

The Tale of The Pearl



By Shelly Foy

Back in 1994, the directors of the Treasure Coast GCSA often met after work to grab a bite, share a cold one, and talk about association business. That year the guys were stirred up because Paul Harvey had just finished a broadcast that was not very flattering to golf courses.

Tim Cann, president at the time, had previously been involved with the Suncoast Scramble and remembered how much fun they had planning and hosting the tournament. He suggested the TCGCSA host a similar fundraising event. Collectively, the TCGCSA board — Cann, Craig Weyandt, Dick Gray, Bill Lanthier, David Chees-

man, Roger Welker, David Oliver, Jack Orr, Steve Sill, Chris Leahy, Brad Fick, and Tom Benefield — decided it was time for golf course superintendents to get serious about letting people know the truth about golf and the environment. In Gray's words, they needed some "green ink." They proposed a golf tournament to raise funds for teaching environmental awareness and showing that golf courses are good for the environment.

The first event, dubbed the "First Annual Wildlife Charity Golf Tournament," was held at Loblolly Pines GC in Hobe Sound May 21, 1994. The flyer read, "So often our industry is criticized for its perceived negative impact on the environment. This is an excellent opportunity for us to make a positive impact."

The first tournament raised more than \$10,000 for the Treasure Coast Wildlife Hospital.

Needing a catchier name, Gray proposed "Blue Pearl," remembering a NASA photo where the Earth looked like a pearl in a sea of blue. So in 1995, the Blue Pearl was born.

In its 16-year history, the Blue Pearl has raised more than a quarter-million dollars. The goal was, "By funding environmental and ecological awareness programs in grade schools throughout the Treasure Coast, we can inform and educate not only students, but teachers, administrators, and parents. We can foster and nurture an age of children who grow up knowing the benefits of a healthy environment and the benefits golf courses offer to people, wildlife,

Roy MacDonald and Tim Cann present Debbie Fritz-Quincy, director, Hobe Sound Nature Center, with a check for \$12,500 to support newly opened educational exhibits. Photo by Shelly Foy. Earth – The Blue Pearl. Logo courtesy of the TCGCSA.

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and the environment.”

Below is a partial list of environmental programs and projects the Blue Pearl has supported over the years:

- \$20,000 to help Pelican Island Elementary School in Vero Beach purchase adjacent lots to protect as Scrub Jay habitat
- \$8,500 to sponsor four years of the Indian River Lagoon Envirothon
- Over \$34,000 since 1996 for the South Fork High School turf program. South Fork High School has a three-hole golf course on campus. Students are encouraged to work hard to earn acceptance into the golf program. Several South Fork students have graduated from the turf program and are now working in the golf industry.
- Over \$5,000 to Audubon International as grant money for schools across the country looking for funding for environmental projects

Many individual schools have received grants for environmental programs, including:

- Hobe Sound Elementary School built a native plant nursery/slat house, designed and installed butterfly and hummingbird gardens, provided school-wide subscriptions for National Geographic magazine, and purchased environmentally themed books for the school library.
- Hidden Oaks Elementary constructed an outdoor classroom
- Crystal Lake Elementary built a nature trail
- Palm City Elementary purchased 30 sets of computer programs on oceans and rainforests, and created a land-

scape habitat area

- Sea Wind Elementary School created a butterfly garden
- Stuart Middle School installed a butterfly garden and purchased a dolphin topiary
- Citrus Elementary School planted vegetable gardens and a developed a Tree Program
- Martin County School District Plant Nursery purchased native plant liners to encourage use of native plants on school grounds

In July, the TCGCSA donated \$12,500 to the Hobe Sound Nature Center which lost its building to hurricanes in 2004, and in August, new exhibits were opened to the public to promote environmental awareness for people of all ages. In addition to on- and off-site environmental programs that reach more than 60,000 students a year, there are many programs for the public, including turtle walks, summer camps, evening forums, scrub habitat tours, and more.

Originally intended solely for environmental awareness, the Blue Pearl has diversified recently due to the increasing need for financial support for disaster relief. Donations have included money for 9/11 victims, support for superintendents affected by Hurricane Katrina, as well as other benevolent funding needs. They also came to the aid of the Challenger School in Stuart with a \$5,000 donation to help build a handicapped-accessible playground.

I have been fortunate to have been involved with the Blue Pearl, almost from its beginning. I have seen first-hand how generous the TCGCSA and the Blue Pearl

sponsors have been over the years. Craig Weyandt, superintendent at the Moorings Country Club in Vero Beach recently said, “I can still hear the passion in Dick’s voice when we came up with the concept for the Blue Pearl. He said that it was up to each of us to polish the pearl, take care of it. After all, we are only tenants here, visitors, guests. It is not ours to abuse.”

Since the Blue Pearl’s beginning, there have been eight presidents of the TC-GCSA and each one has taken on the responsibility of “polishing the pearl”.

Cann, now in his second term as president, said, “Even though boards have changed over the last 16 years, the original message of the Blue Pearl has stayed alive. This year’s contribution to the Hobe Sound Nature Center is a perfect example of what the Blue Pearl fundraising is intended for. We are especially thankful to every participant, vendor, and volunteer that continues to be generous year after year even in these tough financial times.”

Recently Gray reminded me that the original goal was to have a String of Pearls across the country. “Can you imagine what we could do as an industry if every state hosted a Blue Pearl and the collective money raised went to fund environmental awareness and to also tell all the ways golf courses benefit the community and the environment? Man, wouldn’t that be sweet?”

A String of Pearls across the country is doable. Florida could challenge other states if every chapter would host a Blue Pearl in 2011, or at least support a statewide Blue Pearl fund. Eleven FGCSA Chapters, eleven pearls on the string. Who’s up for a challenge?

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#18 Old Course, Broken Sound. Improving habitat and water quality by using native grasses and aquatic plants. Photo by Joe Hubbard.

Audubon International certifies golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses and the Audubon Signature Programs that demonstrate their commitment to the environment. These eco-friendly courses meet required standards for protecting water quality, conserving natural resources, and providing wildlife habitats. More information about the Audubon International programs can be found at www.auduboninternational.org. The following Florida courses have achieved certification as of July 12, 2010.

CERTIFIED GOLD AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| The Old Collier Golf Club, Naples | WCI-Raptor Bay Golf Club, Bonita Springs |
| WCI-Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club, Marco | WCI-Tuscany Reserve Golf Club, Naples |
| WCI-Old Palm, Palm Beach Gardens | WCI-Venetian Golf & River Club, Venice |
| WCI-Pelican Preserve, Ft. Myers | Washington Reservation & Golf Learning Center, Cleveland |

CERTIFIED SILVER AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| The Club at Mediterra, Naples | Shark's Tooth Golf Club, Panama City | Villages of Sumter Phase II: |
| Eagle Creek, Orlando | The Aerie Golf Course, Naples | The Villages Cane Garden & Sunset Point |
| Eagle Ridge Golf Club, Summerfield: | Villages of Marion, The Villages: Nancy Lopez | Villages of Sumter Phase III: |
| Masters & Memorial Courses | Legacy Country Club, Amberwood Nine, Briarwood | The Villages Key Largo (Bogart and Bacall) |
| Juliette Falls, Dunnellon | Nine, Oakleigh Nine, Walnut Grove Nine | Villages of Sumter Phase IV, The Villages |
| Old Corkscrew Golf Club, Estero | Villages of Sumter Phase I (63 holes): | WCI - Lost Key Golf Club, Perdido Key |
| St. James Bay Golf Course, Carrabelle | The Villages Belevedere Golf Course (Churchill | |
| Sarasota National Golf Club, Venice | Downs & Pimlico), Sunset Pointe Golf Club (Heron | |
| | & Pelican), Palmer Legends Country Club (Cherry | |
| | Hill, Laurel Valley & Riley Grove) | |

CERTIFIED BRONZE AUDUBON SIGNATURE SANCTUARIES

Bonita Bay Club East, Naples
Collier's Reserve, Naples

Indian River Club, Vero Beach
Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes, Longwood
PGA Golf Club, Port St. Lucie

The Talon at TwinEagles, Naples
West Bay Golf Club, Estero

CERTIFIED AUDUBON COOPERATIVE SANCTUARIES

Aquarina Country Club, Melbourne Beach
Arlington Ridge Golf Club, Leesburg
Audubon Country Club, Naples
Bent Creek Golf Course, Jacksonville
(aka Golf Club of Jacksonville)
Bonita Bay Club, Bonita Springs: Bay Island
Course, Creekside Course, Marsh Course
Black Diamond Ranch, Lecanto
Broken Sound Club, Boca Raton
Brooksville Country Club at Majestic Oaks,
Brooksville
Camp Creek Golf Club, Palm City Beach
Card Sound Golf Club, Key Largo
Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Club, Clearwater
Copperleaf Golf Club, Bonita Spring
Country Club of Florida, Village of Golf
Country Club of Miami, Miami
Country Club of Naples, Naples
Crown Colony Golf & Country Club,
Fort Myers
Disney's Oak Trail Golf Course,
Lake Buena Vista
Doral Golf Resort and Spa, Miami
Eglin Golf Club, Niceville
Faldo Golf Institute by Marriott, Orlando
Floridian, Stuart
FoxFire Golf and Country Club, Naples
Gainesville Country Club, Gainesville
Golf Club of Jacksonville, Jacksonville
Grand Harbor Club, Vero Beach
Grande Pines Golf Club, Orlando
Hammock Dunes Club, Palm Coast Creek
Course Links Course

Harbour Ridge Yacht & Country Club, Palm City
Harmony Golf Preserve, Harmony
Hawk's Landing Golf Course at Marriott's
Orlando World Center, Orlando
Hawk's Nest Golf Club, Vero Beach
High Ridge Golf Course, Lantana
Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club, Naples
IGM – Arrowhead Golf Course, Naples
IGM – The Habitat Golf Course, Malabar
IGM – Sandridge Golf Club, Vero Beach
IGM – Spessard Holland Golf Club,
Melbourne Beach
IGM – The Savannahs, Merritt Island
Interlachen Country Club, Winter Park
Ironwood Municipal Golf Course,
Gainesville
Isleworth Golf & Country Club, Wyndermere
John's Island Club – West Course, Vero Beach
Lake Buena Vista Club, Lake Buena Vista
Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club,
Bradenton
Laurel Oak Country Club, Sarasota
Lemon Bay Golf Club, Englewood
The Links at Boynton Beach, Boynton Beach
Loblolly Pines Golf Club, Hobe Sound
Magnolia Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
Maple Leaf Golf and Country Club,
Port Charlotte
Mizner Country Club, Delray Beach
The Moorings Country Club, Naples
Naples Lakes Country Club, Naples
Okeehelie Golf Course, West Palm Beach
Old Marsh Golf Club, Palm Beach Gardens

Olde Florida Golf Club, Naples
Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club, Orchid
Osprey Ridge Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
Palencia Golf Club, St. Augustine
Palm Golf Course, Lake Buena Vista
Palmetto Golf Course, Miami
Pelican Marsh Golf Club, Naples
Pelican's Nest Golf Club, Bonita Springs
Pelican Sound Golf & River Club, Estero
Plantation Preserve Golf Course & Club,
Plantation
Quail Ridge Country Club, Boynton Beach
Regatta Bay Golf and Country Club, Destin
Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Golf Club,
St. Petersburg
The Rookery at Marco Island, Marco Island
Royal Poinciana Golf Club, Naples
The Sanctuary Golf Club, Sanibel Island
Shadow Wood Country Club, Bonita Springs
Shadow Wood Preserve Country Club, Fort
Myers
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Two bald eagles sighted on the Naples Beach Club G.C. during the Poa Annua Classic.
Photo by Joel Jackson.

GOLF BIRDIES Scoring Birdies on the Naples Beach Club Golf Course

Even though I personally scored 18 birdies and a double eagle during the GC Horn Endowment Tournament at the 2010 Poa Annua Classic, our team's final score was only minus-1 and not in the winners' circle. I guess logging 18 different species in the middle of the day isn't too bad. However, I was told I could not count the two duck hooks I also had during the round.

Assistant Superintendent Kristen Conover told me before the round to look out for bald eagles around the lake on No. 7. Sure enough there were two in a tree near the 6th tee as we started our round on No. 8. Later in the day, as we played No. 6, there was the eagle again perched

on a limb over the tee with a fish in its talons. As I was reaching for my camera, our lovely state bird – the Mockingbird – dive-bombed the eagle and it flew off, dropping the fish. The rest of the sightings for the day follow below.

American Crow
Anhinga
Bald Eagle
Collared Dove
Killdeer
Mockingbird
Mottled duck
Mourning Dove
Muscovy ducks with chicks
Osprey
Purple Martin
Red Bellied Woodpecker
Rose ringed Parakeet
Sea gulls
Snowy egret
Starlings
Swallowtail Kite
White Ibis (adult and juveniles)

The next day, playing in the Poa Scramble the eagle was sighted again, this time on the 5th hole near the lake eating another fish. The eagle action on both Friday and Saturday prompted me to share other raptor encounters on FGCSA member courses. See the raptor photos in the Stewardship section of this issue. Obviously golf courses – even in urban settings – are quite compatible as eagle habitat. See the photos at left I call Raptor Rapture.
By Joel Jackson.

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