

## Regulator Reality Check

Twelve years ago, the Florida GCSA joined the allied group of agriculture and green industries in sponsoring a Spring Regulator Tour that brought EPA regulators from Washington and Atlanta, and Florida regulators from the Florida Depts. of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, Water Management Districts, Mosquito Control Districts and some local county officials.

The annual event takes place each March as the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association coordinates the tour which includes golf, nursery, sod, citrus, row crop, sugar cane, dairy and beef cattle operations. The regulators meet in Ft. Myers and, after an afternoon tour of the Old Collier Golf Club in Naples, they head east on SR 80 for a weeklong visit to facilities related to all those commodities mentioned above.

The FGCSA rents multi-passenger, golf-cart-powered trams for the golf course tour and host Tim Hiers CGCS takes advantage of that rental to also conduct an eco-tour for 5th graders from a nearby elementary school.

This is classic outreach and education. It is something we need to do more of on some scale at more golf courses throughout the state. Building working relationships and sharing information with regulators at all levels local, state and federal will reap benefits when it comes to discussing issues that crop up. We can also help our cause by educating the public and we can easily start with maintenance and eco-tours with our golfing customers, members, neighborhood school kids and bird watching groups.

Over the years I have watched the reaction of these regulators on the tour of Old Collier. When the facts of actual acreage under maintenance and the amounts of pesticides applied, the light begins to come on. And there is nothing better than the wildlife sightings as we ride the course. Given that mid-afternoon is not the best time for sightings, we still manage to find gopher tortoises, gators,



*The tour group stops to watch a family of bald eagles soaring over the Old Collier course. Photo by Joel Jackson. Eagle photo by Kyle Sweet.*

songbirds, wading birds and best of all ospreys and bald eagles in mid-air battles over a fish the osprey has captured.

Course design, irrigation management and the use of brackish water with seashore paspalum are also discussed. Finally, a putting contest and a tour of the maintenance facility followed by a barbecue dinner and Q&A session in the break room wrap up the day.

There are always other superintendents and speakers to share information and answer questions one on one. This year thanks to tight travel budgets there were only 20 regulators. My estimate is that 19 of them learned something new, while one remained adamant that water quality had to be compromised during the summer rainy season.

Helping Tim this year with tour hosting duties were Old Collier Superintendent Ricardo Uriarte, Sanctuary GC superintendent Kyle Sweet and his IPM Manager Jason Craft, local ornithologist George McBride and myself. Thanks also to Dan



*Regulators get a little “hands on” time by participating in a putting contest on the practice green. Earlier they witnessed hand mowing, aerifying and spray hawk demonstrations on the green. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

Botts and Mike Aerts of the FFVA for organizing these tours.

The FFVA has been doing a version of regulator tours for a long time. Every local superintendent chapter and/or course needs to do the same thing as regulators and politicians change all the time. The

late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) summed it all up when he said, “You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts!”

If we openly share the facts with the public, maybe they will view those negative media stories with more skepticism. ■

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