions and turf response to determine when and what needs to be done. We don't verticut on a set prescribed schedule, but frequently enough to control thatch levels and mower scalping.

“We aerify everything three times in the summer months, harvesting cores with 5/8-inch tines at a 2.5-inch spacing and topdress with sand to fill the holes. All this is done in-house by our staff.

“Mowing is all done with triplex mowers at a normal daily height of .150 inch. We raise them up to .180 inch after aerifying and topdressing and then lower them back down to .150-inch slowly each week to let the sand settle in. We mow the clean-up ring every other day to minimize wear. Fairways are mowed twice per week



You have to contend with a small lake and the cross-course canal on the par-3, 7th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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and tees the usual three times per week.

“We also roll the greens all week following aerification to smooth them out. Otherwise we roll the greens only for special events. We do topdress greens lightly every other week in the summer and once per month in the winter.

“With chemical costs running so high, our pest-control programs are strictly curative and chemicals are only applied as needed. Again we do lots of scouting and monitoring to make sure no insect, weed or disease outbreaks get away from us.”

Prevatte had lots of first-hand training at spotting symptoms of turf stress while working at the University of Florida Research and Education Center in Ft. Lauderdale as a turf technician. It was his first job after obtaining his BS in biology at Florida International University. Part of Prevatte’s duties were taking care of the FGCSA donated Otto Schmiesser Research Green.

I asked Prevatte how he ultimately got into the business. Not unlike many superintendents, playing the game led to choosing a career in this field. Prevatte said, “Toward the end of high school a friend and I decided to go to Greynolds GC, rent clubs and play golf. Neither of us had any experience with golf prior to that day. We went on to buy some cheap sets of clubs and played maybe once a month for a year or two.

“Then I needed to get a part-time job while I was at FIU. I was still

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A view up the 1st hole and a few of the 81 sand bunkers on the course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

interested in golf and had been to Palmetto several times and there was this opening for a cart man. It was a perfect match. Earn money, go to school and play golf for free.

"I would like to thank three special people who helped me in my career as a superintendent. First there was Carlos McKeon, who was a major influence in the golf business when I was starting out. Carlos came to Palmetto a couple of years after I started there. He taught me the basics of golf course maintenance. He also introduced me to Superintendent Ray Hanson.

"Ray was working with the South Florida GCSA and the FGCSA for the establishment of a "real world" research green at the UF/IFAS station in Ft. Lauderdale. Superintendents wanted research done on turf maintained at greens height and not just the usual turf plot setting.

"While I was working at the

Ft. Lauderdale REC, Monica Elliott taught me a lot about the research world and gave me plenty of hands-on experience with plant pathology – something very useful if you are a golf course superintendent. And last but not least, Joe Pantaleo gave me the opportunity to experience the high end of the business. He refined the way I look at and think about golf course conditioning and maintenance.

Following that 10-year assignment at the Research Center, Prevatte worked for two years as an assistant with Joe Pantaleo at the Indian Creek Country Club before coming to the Palmetto and Briar Bay golf courses eight years ago. Not a bad resume for a young lad from Frankfurt, Germany who emigrated to the US when he was five years old.

Now carrying the title of Course Manager/Superintendent and overseeing both Palmetto GC and the nine-hole Briar Bay GC nearby,

Prevatte has put in enough time to offer up some advice for turf students and aspiring would-be superintendents.

"Resist the temptation to cut corners," he said. "If you do cut a corner, make sure it is reasonable and realize it is only a temporary fix. You might get away with it as long as you go back and do it right."

I don't think Prevatte has been cutting any corners on his own personal golf game either. I read he placed third gross in a recent South Florida GCSA golf outing and that's no easy assignment in that golf-centric chapter.

Prevatte came to love the game of golf, which later became his profession. He started out with old, rented clubs learning the game on public courses and now he finds himself grooming those same links and growing the game for others to enjoy.