

From the Beltway to the Fairway



Regulators Get Real-World View of Responsible Environmental Management

By Kyle D. Sweet, CGCS

On March 30, the Old Collier Golf Club hosted the annual 2009 Regulatory Tour where the EPA, USDA, Florida Farm Bureau and the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association were represented.

This long-standing annual tour of Florida agriculture operations was organized by Mike Aerts, Florida Fruit and Vegetable director of marketing and membership; Dan Botts, vice president of industry resources; and Tim Hiers, maintenance director of the Old Collier Golf Club.

Old Collier has served as the first stop for the group's weeklong tour for the past five or six years after the FGCSA was invited to help host the tour since it is a convenient stop near the Southwest Florida International Airport in Ft. Myers. The tour also includes visits to Lee County Mosquito Control and South Florida production

Tim Hiers (yellow shirt) explains golf maintenance practices during one of many stops on the Old Collier course during the March 2009 Regulator Tour. Photo by Mike Aerts.

facilities for cattle, citrus, sugar cane and other row crops, sod and ornamentals.

Would it surprise you that many of the participants have never been on a golf course?

Each year the tour provides the opportunity to introduce a new group of lawmakers and regulators to the golf course industry at the ground level. Touring the entire group through the golf course on golf carts is by far the best way for them to learn what we do as managers and for them to gain an understanding of the challenges that superintendents face each day.

Besides, the carts are fun and who doesn't like spending a March afternoon in the fresh air on a golf course? Sunglasses, hats and wide open views replace the office attire and indoor atmosphere on a first introduction for many into our world of golf course management.

Superintendents are dedicated to preservation and conservation of our properties. How we utilize chosen chemicals with regard to frequency, thresholds and product decision-making is very important to convey to those who make the rules.

Hiers and other South Florida superintendents have taken the time to educate these decision-makers on not only pesticide issues, but on other

topics such as fertility, irrigation water use, wildlife management, energy conservation and maintenance facility operations.

Combined, this is an extensive list and an integral part of being a superintendent in today's times. Once presented with this information, the group gains an incredible understanding of the Old Collier operation and, in turn, an understanding of the golf course industry trends and abilities to maintain high level course conditioning while not only protecting habitats, but in many cases enhancing them.

All of this work is capped with a putting contest and dinner to wrap up the visit. By day's end, industry professionals have answered many questions and provided much-needed insight to the tour participants.

Florida superintendents should be thankful that this effort is made each March, undoubtedly going a long way toward protecting the practices that we know are crucial to our valuable profession.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The passenger golf carts rented by the FGCSA for the regulator tour are also used by Old Collier for some public outreach and education by hosting annual tours for 5th graders from a nearby elementary school.