

Shell Point Facility Tour



The first stop on the tour was the maintenance facility to show how important and complex golf operations are. Photo by Shelly Foy.

Shelly Foy, USGA Green Section, Florida Region

Mark Jacobs, golf course superintendent at Shell Point Golf Club in Fort Myers, looked anxious with anticipation when we met at the maintenance facility Feb. 20. He was waiting for the bus to drop off a group of Shell Point's residents and golf members for a maintenance facility and golf course tour. It had been several years since he had hosted a similar tour at a previous course.

Mark was well prepared and, as it turned out, he had nothing to be nervous about. The members were enthusiastic and curious and asked questions that put Mark at ease because he was talking about something he knows very well, golf course maintenance and the surrounding environment.

The tour started at the maintenance facility with Mark and crew leader John Sutton discussing the fully contained recycle equipment wash system and fuel island, soil bins, blow-off station and fertilizer storage. Next, mechanic Greg Cramp discussed the equipment repair shop and how it was designed and managed with safety and efficiency of equipment care in mind. While touring the maintenance facility, members had the opportunity to view before-and-after photos of improve-

ments to the equipment storage area. Signs also displayed the cost of individual pieces of equipment. Mark made a point that I am sure stuck in everyone's mind when he equated one hour of equipment use on the golf course to 100 miles on a personal car.

Mark then took everyone into the break room where he had a table set up with items like EC and moisture meters. Members were particularly interested in the automated irrigation system and soil moisture sensors and asked a lot of questions about water use. Mark and his members had a great conversation about how important water conservation is to Shell Point and the golf course staff.

Next, everyone loaded up in golf carts for the course tour. Mark first took everyone to an area where they are working on naturalizing an out-of-play area by removing turf and planting native plants. He took the opportunity to talk not only about the benefits to wildlife from such projects, but also how naturalizing areas can help reduce inputs of water, fertilizers and chemicals. He also took the opportunity to reiterate the benefits of turf and how it can be an excellent bio-filter. On holes No. 3



Posters showed the cost of equipment and the investment a club must make in course maintenance. Photo by Shelly Foy.

and No. 4, he talked about a staff project of propagating (or recycling) existing aquatic plants and how they not only enhance lake edges, but also create habitat for wildlife and help filter and improve water quality.

We then had fun on No. 8 exploring a gopher tortoise den. The members were surprised to hear that the dens are dug to a depth that maintains a constant 72 degrees and are often shared with other animals like snakes.



Mark Jacobs discusses the gopher tortoise habitat and how tortoise dens house a variety of species including snakes. Photo by Shelly Foy.

The last stop was close to the maintenance facility where the staff has worked to create an aquatic haven for all kinds of wildlife, which were very much in abundance during the tour. This area was a great example of what a healthy aquatic system looks like. There was lively discussion from the members about how much they enjoyed this area during their rounds. Mark extended an invitation for anyone interested in working on environmental projects to join their environmental team. One member is very knowledgeable about native plants and offered to get involved in creating a plant inventory.

Mike Mongoven, director of golf at Shell Point, was also on hand throughout the tour and thought the event was very beneficial. Hosting course tours is a great way to garner support, both for environmental projects as well as general golf course mainte-

nance efforts. Mark did this the right way, by planning ahead and making sure the information he presented was well thought out and interesting. After the two-hour tour, he now has some very supportive members, and I suspect that with members talking to members, there will be many more who will be lining up to take part in the next tour.

Editor's note: What a great "How To" article that can be used by anyone interested in conducting a tour. In this era of prolific local ordinances, tours like this can help members spread the word to other friends in the community and support our calls for science in the ordinances. Better still, take some county commissioners or regulators on a tour.



This aquatic haven created by the maintenance employees with its abundant wildlife was the hit of the tour. Photo by Shelly Foy.

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