

Spring 2020

# *The* FLORIDA *Green*

**Bob Bittner, CGCS**  
**The All-Star**  
**Standup Guy**

**Coping with COVID-19**  
**The Superintendent Response**

**Straight Shooter Sails Off**  
**A Remembrance of Jim Lyle**

Florida Chapter  
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# The FLORIDA Green

SPRING 2020



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**ON THE COVER:**  
Bob Bittner, CGCS is as much a part of Club Pelican Bay as the golf course he maintains since he's been there from the start in 1979.

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As Good as We Are at the Grass Communication has been Key



President Nick Kearns leads a Florida GCSA in-person board meeting earlier this year, pre-coronavirus.

We’ve all heard for a long time that it’s not enough to just grow grass anymore. The coronavirus pandemic has underscored, bolded and capitalized the truth of that statement. Communication has been our best weapon against the threat this virus poses to our industry and, of course, our jobs. It was communication, not agronomic skill, that allowed our game to remain open.

Yes, there were some notable exceptions like Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties. But elsewhere across the state the game went on for the most part, providing critical revenue, preserving jobs and doing communities a tremendous service. No one should underestimate the value in terms of physical and mental health of our golfers being able to get out and play.

We have a few people to thank for that and none more so than our executive director Jennifer Bryan. Jennifer worked tirelessly when it mattered most, in those initial stages when so much was uncertain. She initiated conversations at all levels making sure that everyone understood that, come what may, golf course maintenance was an essential service. So even in those counties where local orders did shut down play, at least maintenance of the asset carried on.

I heard from a number of Florida GCSA members how grateful they were not just that their association was doing this critical work on their behalf, but also that they were being kept informed. There was communication. To be honest, I even heard that same sentiment expressed about Jennifer’s efforts from members of other golf industry associations in the state.

It is also important to recognize Ralph Dain, Florida’s GCSAA field representative for his efforts assisting Jennifer with important documents and letter writing on behalf of local and state chapters. As a former superintendent with an extensive network across the state,

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GCSAA

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available all year.

Ralph always brings a lot to the table and, like Jennifer, he’s been a difference-maker for us through this time.

I also need to thank our government relations specialists at The Southern Group. Their expertise truly helped seal the deal for us as an industry in Tallahassee. And their communication is first-class. They go out of their way to keep us in the loop. You’ve seen the columns they’ve written for this magazine, they spoke in person at our local chapter roundtable during the Golf Industry Show and they are always quick to respond to any phone or email query.

Closer to home, I’ve seen the value of communication play out in a small text group we started here in Sarasota. Obviously, there are many issues that affect superintendents across the state but sometimes the issues are uniquely local. This group, which started out very small, has grown as word has gotten out. It now includes some superintendents who haven’t been very active in the networking department in the past. I certainly hope they remain engaged when we can get up and running again at a local chapter level, because their input has been very beneficial.

There should be no surprise there because golf course superintendents, no matter what kind of operation they’re at, are among the most resourceful and innovative people you will find

anywhere. We solve problems and better still, we’re not afraid to share those solutions. So, the more superintendents we have in the conversation, the more solutions we’re likely to come up with and more of us will be better off.

And remember that old saying about a problem shared being a problem halved? There is truth in that too, even if we aren’t able to come up with a perfect answer. Being in contact – communicating – with our fellow superintendents reminds us we’re not alone in this and can be a great source of strength and encouragement. It certainly has for me.

Who knows where we will be as a country, state or industry in the coming months? Will there be a second wave in the fall? Will there be a vaccine? Will we develop herd immunity? The fact is that no one knows right now. So, we must continue to do what we as superintendents do every single day in our jobs, make the most of the science we do have, of what our experience has taught us and what our best thinking can create. Then we deal with the results and start again the next day.

Continue to keep your heads held high and be proud of who you are and what you represent. You have plenty of reason to. ■

- Nick Kearns, The Oaks Golf Club

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## Rolling with the Punches But Not Throwing Any



Jennifer Bryan's "office" mates at home.

As many of you know, the magic that I weave for the Florida GCSA gleams from my home office, a downstairs bedroom that is completely dedicated to my work. Only the dogs are allowed in, and only if they are quiet. I am very disciplined, organized and productive but also have the flexibility to attend to life's many challenges. It works for me.

That was before the pandemic.

Now my husband has a home office in an upstairs bedroom and my daughter is home schooled in

her bedroom. This has created new challenges and distractions. I am sure I am not alone in these experiences and many of you have changed your work hours, increased time in your home office or become your child's new teacher.

Hopefully, you are learning to navigate this newly paved path and have learned some things about yourself and your family members. I know I have. The family has learned to adapt, roll with the punches and still get along. I have become more grateful for my family and my job.

In fact, I have never been prouder to be a part of this association. Seeing what you are having to endure with reduced staff, reduced play, CDC requirements and family challenges we all can relate to, gives me another level of appreciation for what you superintendents do every day. Having the ability to adapt and assist you with timely communications and decision making during this period has proven very rewarding for me as well.

I have also developed a great appreciation for our government relations specialists, The Southern Group. Hopefully by now, you have taken the time to read some of the "Five Things You Need to Know" from The Southern Group that I have been forwarding. They have proven to be a lifeline of information for our industry.

The folks from The Southern Group have been instrumental in connecting us to the folks that matter and making sure that our industry's needs were heard and listened to. They helped secure our role as an essential service and made sure that maintenance remained opened so clubs could keep their greatest asset, the golf course, viable. They have also been a solid sounding board and source of assurance for me in making good decisions, setting appropriate priorities and generally doing all the right things to make sure the economic importance of your job was understood by the folks in Tallahassee and at the county level.

There is a lot of uncertainty for the future and what the new normal will be when we get there. One day we will be back to large gatherings, tournaments and chapter meetings where everyone can enjoy each other's company without worry. Until then, we all need to stay flexible. Chapter and state events still on the calendar may need to be rescheduled or canceled.

Membership renewals will be going out at the end of May. This may prove to be unfortunate timing for many of you. If anyone needs an extension for renewing dues, please know that we are here to help accommodate you as best we can. Like the lessons I have been learning at home, we as an association need to stay flexible, appreciate each other and get creative with new ways to accomplish things. So, please, be smart, stay healthy and know that we are here for you. ■

- Jennifer Bryan  
Executive Director







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# State Association Membership DELIVERS STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

The fact that there is strength in numbers has brought people together forever. *United we stand, divided we fall.* From the Bible to the Founding Fathers, it's a notion drawn from the experience of families, communities and nations, throughout history.

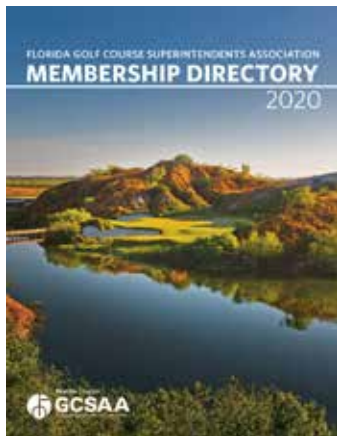
The Florida GCSA is one such family, one such community. A collective of professional colleagues committed to common goals that benefits superintendents at work, as a profession and within the industry they serve.

Membership dues help provide a slate of important services including research, education and advocacy. Investment in that latter service - advocacy, or government relations - has never been more critical than it has during the coronavirus pandemic.

"Golf might well have been shut down statewide if we didn't already have a presence and a great track record in Tallahassee," says Florida GCSA president, Nick Kearns, from The Oaks Club in Sarasota. "But because we do, the vast majority of clubs and courses have been able to stay open, saving jobs, maintaining a revenue stream for facilities and providing an important outlet for people to play during an otherwise tough time."

Through the Florida GCSA, golf course superintendents have worked for decades establishing relationships with lawmakers and providing information to help them make sound decisions affecting the industry. Those efforts within the state dovetail with work by GCSAA at a national level and through the Grassroots Ambassador program.

That work is not cheap and consumes an enormous amount of time. Thus, the Florida GCSA contracts with The Southern Group to provide government relations counsel in addition to the visits the association makes to the State Capitol during events such as



Strength in numbers allows the Florida GCSA to provide a range of services to benefit members.

Florida Golf Day.

"Events can move so quickly and in often very complex environments these days that it is critical for us to constantly have eyes and ears, as well as a voice, in Tallahassee," says Florida GCSA executive director, Jennifer Bryan. "If anyone ever wondered about the value of their membership, they can see the payoff in simply being able to go to work for the past couple of months. Because of the all work we've done in the past, we were able to state our case, be heard and be trusted to be part of the solution, not the problem."

Of course, the very work superintendents do and the industry in general, also face increasing challenges on other fronts. A growing public focus on the products superintendents use and resources they consume, like water, threaten significant change. Constantly informing governments and regulators will help ensure they make decisions based on science rather than emotion.

The Florida GCSA leadership team also works closely with allied associations, within the state, and nationally, to tackle those challenges affecting the industry. This is part of a comprehensive out-

reach effort designed to grow, not just the game, but the understanding and appreciation of the role superintendents play in its well-being.

In collaboration with the 11 local GC-SAA affiliated chapters within the state, the Florida GCSA also helps generate critical funding for turfgrass researchers every year. Coordinating state support for initiatives such as Rounds4Research, helps superintendents ensure this science continues, even as traditional funding wanes.

The state association also provides a range of high quality, affordable education throughout the year. The Golf BMP Training and Certification program remains the gold standard across the country. That education extends to school children through support of programs such as The First Green.

The Florida GCSA also provides avenues to come together with colleagues, to create shared experiences, celebrate successes and trade lessons learned. The annual meeting and golf championship, and events like the Florida reception at the Golf Industry Show, are valuable platforms to expand professional networks and enjoy the brotherhood unique to the profession.

**"Membership in the Florida GCSA is both of those things - an investment in your future and insurance against threats that would undermine it."**

The Florida GCSA also provides services such as its own magazine, The Florida Green, a dedicated website at [floridagcsa.com](http://floridagcsa.com), an annual membership directory, and more. Annual awards honor and recognize the efforts and excellence of individual members. A benevolent fund provides financial support in times of hardship.

As the state association, the Florida GCSA serves as a hub from which all of these benefits emanate. "There is value in belonging and being part of something bigger than yourself," Kearns says. "I think the real question

we should ask when considering our membership, is not so much what's in it for me, but what's in it for us. Because the fact is, more of us are better served when more of us join the cause."

"We all put money aside for our future financial health and to insure against the unexpected," Bryan says. "Membership in the Florida GCSA is both of those things - an investment in your future and insurance against threats that would undermine it. My message to superintendents is simple, help us help you get stronger in your profession. Renew or begin your Florida GCSA membership as soon as possible." ■



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## A Straight Shooter WITH A BIG HEART

When the time feels right at some point down the track, someone will hang a boat oar on a wall at the offices of ProPlus Products in Bowling Green. It will be accompanied by an inscription reading something like: “A man, an oar and a dream.”

The man was Jim Lyle, company founder, who died March, 24, just two days short of his 75th birthday. The oar was what he used to mix the first barrel of liquid fertilizer for his new company on Fourth of July weekend in 1982. The dream Lyle had as he stirred away all those years ago, wild as it seemed to some, was surely realized in the years that followed.

Tom Alex had never heard of fertigation when Lyle first came to him at Grand Cypress Resort in 1983. “I thought he was a quack,” Alex laughs. “I says, ‘You want me to pump fertilizer through my irrigation system?’ It was the craziest thing I’d ever heard. But after six or seven visits, I finally started buying something from him.”

Lyle helped pioneer fertigation, a process that would become a golf industry standard and help make him enormously successful. As customers who became friends, like Alex, and former

colleagues reflected on his life, they marveled not just at his business acumen but at his generosity of spirit. As son-in-law Jason Zimmerman CGCS from Pelican’s Nest Golf Club in Bonita Springs, says, “He never met a stranger and treated everybody he met as if they were family.”

Alex remembers Lyle as a straight shooter with a big heart. “Jim was old school for sure,” he says. “He told it like it was. There was no pulling any punches. Just an honest, hardworking guy from Polk County who was very generous to all people, including those who worked for him.”



The late Jim Lyle

That generosity was reflected in Lyle’s obituary which closed with a request: “In lieu of flowers, and as family and local business was important to Jim, the family requests that his friends and family support your local businesses; and as you make your purchases, remember Jim, and pray for his family as they go through this difficult time of Jim’s passing.”

Zimmerman says Lyle would go out of his way to support local businesses like “ma and pa restaurants, the taco stands.” “To me, he was just an awesome guy. He was probably the smartest and the nicest guy I’ve ever met.”

James Skidmore Lyle graduated college in 1967 with a degree in citrus and soil science and went to work as a teacher. After a year, he changed course taking a job with Swift and Company selling agricultural fertilizer. It was with Swift that he sold the first bag of Par Ex in the state. Swift did a lot of business with Kaiser Agricultural Chemical, a relationship that spawned Lyle’s interest in liquid fertilizers.

In 1982, he went out on his own with Lyle Inc. Alex recalls Lyle attending a meeting of the Central Florida GCSA to introduce his new business to superintendents. “Right after the meeting, Larry Kamphaus went up to him and said, ‘Hey, how would you like to be a sponsor of the Crowfoot Open?’ Jim wrote a check for \$400 that day to become a sponsor of the Crowfoot. We found out later that he had \$500 in that account. You talk about a leap of faith.”

It may indeed have been a leap, but Lyle stuck the landing. Lyle Inc. became ProPlus and more than 30 years later, in 2015, Alex was there to present Lyle with the Central Florida GCSA’s Larry Kamphaus Award for his outstanding and enduring contribution to the golf course superintendent profession.

Lyle underwent emergency open heart surgery in Orlando early March and appeared to be doing well. Then, about a week later, he suffered a massive stroke and died several days later. “It was unexpected and just absolutely heartbreaking,” says Lyle’s daughter, Christy, Zimmerman’s wife, who took over ProPlus with sister Holly when their father retired seven years ago.

The hand off was a proud moment but not one Lyle himself anticipated, at least early on. “When he started, the golf industry was an almost entirely male domain,” Christy recalls. “So, with three girls, and we were girly, passing the company onto his daughters wasn’t a thought he ever had. But then one day he called me, and said, ‘You know what, you can do this. Let’s do it.’

“We always worked in the office as kids, helping out, that sort of thing. But I couldn’t believe it when he called and said you can do this. He groomed me, taught me everything. I went to the University of Jim Lyle!”

It is a measure of Lyle’s impact, passed on through his company and his daughters, Lesley, Christy and Holly, that one North Florida superintendent reached out to The Florida Green to make sure his passing would be recognized. “I never personally met him,” that superintendent said of Lyle. “But after working with Christy and ProPlus since 2004 when I graduated from Lake City, she and



Tom Alex soon after presenting Jim Lyle with the Larry Kamphaus Award in 2015.



Jim Lyle at peace feeding his passion on the water.

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A proud Jim Lyle with daughter Christy on her wedding day.

“At times I wish I’d stayed with them,” he says. “Don’t get me wrong, I’ve been very fortunate to do the things I have. But I miss being with them, the family. Talk about mom and pop.” Of his former boss, Kopack says, “The guy was freakin’ brilliant. Truly, he was a genius in his own way. He taught me a lot.”

Lyle married Martha, the “mom” in the operation, 52 years ago. They were together for 55 years and were to have headed off late March for a five-month trek with their travel trailer. Road tripping was to take the place of Lyle’s lifelong love of boating. “They were done with the boat thing,” Christy explains. “Mom’s health wasn’t great the past few years, but she’s doing better now. This is very hard for her, very hard when you lose your best friend of 55 years.”

Over the years, Lyle hosted many superintendents for fishing trips in the Florida Keys. Tom Alex says Lyle spent so much time on those waters they were known as his “Key’s office.” His passion for the water reached full expression when, with Martha and Christy as crew, he took off in a 43-foot Nordhaven trawler, “Special Blend,” on a journey that once again made Alex question his sanity.

the company have been the best out there.”

Brett Harris was at Lake Nona Country Club when he became a superintendent in 1995 and remembers Lyle making an introductory visit. “He gave me a little book. It was a farmer’s ag. book about soils,” Harris says. “One of the quotes he pointed out to me from the book was that ‘the soil becomes what the water is.’”

It would be a line Harris himself would use for years while performing water audits and soil testing work with Burrows Turfgrass Services. “I always pointed that out to the superintendent I was working with,” says Harris, now at Indian Creek Country Club in Miami. “Jim was just a good guy. When I heard that news, I was shocked. Great guy, very smart. Humble. Salt of the earth. It’s a great family.”

John Kopack fondly recalls going to what he called “Jim class” every Friday afternoon while working for ProPlus years ago. At the end of each week, Kopack and fellow sales staff would gather on Lyle’s back porch to review and strategize. Those staff meetings behind the Lyle family home in Haines City were a snapshot into the richness and balance of Lyle’s life.

“Jim would have flipcharts and he’d be talking about the latest chemicals. And at the same time, he was teaching us, he’d be winding fishing line onto a reel,” Kopack says. “He was an incredible guy.”

Kopack, now with Diamond-R Fertilizer, worked for Lyle until he was offered the role as director of grounds at Marriott World Center. He later traveled the country as lead agronomist worked for Concert Golf. Still, he remembers his time with ProPlus as perhaps the best.

“What is really kind of cool,” says Alex. “Is that he took a gamble early on with his business, and that entrepreneurial spirit kicked right over ... I mean, who in the heck gets in a 43-foot trawler and decides to go across the Pacific? I asked him if he’d done a lot of that kind of boating before and he says, ‘No, we just thought we’d try it.’ That would scare the death out of me.”

In that trawler, the Lyles crossed the Gulf of Mexico to the Panama Canal and the Galapagos Islands. Then came 22 days of open ocean adventure before reaching French Polynesia. Over the next five seasons, they checked off New Zealand, Australia, Vanuatu and more.

Along the way, Lyle caught some huge fish, wore some native dress – a skirt, and celebrated with native chiefs, mayors and their families, drinking kava and enjoying feasts. He helped islanders enhance their own vegetable production, fixed their generators and provided supplies. His impact was such that one father in Vanuatu named his newborn son after him.

Even in the days after his heart surgery, Christy says her dad was still giving, this time to his family, and to the business he built from his own back pocket. “The week before he passed, we were still bouncing ideas off him,” she says. “Especially with the coronavirus going on, we wanted his thoughts on things. We were very blessed to have had the relationship our family has. Now, we are missing a big piece of it. But he taught us to be strong and pull yourself up, to put your boots on and go do it. And that’s what we’ve got to do.” ■

-Trent Bouts

## What’s your handicap?



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## CHAPTER ROUND UP

### SOUTH FLORIDA



Kenton Gamache

Working as a golf course superintendent in South Florida has its ups and downs through any given year. But 2020 has really thrown all of us a curve ball, not only in South Florida but the world, with COVID-19. This pandemic is something none of us have ever experienced. Even though we all are affected by COVID-19 everybody will have a different story to tell.

I work and live in Boca Raton and the course closed on March 20 and re-opened on April 29. I am fortunate to work for a management company at a private club that is stable on both ends. I was never worried about losing my job or being furloughed. There was always some worry for the crew's hours being cut to save costs, but again both the management company and the club knew it was best to keep everyone working. Not only so the crew could keep a steady pay check but to help have some sort of normalcy in an abnormal situation. The benefit of this was the ability to start summer projects and cultural programs early and get a head start on recovering the course from a busy winter golf season.

Weeks before the course closed, myself and many other superintendents in the area talked to one another about implementing new policies and procedures to prevent and stop any spread of COVID-19 on the golf course. Many of the ideas we used prior to the closure are now guidelines the counties used to re-open golf. For example, removing bunker rakes, filling the cups

with pool noodle floats, removing water coolers, and removing ball washers, to just name a few.

Then there is the task of cleaning not only the breakrooms, bathrooms, and locker rooms, but also disinfecting all equipment and tools. Many of us also have split the crew into two or three different shifts to keep social distancing and any gatherings to as few employees as possible.

On top of work, many of us like myself have kids in school and spouses that worked in business that are to this day still closed. As a server working nights, my wife was and was furloughed back in early March. She was able to get a day job at a grocery store to make sure we stayed financially stable. With my son, being a first grader and distance learning at home, the wife now having a day job along with mine, our first priority was to find a balance. With her new job, my career, our son's education and keeping our four-year-old

daughter entertained was a struggle at first. But as the days and weeks passed, we were able to find a balance.

Now, as it is for all us, it is a matter of waiting and seeing what the next day brings.

- Kenton Gamache, *The Club at Boca Pointe*.

### EVERGLADES

As a chapter, the Everglades GCSA has been basically shut down as far as activity goes. We have canceled several events already and can't say when the calendar will resume. Like everybody else, we're watching to see where this thing goes.

In the meantime, kudos to Bryce Koch, CGCS and his club, Cypress Lake Country Club. They took the initiative to support their local food bank. "With the run on food pantries due to the COVID-19 pandemic and fortunately being designated an essential business,

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## CHAPTER ROUND UP

our club wanted to give back to our local community," Bryce says. "Knowing that for every dollar donated, the Harry Chapin Food Bank can turn that into \$8 worth of food, we created The Drive Out Hunger Challenge."

Members and staff donated money either in a set amount, or on by pledging on a per shot basis before going out to play. The event was stretched over four days to give as many members a chance to participate while still observing social distancing and other health measures.

"We set a goal of \$5,000 but reached that goal in a matter of one day," Bryce says. "Ultimately, we reached a total donation of \$20,000. That amount equates to \$160,000 in food for the Harry Chapin Food Bank and nearly 40,000 meals."

- Dan Brooks, Panther Run Golf Club.

### PALM BEACH



Longtime industry observer Pat Jones makes a point during the Palm Beach GCSA's meeting at The Seagate Country Club.



Chris Massey from John's Island Club speaks at the Palm Beach GCSA's assistant superintendents meeting earlier this year.



A letter and gift certificates sent to Boca Regional Hospital sent as thanks to healthcare workers on behalf of Gulf Stream Golf Club.

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## CHAPTER ROUND UP

It has been an unusual peak of season in Palm Beach to state the obvious. We have faced many challenges in adapting to the effects of COVID-19 and what for now appears to be the new normal. However, we will remain thankful for the many blessings that these trying times have made more evident in many ways. It is our feeling we will continue to work through this and remain resilient as our teams always do.

February gave way to our annual Assistant Only meeting at The Seagate Country Club. A special thank you to Hector and Toro for sponsoring this year's event. The education was provided by the legendary Pat Jones. He gave an invaluable presentation to our attendees and we are thankful for his insight. This is always one of our favorite events and as usual Pat had some nuggets of wisdom that we all took away.

Also, we would like to thank Christopher Massey, the assistant superintendent at John's Island West, for his informative presentation on assistant superintendent certification. Thank you to Nate Watkin and the entire staff at The Seagate for continuing to support the Palm Beach GCSA by hosting our events.

In Palm Beach we are happy to have our golf courses beginning to reopen along with some other limited club activities. As you may know, Palm Beach County continues to be a few steps behind other regions due to the high number of cases in our county. The Palm Beach chapter would like to recognize Jennifer Bryan for her continuous hard work in helping us through these unprecedented times.

Jennifer, thank you for all the efforts to keep golf maintenance essential and for the constant communication to each chapter to keep us informed and compliant. We are currently working with many around the state to amend the 2020 calendar of events. This is a challenging task and we are working diligently to come up with sensible solutions in consideration of all chapters.

The Palm Beach Chapter would also like to thank the Southern Group for their efforts during this crisis. They are doing a fantastic job keeping everyone in the state

informed on what's taking place behind the scenes and making sure that all of our members have current, accurate, and up to date information on all relevant COVID-19 information.

We also want to say thanks to everyone working hard to steer our communities through this period. There are a lot of people putting themselves at risk and going to great lengths on our behalf. Some of our members have found different ways to show their appreciation. At Gulf Stream Golf Club, Ryan Swilley sent a heartfelt note to Boca Regional Hospital, along with gift cards to help provide meals for the hospital staff.

We are optimistic that even with the setback that this pandemic has caused, we can still deliver some quality educational opportunities, golf events, and networking with the members of our chapter in the coming months. Please continue to check us out on the website, and follow us on Twitter @PBGCSA, for updates on our upcoming events. Thank you to all who

support the Palm Beach GCSA and all the best to you and your families during this difficult time.

- Robert Anderson, Royal Palm Yacht & Country Club.

### CALUSA

Hopefully, by the time you read this, a sense of normalcy will have returned to our lives. Or is social distancing the "new norm?" This season - that really wasn't - defined our industry as adaptable. It was amazing to hear of the spectrum of maintenance practices assumed by everyone. From closures, to split crews alternating days, to short shifts, to working a standard 40 hours a week, demonstrated how dedicated we all are to doing the right thing, while all the while keep pushing on.

The Calusa chapter cancelled two events, our two-club event and our match play event versus the Suncoast chapter. With regard to the latter event, the Calusa chapter definitely would have prevailed, so



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## CHAPTER ROUND UP

please mail the trophy back to us!

We are holding out hope that our annual meeting on June 25 is still a go at Kelly Greens Golf & Country Club where Mark Thomas will be our host. Of course, we are also hopeful that our inaugural Calusa Cornhole Tournament slated for July 24 and match play event versus the Everglades chapter happen as well. In the meantime, let's aerify!

- Mitch Miller, Legends Golf & Country Club.

### SUNCOAST



Josh Delbane is now at the Country Club of Jupiter.



Josh Delbane, left, and Joel Ehrhart on duty during their time as fellow Suncoast GCSA board members.



Joel Ehrhart thanks Preston Stephenson for his service on his way to becoming Suncoast GCSA president.

"Isn't it funny how a small thing can have such a big impact on your world," says Josh Delbane on the phone from his new digs, the Country Club of Jupiter. Josh is recounting the events of his move from over a decade at Sarasota National to the Country Club of Jupiter, where, as the new superintendent, he is overseeing a course renovation during these strange and challenging times.

In recalling the interview process at Country Club of Jupiter, Josh explains that it came down to two finalists: him and Joel Ehrhart. At the time, both guys were board members of the Suncoast chapter as well as neighbors. Joel was basically across the street from Sarasota National at Plantation Golf Country Club as the 36-hole course superintendent working for Jay Mullen, the board's vice-president to-be.

During his final interview, Josh's new boss and owner asked him if he knew Joel and what he thought about him. Josh answered, "Yeah, I know Joel. I know Joel really well. He is like a brother to me and

I am hoping to recommend him for my job if I get this one." Well, the script went exactly as planned.

While the rest of us were sheltering in place, these two were doing anything but; they were shucking and jiving to further their careers. The symmetry and connectedness of this story, as is the case with many of our stories, doesn't stop there.

Josh grew up in Stuart, went to the University of Florida studying turfgrass. He started with Troon at BallenIsles Country Club and moved to Sarasota National from its inception. He went through multiple developers, multiple management companies, a housing market crash and finally, an economic boom. Now, he is right back in the area where he got started restoring a course he played over 20 years ago and literally living off home cooking while staying with mom until all this mess blows over. The Country Club of Jupiter is one of only two daily fee course in the area and with this renovation will be

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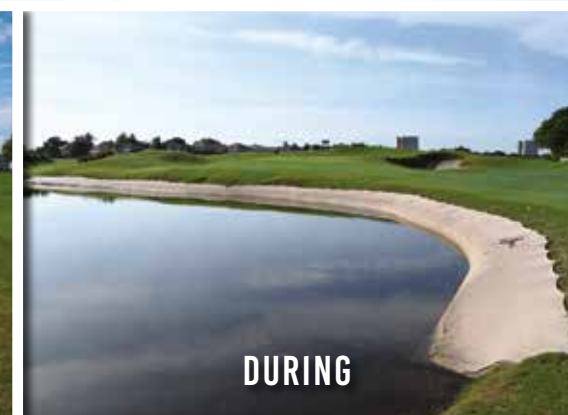
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## CHAPTER ROUND UP

positioned to be very successful for years to come.

Joel moved to the Venice area as a kid. He was in the final graduating class for turfgrass management at Edison College. He was an assistant at Coral Creek before his three-year run at Plantation. His appointment to the job at Sarasota National puts him right back on the property he used to bass fish as a youth.

“Josh left me with a great product on a golf course any golfer would love to play,” Joel says. He will be working for Icon Management under a temporary COVID-19 budget. During the interview process he delivered a Power Point presentation where he highlighted how he will manage the vastness of the property. “There is a ton of space between holes and I can’t let that eat up our time doing maintenance, especially in this work climate,” he says. Joel’s assistant at Sarasota National is Johnny Gault. Joel introduced him to the industry and after a time as the spray tech at Plantation, Joel recommended him to Josh, and he was hired as Josh’s assistant superintendent.

Great to see good things happen to great people. Josh will be missed as a Suncoast GCSA member and board member but who says “you can never go home?”

As far as Joel is concerned, we are glad he chose to stay home and we look forward to having him lead the Suncoast chapter in the future. Awesome job guys.

- John Reilly, The Resort at Longboat Key Club.

## WEST COAST



Superintendent Andy Neiswender, left, and equipment manager Bill Cash, right, from Belleair Country Club, present a check for \$2,500 to Shannon Veronesi from Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches.



Todd Six at one of his pollinator plots at On Top of the World Clearwater.



Pollinator plots have elevated out of play areas and provided important habitat at On Top of the World Clearwater.

While the coronavirus pandemic has put a lot of activity on hold, the Florida West Coast chapter did have a successful education meeting on March 4 at Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club. The meeting centered on the incredibly important topic of BMPs and gave our members a chance to take the Florida GCSA Golf BMP Certification examination. I’m pleased to say 90 percent of participants passed the class.

The class itself was outstanding with educators Ralph Dain from GCSAA, Dr. Bryan Unruh and Don Rainey from the University of Florida, and John Foy, former USGA Green Section agronomist and consultant. Special thanks to host superintendent Carson Kamps and everyone at Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club.

We are also happy to share the news that we launched a new chapter newsletter in April and look forward to keeping members up to date with it. Our first issue highlighted our annual Christmas event at Feather Sound Country Club. Florida West Coast chapter board member Mike Strube hosted this event and he and his staff did a great job, presenting a golf course that was in fantastic condition. We had a full field of 80 participants.

Even more importantly, we were able to donate \$2,500 to A Kids Place Tampa Bay and Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches. The 50/50 raffle and skins game raised \$1,130 and a lot of toys were also donated. Thanks to John Reilly from The Resort at Longboat Key Club who won the 50/50 drawing then handed his winnings straight back for the good of the kids.

While chapter events have been put on ice, I have had time to spend on my facility’s involvement with the Operation Pollinator program backed by Syngenta. With the assistance of Dr. Adam Dale from the University of Florida and Andy Jorgensen, CGCS director of golf course maintenance operations at On Top of the World Ocala, we found the perfect opportunity to help pollinators here at On Top of the World Clearwater.

We first picked ideal areas for wildflower beds near but not in play and near lake banks for ecological bordering. Ornamental grasses were also transplanted near the lake banks to further provide bordering. Beds were prepared in late summer and early fall months and seeding began in November. Germination began in 14 to 21 days, depending on moisture.

The main 18-hole golf course was seeded in 2018 with a blend of 20 varieties of wildflower seeds and the 9-hole executive course followed in 2019. Approximately 25,000 square feet of wildflower beds were

developed.

Members have been thrilled with the addition to their golfing experience and local pollinator enthusiasts have been overwhelmed with the return of bees, butterflies and other of nature’s beauties to the area.

- Todd Six, On Top of the World Clearwater.

## SEVEN RIVERS

We are hoping everyone has stayed safe and not dealing with too many headaches during these times. Unfortunately, we had to make the difficult decision to postpone the Jeff Hayden Memorial Envirotron Golf Classic this year. The good news is that we have rescheduled it to October 5, 2020 at World Woods Golf Club. We are excited about this news and happy to have something to look forward to.

Speaking of World Woods Golf Club, David Court, CGCS at World Woods recently retired. Soon after, David joined

up with his son, a superintendent in south Florida, to assist with the preparation for a professional golf event that his son’s club was hosting. David had a long career in turfgrass management and was always willing to provide his expertise and guidance when needed. We wish David the best in this next chapter of life, but know he won’t be too much of a stranger.

Our annual meeting at Candler Hills Golf Club scheduled for June 25 is currently tentative. We are waiting for additional guidance as to whether or not this meeting will even happen. Being an election year with a new slate of officers on the table, we will be sure to communicate to the membership in the possibility this event needs to be canceled.

Moving forward, we hope we can get back to some sort of normalcy in the near future. The chapter has plenty of room for host facilities in the next year, so if you want to show off your staff’s hard work, please feel free to reach out to me so we can get a meeting scheduled. As always, I’m more than happy to help organize the details with your club.

- Andy Jorgensen, CGCS On Top of the World.



David Court (Photo: Badgolfguy.com)

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by Trent Bouts

## Making the Best of THE WORST OF TIMES

*Staff at The Loxahatchee Club gather for their morning meeting under the soft light of a rising sun in a new climate dictated by the coronavirus pandemic.*

*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”*

Charles Dickens’ opening to *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859, could easily have been written for the coronavirus today, except with the negative clauses taking precedence over the positive. Because for now, the bad stuff still greatly outpunches the good.

Whether you believe we’ve over-reacted or are under-reacting – and there are plenty on both sides – people are still losing their lives by the thousands, millions of others are losing jobs and the rest of us, with varying degrees of modification and disruption, remain living under a cloud.

Even so, in the case of golf in Florida, there has been some wisdom, some belief and some light, all of which give rise to some hope. And much of that good stuff, in no small part, is thanks to golf course superintendents, who, with all due respect to Dickens, have made the best of the worst of times.

While virus outbreaks or hotspots can spring up seemingly overnight, at least at press time, golf course maintenance facilities across the state remained fully operational. That is not to say all were at full strength. Some laid off workers, others put a hold on hiring, on purchases and on big projects. The mindset of doing more with less that became a mantra during the Great Recession, was making a comeback.

But for all that, the fact remains that while many industries are on their knees right now, if not having toppled over altogether, golf remains vertical. The game’s courses are as playable as ever, grown and mown just like always, and that alone is a compelling proof of concept that golf can be done safely.

As James Sprankle, CGCS from The Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter puts it, “Golf was ahead of some industries because golf course superintendents knew right away, that if our crews got sick, we were done.” Accordingly, Sprankle and his colleagues across the state went to great lengths to keep staff healthy. Tables moved from break rooms to the main shop, doors were propped open, equipment was sanitized after each use, gloves and masks were distributed.

At Club Pelican Bay in Naples, veteran Bob Bittner, CGCS even locked away the microwaves and the coffee pot. “Everybody was at me, ‘Bob, what are you doing?’ And I told them, ‘Guys, I’m trying to protect you here,’” he says. “It took a while to get everybody to understand this was serious.”

More broadly, it also took a while for everybody to get a handle on balancing that initial flush of fear with a workable reality.

“Particularly early on, when you’re trying to work out what’s right for the company and what’s right for the employee,” Jason Bailey at Parkland Golf and Country Club in Parkland says. “The answer wasn’t always obvious, and you were so scared guys would get sick, and you don’t want to lose a guy, God forbid, for what, just some grass? It was stressing me out.”

**“Some of the scrolling comments during telecasts were horrific about golf. People were seriously pissed off” – Jennifer Bryan**

Today, Bailey is more sanguine. “I’m not nearly so germophobic,” he says. “Because you get in the routine of disinfecting everything, of washing your hands, doing the social distancing, wearing the masks, all of that.”

It’s precisely because superintendents have done such a good job of “all of that” that golfers have not encountered empty shelves when they shop, so to speak.

“We adapt quickly, it’s what we do,” Sprankle says. “We’re proactive, we don’t just solve problems, we anticipate them and take care of them ahead of time as much as we possibly can. Guys who are reactive don’t last very long in this industry. We took precautions faster than government.”

That golf could remain open for business was far from guaranteed when the coronavirus began to take hold in the U.S. Indeed, for weeks on end from March into April, more than half the courses in the country were closed. In the beginning, as lawmakers and health officials grappled with incomplete and, as it turns out, sometimes inaccurate information, no one could confidently predict where golf would stand if this thing really got going.

And it did. But when Governor Ron DeSantis issued his first executive order April 1 that all non-essential business would close for 30 days from 12.01am April 3, golf was exempted. In Sarasota, The Herald-Tribune declared, “The Golf Capital of the World is still open.” Even so, some clubs took it upon themselves to close,



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Equipment has never been cleaner in golf course maintenance facilities as staff strive to beat off the coronavirus.

Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan monitored television coverage of some county meetings. “Some of the scrolling comments during telecasts were horrific about golf,” she says. “People were seriously pissed off.” At one point, the Palm Beach Post slammed what it labeled a “shameful display of selfish privilege,” attacking private clubs that remained open “beyond all reason.”

Bryan and association leaders worked tirelessly in the early weeks as things came to a head. They worked in collaboration with allied golf associations, writing letters to state officials including Gov. DeSantis explaining how, with modifications to limit common touch points, golf could be played safely. Other letters stressed that if courses were closed, continued golf course

maintenance was essential to preserve the asset.

The fight wasn’t restricted to one front. Indeed, Bryan was kept busy addressing a host of spot fires of opposition, sometimes at a county level, sometimes down to individual cities, even courses. “It was relentless,” Bryan says. “There was just so much uncertainty about the virus itself, and who had jurisdiction to do what, that some confusion was inevitable.”

Confusion, and fear. Even within golf course maintenance circles, there was some question whether all the best prevention measures on property would be worth much if staff didn’t mirror those steps away from work. That trepidation was further fueled by the fact the industry employs so many migrant workers, a significant number of whom work at different jobs but share housing and transport. Other fields with a heavy migrant worker presence,

such as food production and meat processing, certainly took their hits.

But not golf, not to date at least.

There have been cases of coronavirus in and around golf course maintenance operations, although precious few and without significant impact. At one facility, a contract worker tested positive, but no one else. There were reports of another where four workers contracted the virus. And possibly there are others. It’s not as if facilities would want to advertise the fact.

But because the golf course maintenance world is so intertwined, word usually travels widely and swiftly. And then there are health authorities, not to mention news media, in hyper alert mode right now. Had a golf course maintenance operation shut down, or even been significantly compromised, it would unlikely remain unnoticed for long.

So, in calling on their wisdom and some belief, golf course superintendents have demonstrably done well, offered some light.

They have achieved what Florida GCSA president Nick Kearns, from The Oaks Club in Sarasota, called for early when he said: “Clearly, this is a stressful time and emotions are running high. That’s all the more reason why golf needs to continue to be a good citizen right now.”

But while superintendent performance has been exemplary, what they’ve dealt with has been all over the place. “Slammed” is a



Signage like this is now commonplace at golf facilities.

common response from superintendents at many public facilities. Conversely, city-owned Miami Beach Golf Club went for what seemed like an eternity without a single golfer. The course was closed for six weeks.

“We got a phone call at 11am on the 19th to say we were closed immediately,” says superintendent Ricky Reeves, a Florida GCSA past-president. “Anyone on the golf course was allowed to finish their round. But that was it. The pro shop and the clubhouse shut down the next day.”

Like many of his colleagues whose courses were ordered closed to play, he immediately adjusted his program. He brought forward aerification, irrigation work and a tree pruning project he had planned for summer. Forced to furlough 14 employees on April 3, he reduced mowing frequency and raised his height of cut.



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When the shutdown lifted at the end of April, Reeves was surprised to find all 14 ready to come back. “I was like, wow!” he says. “They’d been able to hold on. They all got their stimulus checks, although not everyone was able to get unemployment.” All 14, plus furloughed food and beverage staff, also shared in proceeds from a GoFundMe page started by a member that raised about \$40,000.

Reeves said the amount was split between so many that the share “was not a lot by any means” but the goodwill it engendered will go a long way. “Now, we’re like everybody else I’ve talked to, we’re busy, busy, busy,” he says. “It took us about two weeks to get the golf course back where we wanted it. We let the greens get up to about .120 while we were closed and so they were sticky. But we’re back down to .100 now and they are fine.”

While all golf courses in the state that wanted to be were open by mid-May, things were still at a standstill as far as meetings and events were concerned at a state and local chapter level. Gatherings that many superintendents shaped their personal calendars around like the Everglades GCSA’s Poa Classic were cancelled. Others, like the Suncoast GCSA’s Suncoast Scramble, were postponed.

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“We’re not sure of a make-up date,” says chapter president, Preston Stephenson, from Misty Creek Golf and Country Club in Sarasota. “A lot is going to depend when courses are allowed to do shotgun starts again and when we’re allowed to have two people in a cart. So, we’re playing it by ear like a lot of people.”

Shortly before press time, the Florida GCSA board decided to cancel this year’s Steve Wright Memorial Golf Championship and Team Scramble that was to be at The Club at Longboat Key Resort at the end of July. The Florida Turfgrass Association’s annual conference at World Golf Village in September was still on, but a lot can happen between now and then. Even if that event, and any others, do go ahead, individuals will have to decide whether they are comfortable participating.

At Loxahatchee, James Sprankle believes what was second nature to him pre-coronavirus will be different in its wake. “I’m certainly going to be cautious,” he says. “I don’t expect I will be as outgoing at events like the Golf Industry Show. I won’t be chasing down as many people to shake their hand. Same here at the club. I used to hug a lot of older lady members but not anymore. That won’t be happening.” ■



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# Association Offers YouTube Sessions



A screenshot from the first in the Florida GCSA’s YouTube sessions with, clockwise: Andy Jorgensen, CGCS from On Top of the World Ocala; Dr. Bryan Unruh; Nick Kearns, The Oaks Club; and Andy Neiswender, Belleaire Country Club.

The Florida GCSA was quick to move as the coronavirus pandemic loomed. To help superintendents adjust to what might be ahead, the association launched a series of YouTube-based webinars. The first, featuring Dr. Bryan Unruh from the University of Florida, focused on agronomic issues and what superintendents could face if certain scenarios played out.

The second in the series centered more on the business aspects of golf course maintenance operations and featured Henry DeLozier, a principle at Global Golf Partners. Both videos are available at [floridagcsa.com](http://floridagcsa.com). More topics are planned.

“The goal of these webinars is to help get the wheels rolling for superintendents,” says Florida GCSA president, Nick Kearns, who has moderated both presentations, with help from other members of the board. “Dr. Unruh and Henry are both sharp thinkers and they had some things they offered that should help superintendents refine their own approaches. No one has been able to hold traditional-style education meetings, so we’re hoping this is a valuable substitute in the meantime.”

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NEW





(Photo: Robert Toski)

# THE GO-TO GUY

## Bob Bittner's *Lifetimes* of Achievement

by Trent Bouts

**B**ob Bittner has been around so long he's grown-in the same course three times. He's been around so long he won a lifetime achievement award ... in 2003! To give you a sense of how far back that really is, that's the same year another native-Ohioan made his debut in the NBA. Yeah, LeBron James. Oh, and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers won a Super Bowl.

Bittner, the certified golf course superintendent at Club Pelican Bay in Naples, laughs at the implication inherent in a "lifetime" award; that back then he was nearing the end of the professional road; that he was like Mark Twain, reports of whose death were "greatly exaggerated."

"That is kind of funny," he says. "I don't know what the hell they were thinking."

The truth is that Bittner knows well enough what "they" were thinking.

"They" were thinking he was pretty darned good at what he did and had been for a long time. Moreover, "they" also appreciated the way he went about it, the way he taught others and the admiration he earned from his members. And "they" were thankful for his volunteer service to the Everglades GCSA and the Florida Turfgrass Association, not to mention what he did for colleagues every time they called.

"Bob was always my go-to guy if I had a problem," says one of them, Mark Black, CGCS, who built his own legend over a career split between Bonita Bay Club and Quail West Golf and Country Club. "He's always been known as one of the best greens growers in the Naples area. He's well-liked, well-respected. You never hear him criticize or ridicule. Just a standup guy."

Black and Bittner go back to the start of that working "lifetime," as running mates fresh out of college as the '80s got under way. Young and eager assistant superintendents, they played golf, fished and hung out together with other fresh faces in the business, guys like Bob Shevlin, Robert Toski and Kevin Leo.

It was Black who wrote of Bittner's lifetime achievement award in *The Florida Green* in 2003.

"Bob Bittner is many things," he said. "He is a professional and a credit to our occupation. He is honest and trustworthy. He is kindhearted and supportive. He is a knowledgeable golf course superintendent and respected as such ... I can count on him. I honestly don't know what better friend or support system I could have in this industry and I know I speak for many when I say this."

Perhaps the only difference 17 years later, is that Black's sentiment speaks for even more people in the industry. Around the time Black was writing about his friend, Todd Lowe was finding his way as an agronomist for the USGA Green Section. Traveling the state, Lowe, now with Bayer, was of a new generation who saw for themselves just how good Bittner was, albeit in his second "lifetime." Today, Lowe describes Bittner as "an All-Star superintendent." "I learned a lot during visits with Bob," he says. "And that was information I was able to share with many other superintendents."

Bob Bittner's journey to that status began as a 10-year-old behind the wheel of a tractor on his grandparents' farm. It wasn't just



a love of the outdoors and an affinity for the land that he was harvesting, it was a work ethic and a respect for a job, any job, well done. Such traits serve any superintendent well, but they fit hand-in-glove where he landed, straight out of McNeese State University, at Club Pelican Bay in 1979, and where he's been, in some capacity, ever since.

The club, with 27 holes designed by Arthur Hills, was still under construction when Bittner arrived as an assistant to Roger Whitford. But thanks to geography, it quickly became a draw for many who shared the very values Bittner was grounded in. If I-95 funnels those from the northeast to Florida's east coast, I-75 brings those from Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania to the west.

"This is a Midwestern club, good people, down-to-earth type people," Bittner says. "It's a club that takes pride in their employees and treats their employees correctly. The club is run great. It's a great place to work for." If length of service says anything, consider that in addition to Bittner's 41 years, golf pro John Carroll was there nearly 30, Bittner's executive assistant Kelli Murphy has 20 years with the club and current general manager Dave Mangan is in his 15th year, and recently contracted for another 10.

"I was just lucky, pure and simple," Bittner says.

Bittner didn't discover golf until his parents semi-retired to Fort Myers Beach from tiny Elyria,

OH, at the start of the '70s. Just starting high school, he was more into fishing at the time, a passion borne of countless trips on Lake



Looking back at the clubhouse from the ninth green. (Photo: Robert Toski)

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Father and son team, Bob Bittner, CGCS and assistant Pierce. (Photo: Robert Toski)

Erie on his parents' boat. He and his younger brother actually bought their own boat before they bought their first car.

In high school, Bittner used his growing frame to good effect on the football team and eventually attended Troy State University in Alabama. "I thought I was a football player, until you get beat up a little bit and you realize you're not," he laughs. A rising toll of injuries and a decreasing interest in business management studies led Bittner to quit college for a few years and head back to Florida.

He went to work on a golf course, something he first did late in high school when he was looking to build up some savings for college. He liked it and kept at it any chance he got during breaks in the school year. Before too long, he realized he loved it.

"When I found golf, it was the perfect match for me," he says. "When I was thinking about what I wanted to do, it was either golf or landscaping. I loved being involved with the equipment, the turf, being outdoors. I was involved in athletics all through high school and this was around a sport. It was just a natural fit for me."

So, Bittner went back to school, this time to McNeese State Uni-



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To make sure that “right direction” is even on the compass of those who make the final decisions, Bittner often goes into a greens committee meeting with some reading material for distribution. “I always take two or three articles with me to pass out,” he says. “It could be on aerification, mole crickets, traffic control, staffing, whatever. I try to keep the members educated as much as I can. The more they know the better it’s going to be. I think the biggest job we have as superintendents is educating the membership on why we do this and that.”

Perhaps one day, that reading matter will be Bittner’s notice. At 66, he’s already passed retirement age for a lot of people. “I’ve discussed it, but I still enjoy coming to work and think I still do a pretty good job and I’ve got good assistants,” he says. “I can see it happening in the next few years, but we haven’t set a date yet.”

The Bittners have been preparing though. Several years ago, they bought a home in the ambitiously named Everglades City. With a population of less than 1,000, it is very much as Bittner describes, “a fishing community with not a lot to do.” They’ve spent a lot of weekends on the water there since. When he finally does retire, he expects to flip that schedule with the weekdays on the water and weekends back in Naples out to dinner with friends.

When the time does come, Bittner will step down comfortable that he’s earned the right to walk away. “I’d like to think so,” he says. “I’ve enjoyed a good run.” ■



Bob Bittner, CGCS with longtime executive assistant Kelli Murphy. (Photo: Robert Toski)

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# Pandemic Puts Hold ON RESEARCH EFFORTS

by Kevin E. Kenworthy, Ph.D.

Like so many aspects of our lives, in mid-March all research programs at the University of Florida hit the pause button. If a research project was not involved in studying COVID-19 it was placed in maintenance mode. These drastic measures were taken to ensure the safety of university employees, students and the Gainesville community. Safety remains the university's top priority, but we are progressing towards more active engagement in field research in the coming weeks.

The Florida GCSA has been supporting research in the turfgrass breeding program for several years. There are currently five trials supported at the Plant Science Research and Education Unit (PSREU) in Citra and four trials located at both the West Florida Research and Education Center (WFREC) in Milton and the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center (FLREC) in Fort Lauderdale.

Fairway trials of bermudagrass and zoysiagrass were planted at all three locations in 2017. Putting green trials (planted in 2017) of bermudagrass and zoysiagrass are located at WFREC and FLREC. In 2019, new bermudagrass and zoysiagrass fairway trials and a new zoysiagrass putting green trial were planted at PSREU. All trials get rated monthly for turf quality and, depending on the time of year, will get rated for drought stress, incidence of disease and retention of color and density through winter.

In the fall of 2019, wear was applied to the 2017 fairway trials at PSREU using a traffic simulator. Wear treatments were applied as a single pass on October 21, 24, 28 and 30; and November 4, 7, 12, 14 and 18. The bermudagrass trial has 15 entries including Tifway, Celebration, Bimini and TifTuf as commercial standards.

Among the commercial lines TifTuf maintained the highest percent cover through the fall; however, there were two experimental entries from the breeding program that were equivalent or better than TifTuf. Figure 1 shows wear patterns on the bermudagrass trial.

The 2017 zoysiagrass trial has a total of eight entries and includes Zeon for comparisons to a commercial standard. Four of the experimental lines maintained better cover through the period of wear compared with Zeon.

These two trials were subsequently rated for regrowth and recovery from wear once the treatments were terminated. Again, several experimental lines of both species exhibited favorable recovery. The observations of plant performance and data are evidence that wear treatments applied in the fall will be useful in the selection of lines that will both resist wear and have improved growth during the cooler winter months when Florida golf courses experience their

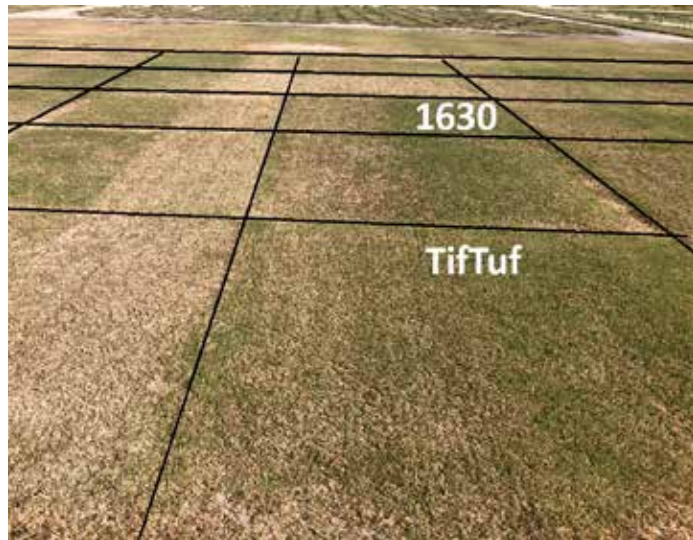


Figure 1. Wear patterns on the 2017 bermudagrass fairway trial at PSREU. Plots were split and wear was applied to one-half of each plot. The picture is from December 4, 2019 showing recovery and regrowth from wear applied on October 21, 24, 28 and 30; and November 4, 7, 12, 14 and 18. TifTuf (bottom right) showed good wear resistance and recovery as did a University of Florida experimental line, FB1630 (two plots behind TifTuf). These entries show good potential for growth during cooler months in Florida.



Figure 2. 2019 fairway bermudagrass trial at PSREU showing variable establishment rates among entries.

greatest numbers of rounds of golf. Growth and performance through winter are major objectives in the breeding program.

The new 2019 trials include the best performing lines from the 2017 trials along with more recently advanced lines. To date, these trials have mostly been evaluated for establishment (Figure 2). Data shows that lines included in both 2017 and 2019 trials are performing consistently well across both trials and we have new lines that show tremendous promise in both bermudagrass and zoysiagrass.

In 2020, plans are being made to establish small expansion blocks of several fairway lines of bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. Our goal is to use these small expansions as a means of providing sod for testing on golf courses. COVID-19 is delaying our expansion efforts, but we hope to plant these in June.

From the 2017 putting green trials, we identified a few bermudagrass lines that exhibited good performance across the three locations (PSREU, WFREC and FLREC). We have planted expansion strips of these at PSREU and will have enough material to sprig a few trials with golf courses later this year.

The University of Florida turfgrass breeding program is grateful for the support of the Florida GCSA and its members. This program is committed to continued development of turfgrasses with improved characteristics for use on Florida golf courses. For any questions or interest in future cooperation by serving as an onsite test location, please contact Dr. Kevin Kenworthy at [kenworth@ufl.edu](mailto:kenworth@ufl.edu). ■

- Dr. Kevin Kenworthy is assistant professor at the University of Florida - IFAS agronomy department.

## Lance Nematode Research Update

Thus far in 2020, we have collected percent green cover, turf quality, NDVI and Tru-firm data every two weeks through early March. We collected nematode samples and root samples and applied Indemnify to nematicide plots in early March. From mid-March through April we were unable to visit the field plots due to the COVID-19 stay-in-place order and the university mandating cessation of all research activity. However, at press time, we had approval to start visiting plots and collecting data again starting early May. We were able to process the nematode and root samples collected in March, so all we are missing data-wise is six to eight weeks of field assessments.

- Billy Crow, professor of nematology, University of Florida.



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## Superintendents Grappling With GROWING IGUANA POPULATION

Ryan Murphy draws a deep breath before offering his take on what is an increasing headache for golf course superintendents in South Florida. “The iguanas love our flowers. But our members love them too,” he says. “So, somebody’s got to go ... and it won’t be the members.”

Iguanas don’t just eat the flowers, they burrow – sometimes into bunkers, sometimes under bridges, and their feces can carry salmonella. They also threaten native species. So, like a growing number of his colleagues, Murphy employs a professional service to help minimize iguana damage at Boca West Country Club in Boca Raton.

One such service is Hollywood-based Redline Iguana Removal. Owner Perry Colato says an already bad and growing problem has been exacerbated, believe it or not, by the coronavirus pandemic. Orders to close golf courses in three counties – Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade - where he operates, gave iguanas a 24-hour-a-day open ticket.

“Especially with nobody out there except the occasional golf course maintenance worker, they’ve just had free range,” Colato says. “And they’ve just been destroying everything. It’s unbelievable man.”

Three years ago, Colato was a firefighter and studying for a higher certification outside a library when he became distracted by the amount of iguana activity. Then he started doing some online research and a business was born. Today, his service employs as many as six iguana catchers, depending on demand.

A contract with a golf course generally run in a range of \$500 to \$7,000 but even those numbers depending on the size of the population being targeted. The heaviest populations can take as much as a month to get on top of. Even then, there is always the prospect of reinfestation from neighboring areas.

“It’s a serious problem down here. I’ve seen their population explode in my lifetime,” Colato says. “In less than four hours yesterday we removed more than 100 iguanas from one course and that was after taking more than 70 in about two hours there the



Perry Colato, right, and staff members from Redline Iguana Removal are removing iguanas from a growing number of golf courses in South Florida.



Iguanas, an invasive species, are proving a handful for an increasing number of golf course superintendents.

day before. In the five days we’ve visited we’ve removed upwards of 500. But we deal with a lot of courses and there are some where we’ve taken more than 1,000.”

An invasive species, iguanas were first reported in Miami-Dade in the ‘60s and have steadily worked their north. Today, their range reaches to the middle of the state. Reports have also been confirmed north of Orlando, even as far as the Panhandle, but generally temperatures are not warm enough year-round to sustain large populations in the upper parts of the state.

In January, the National Weather Service took the unusual step of issuing a warning about iguanas falling from trees because of unusual cold. When temperatures fall into the 40s, cold-blooded iguanas essentially shut down. They bounce back when the temperatures do, unless the cold snap extends across four days, then they die.

Colato says the animals lay about 70 eggs a year, which is a recipe for trouble given that they have no natural predators in Florida. Conversely, they are a threat to some native species including the burrowing owl. “These spiny tail iguanas steal their nest and eat their eggs.”

For most part though, it’s the iguanas’ own penchant for digging that’s causing the mostly costly damage on golf course properties. They undermine bridges and weaken sea walls which can lead to really significant problems if not addressed.



Burrowing iguanas can undermine bridges leading to extensive damage.

At Cooper Colony Golf Course, an executive facility in Cooper City, owner Dawn Braeseke says iguanas contributed to damage beneath the facility’s kitchen that resulted in a \$40,000 repair. “I can’t imagine there’s a single course in the area where they’re not causing problems,” she says.

The degree of the iguana problem was highlighted last summer when the Florida Wildlife Commission issued a statement saying the commission “encourages homeowners to kill iguanas on their



Iguana feces create a mess and can carry salmonella.

own property whenever possible.” That statement was followed by a clarification a few weeks later.

“Unfortunately, the message has been conveyed that we are asking the public to just go out there and shoot them up. This is not what we are about; this is not the ‘wild west,’ FWC Commissioner Rodney Barreto said then. “If you are not capable of safely removing iguanas from your property, please seek assistance from professionals who do this for a living.” ■



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# CONTESTS

## Birdies Among Candidates IN TWEETING COMPETITION

Most golf course superintendents are artists deep down, growing, crafting and creating their work on canvases that span 100 acres or more. Over the past month, the Florida GCSA celebrated that fact with a Twitter-based photo contest.

Superintendents were asked to post some of their favorite images - at #floridastrong - of their facility and their colleagues were encouraged to forward them. The suggestion came from Florida GCSA and GCSAA past-president Darren Davis, CGCS from Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, who offered his own snap of screech owls nesting on course.

The photographers responsible for the five images with the most retweets would win free Florida GCSA membership for 2020-21. While the winners weren't announced until after this issue of The Florida Green went to print, here's a sample of some of the photos that were in the running. ■



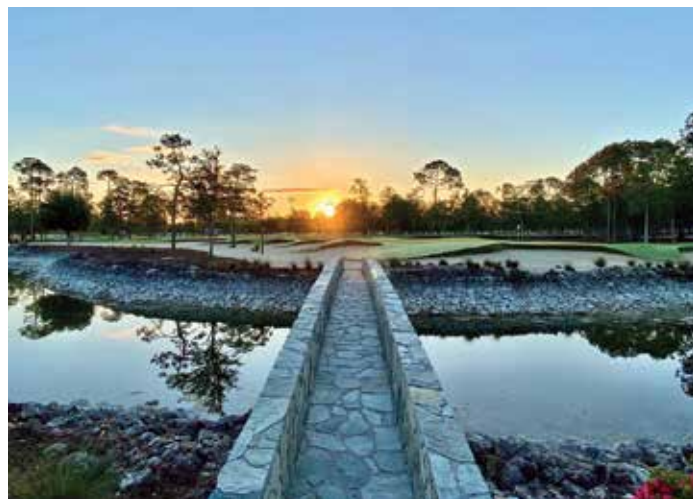
Darren Davis, CGCS  
Olde Florida Golf Club, Naples



John Roberts, Del Tura Golf and  
Country Club, North Fort Myers



Jeff Jones, Frenchman's Reserve Country Club, Palm Beach Gardens



Jim Colo, Naples National Golf Club, Naples



John Reilly, The Club at Longboat Key Resort, Longboat Key



Nick Kearns, The Oaks Club, Sarasota



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## Home at Noon on a Tuesday

### A SIGN OF DIFFERENT TIMES

by Kyle D. Sweet, CGCS

I've heard many times that the hit sitcom "Seinfeld" was a show about nothing, but somehow it seemed to cover basically everything. I like the concept. Just start thinking and writing and see what happens. I would've loved to be in the writers' room for those sessions. Sweet Talk is my Seinfeld. Every episode starts as nothing, typically covers something and maybe has an impact on everything.

You know, everything is an interesting word in our language that takes on two meanings. The first, "All things, all the things of a group or a class," and the second, "the current situation, life in general." Well, that's a good enough start for me, but let's mash 'em up and say this, "The current situation of all things."

That's a big six words, but I think it's safe to say that the current situation of all things is affecting our everything, whether good or bad. Life is different. Hell, I'm writing this on a Tuesday at noon at home. That's different!

To combat the spread of the coronavirus, every golf course or club has gone about their preparations differently and in some cases your local governments have made the decision for you. Sorry east coast guys, ... well wait, maybe you've got the best situation of all of us!

Ultimately, the goal has been to keep golfers and employees safe while working to stay in business during what is typically the busiest time of the golf season in Florida. Certainly, reduced hours and other measures have been taken across our state. Golf is strong and will make it. If you're like us, and your course remained open, and you may have even experienced more golf than usual in March and April as it's probably one of the most natural social distancing sports. Oh, if tackling, punching, wrestling or other forms of contact are part of a normal round on your course, it's not normal.

Golf course maintenance staff are considered essential? Let's give a round of applause to Jennifer Bryan and the board of the Florida GCSA. I don't know about you, but I walked a little taller and even got myself a new hat in the golf shop after sending that one out. Seriously though, you take care of a living, breathing thing and undoubtedly the biggest asset at your property. In just a week's time, no maintenance on a golf course can have significant impacts. Essential, thank you!

Ok, that's cool, I'm essential, now it's time to shine. I might not get out as much as I used to, but I'm pretty good at talking and overwhelmingly I continue to hear how hard staff is working through these different times. It may be because we're happy to

have jobs, which we are, but I believe it's also because we're workers, pure and simple. Sick time is down, understandably, and many of those falling short on hours are asking for more or picking up extra work during their time away from the job and making it work as best they can. No wonder we love doing this job, we've got great, hardworking staff stepping up to the plate time after time ... drought, flood, hurricane, virus ... regardless, they get it done!

On the course, have you had to lower your standards? Resoundingly across the industry this was an adjustment we knew we would have to do. Making staffing adjustments equals making course adjustments. Bunkers raked less, cups changed less often, mowing repetitions reduced, etc ... you know where I'm coming from. How about the feedback from these changes? Umm, do I hear crickets? Yeah, me too, surprise. Maybe because there are bigger things to worry about or maybe our own expectations are causing the issue sometimes?





I digress though, we've gotten complaints. We pulled bunker rakes and stopped providing divot containers due to the "touch" factor of these items and then I think they actually felt bad that we took away the option to rake the bunker and fill their divots. Makes me kind of wonder if the aftermath will be the best etiquette we've


ever experienced? Well, not so fast, I've also heard that our efforts have also really sped up play. Oh, brother.

Next stop, the homelife. I've heard of such rarities as superintendents eating dinner with their families multiple times in one week, spur of the moment home renovations, huge sums of money being saved on no restaurant dining and attempts at helping third graders with their homework. Eating, working and saving the cash went fine, homework not so much. Sharing the parenting responsibilities and having a revised schedule for now seems to be fitting most pretty well and I know I've valued it too. Weird though, my other half started working on the days I'm off, which I'm thinking is normal, right?

Out of nothing comes something which might just affect everything. For now, our everything will be different but having faith in our business, our terrific staffs, our high standards, our valuable customers, our supportive, appreciative families and our essential status should get us rolling out and to work early each morning to take on another day. Be safe and keep healthy. ■


- Kyle Sweet is certified golf course superintendent at The Sanctuary Golf Club in Sanibel




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# IN THE NEWS

Excerpts from press coverage on people in the world of golf course maintenance in Florida.

## Tim Campbell Palm Beach Par 3 Golf Course Palm Beach Daily News • April 24

Sierra Malnové visits the Palm Beach Par 3 Golf Course at least once a month but not for the golf — she said she's never played a day in her life. Instead, she cares for the tens-of-thousands of bees she recently installed on the property. As a commitment to environmental sustainability in the town, Par 3 decided to introduce honey bees to its property in February.

Golf superintendent Tim Campbell believes the course's warm weather and arrangement of pollinating palm meadows and mangroves makes it the perfect setting for honey bees. He said bees will not only enhance the course's features, but also add beauty to the town's surrounding areas miles away. The bees are also a good measure for how environmentally friendly the course is. "If the bees are okay, we are doing something right," Campbell said.

The golf course has always had bees on the property, but staff planned to add honey bees for years. Malnové installed colonies of more than 45,000 bees on February 25. Campbell thinks the

new addition to Par 3 will benefit golfers and nature-lovers alike. "This is just another way to show that golf courses are good for the environment," he said.

## Kevin Leo Quail Creek Country Club Naples Daily News • March 19

Collier County still won't have a United States Golf Association event. The county and specifically Naples' Quail Creek Country Club is 0-for-2 after Tuesday's announcement by the USGA that the U.S. Women's Four-Ball Championship scheduled for April 25-29 was being canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"Our overall standing on this is just disappointment," director of golf Jon Balyeat said. Balyeat, general manager Chad Schultenover and golf course superintendent Kevin Leo all recognize the severity of the pandemic. Quail Creek was originally set to host to the U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur Championship in early October 2017 before Hurricane Irma damaged the club so badly ... the tournament had to be moved.

The awarding of the U.S. Women's Four-Ball was a sort-of make-

up for losing the Women's Mid-Amateur. But now that's not happening either. "What are the odds? A hurricane and a pandemic. Vegas couldn't make those odds up," said Leo, the longtime golf course superintendent. Leo had the two courses at Quail Creek prepared. "We were ready to showcase again what Quail Creek's all about, and also showcase Naples and Collier County," he said. "We were getting geared up with the volunteers, the new sports center. Everybody was getting really excited."

## Kirsten Conover & Kevin Leo Quail Creek Country Club Naples Daily News • April 5

Quail Creek Country Club earned back the community's name-sake with a recent bird release.

About 200 bobwhite quail, transported from a farm near Ocala, arrived at the North Naples golf community on March 17. Monitoring continues in an effort to permanently reestablish what was a native quail population there. "We know a few things. We know we will get some flyaways. We know some are going to stay here. And, we know we'll be feeding some wildlife," said Brian Beckner, owner of Native Bird Boxes, leading the species' experi-

mental reintroduction.

Though butterflies and other species have been introduced to golf courses in similar ways, this is the first known release of quail to reestablish a native population, said Kirsten Conover, who was part of leading the club's ongoing Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary certification.

Unfortunately, from a quail perspective, snakes and other predators were not driven out of the 640-acre Quail Creek... In their favor, the feral cat population has declined, said Kevin Leo, Quail Creek's director of operations.

The hope is that now that development and renovations are complete, the remaining native scrub palmetto that line parallel fairways will provide enough cover and habitat for the birds, said Leo.

"I remember seeing herds of quail, flocks, running through the fairways and into the woods," recalled Leo. But that was back in the '80s when Leo was part of the community's development, he said. When Leo returned to Quail Creek decades later, in 2013, there were few if any quail remaining. "It was one of the first things I noticed when I came back. The loss of the quail," he said. ■

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Scamehorn and Nysse on Move


Scott Scamehorn, CGCS, formerly at Mountain Lake Golf and Country Club in Lake Wales, is now at 54-hole Reunion Resort in Orlando. Reunion Resort came under new ownership by Kingwood International Resorts in 2019. Scamehorn had been at historic Mountain Lake since 2004. His successor as director of golf and grounds at Mountain Lake is Tony Nysse, who was previously at Old Marsh Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, and before that at Pine Tree Golf Club in Boynton Beach.

### BMP Sessions Coming Soon

The Florida Golf Course BMP Certification training and examination will be offered online in late May early June. The training will be in two four-hour blocks. The exam will be proctored online.

### Sheridan Earns Certificate

Congratulations to John Sheridan, assistant golf course superintendent at Palm Beach Country Club in Palm Beach on becoming the fifth in the Sunshine State to complete GCSAA's assistant superintendent certificate program. George Kervern is superintendent at Palm Beach Country Club.



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## Snapshots from Twitter and Such



John Reilly's homespun bunker brushes – squeegees weighted with filled water bottles – at The Club at Longboat Key Resort might not be very high-tech but the product is hard to beat.



"The operator in this case with many years of experience in turfgrass management missed about one nozzle width wide with this application. The operator is limited in recent experience behind the wheel of a sprayer and learned from his mistake ... That operator was me." – Andy Jorgensen, CGCS On top of the World Ocala.



Alligator twin tracks in a bunker at Olde Florida Golf Club discovered by Darren Davis, CGCS on the club's 16th hole.

## Streamsong Moves Greens to Mach 1

Streamsong Resort in Bowling Green is regrassing all Streamsong Blue greens with new Mach 1 ultradwarf bermudagrass. With this project, Streamsong will become the first golf destination in the world to showcase Mach 1 on an 18-hole layout.

Regrassing will be carried out in phases. Work on Streamsong Blue was to begin in April with Streamsong Red to follow the same process in 2021. Mach 1 was developed by golf course superintendent Rodney Lingle and is distributed by Modern Turf.

"Since opening, our goal has been to provide a pure golf experience with firm and fast conditions that rival the very best golf destinations in the country," Streamsong Resort director of agronomy Rusty Mercer says. "This project is a natural progression for the maturity and environmental conditions of our sand-based courses. We have evaluated the latest technology of turfgrass in the industry and we are very impressed by the high-quality performance of Mach 1 at Streamsong."



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# The Weird Places We Go To Escape Cabin Fever

I am not sure what the other articles in this edition of The Florida Green will cover, but I am pretty confident the COVID-19 pandemic will have a presence. I am also pretty sure nobody else will be discussing the inability to purchase toilet paper or Baby Foot exfoliation foot peels!

Let's get that elephant out of the way immediately. As day 678 of April 2020 passed, my family and I were, like most, struggling with a little cabin fever. My wife had seen a product for making your feet soft like a baby's, so she ordered it. The kit arrived yesterday, and we got to work on the process after dinner.

We sat with our feet wrapped up in little booties filled with gel for an hour as the directions indicated. It felt a little funky, but we made it through. We are currently waiting the five to seven days for the effects to take place. I will either have the softest feet in Florida or they will be grotesquely deformed from the unknown agent I soaked them in. This is what happens when you take someone accustomed to traveling the state and relegate them to home office work for an extended period of time. I will keep you posted on the outcome.

Besides the opportunity to exfoliate my feet, these unusual circumstances that we have all been living through have, once again, allowed me the chance to appreciate the resilience and ingenuity of our members and chapter leaders. When everything started sliding off the tracks in early March, there was no panic or loss of focus. As a matter of fact, there was great resolve in the face of something we had not experienced in our lifetimes.

As golf course superintendents, we know we are responsible for the largest asset at any facility and are often called upon to exercise judgement and leadership when put to the test. Our members did precisely that, they led through the challenges. In the same fashion that hurricanes wreak havoc on our properties, this menace threatened us in an unseen way that would compromise the most valued component at any property, our people.

The efforts put forth by every sector of our business to protect the well-being of our people has been an inspiring example of the heights we can reach when we work together in a unified fashion. We have enjoyed some of the best working relationships with our industry partners as we have navigated through these recent trials. We have seen these relationships prosper at the national level as well as within the local area as we have joined together in our efforts to not only keep our people out of harm's way but also protect and promote the game we love and enjoy.

We are also witness to the great benevolence conveyed by our



Shelves devoid of toilet paper and coffee tables heavy with feet undergoing chemical peels, two unexpected consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.

members as can always be counted upon. GCSAA has allocated money raised in part through member donations into our Disaster Relief Fund and has been able to assist members who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local PGA sections and golf courses have also come together to support first responders in a variety of charitable acts including baking cookies, supplying meals and making monetary contributions. Gleneagles donated 150 meals for workers at Delray Medical, Cypress Lakes donated \$20,000 for the Harry Chapin Food Bank in Southwest Florida, which feeds over 80,000 people, and Eastpointe Country Club and PGA Hope participants baked cookies and delivered them to the staff at the West Palm VA hospital.

As we continue to negotiate these uncertain times, I wonder will I ever be able to purchase toilet paper again? Will my feet actually be as soft as a baby's or will the skin fall from my bones?

These and many other questions remain to be resolved, however, I am confident that no matter what transpires moving forward, our members will overcome the challenges and continue to provide great examples of leadership and benevolence.

As always, it is a pleasure to serve as your GCSAA representative. I am constantly inspired by your efforts and proud to work alongside you. ■

- Ralph Dain is GCSAA regional representative in Florida. You can reach him at (785) 424-4306 or [rdain@gcsaa.org](mailto:rdain@gcsaa.org).

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