

WINTER 2021

*The*  
**FLORIDA**  
*Green*



**Brandon Richey and  
The Getting  
Of Wisdom  
At Lake Nona**

**The New Seminole Legacy  
Murphy Manages a Reinvention**

**From Bus Boy to Icon  
The Stellar Career of Court**

**Hale the Chief at Palm Coast  
Building a Muni Back to its Best**





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# The FLORIDA Green

WINTER 2021



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Brandon Richey is finding a new balance at Lake Nona Golf and Country Club. (Photo: Cameron Darby)

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# What Can the "Family" Do About Fertilizer Rules

Here's to 2021 bringing back some normalcy. Hopefully, we've all gotten a good reset over the holidays with family and close friends. I'm looking forward to getting back to normal with our Florida GCSA family too. We are a family. There are very few other occupations where rivals are treated like brothers and sisters more than amongst golf course superintendents.



Andy Neiswender

Now, perhaps more than any time in the past, is when we need to come together as a family. There are pushes in local governments right now aiming to make golf courses subject to the summer blackouts on fertilizers. This movement is happening in the Miami-Dade County area on a couple fronts. And they will very likely sweep back across the state as the last round did.

In this case, there is no big brother to step in and do all the fighting for you. We have tools to help you, but you will need to stand up and be heard. Local golf course superintendents have a much more powerful voice than someone from outside the area. If you are unsure how you can go about presenting your case, please call our executive director Jennifer Bryan and she will steer you along the appropriate path.

If you are unsure whether this issue really matters and whether it's worth your time and effort, consider what no fertilizer on your property would mean for your course, both economically and environmentally. Conditioning will certainly suffer. Worn areas will not recover as quickly, divots and ball marks will take longer to heal.

Bouncing back from a pest infestation will be more difficult. Without repair 'tools,' superintendents will have to consider more preventative pesticide application. If we can't grow grass back as quickly as is called for, we'll be doing a lot more sodding and turf replacement.

How is a renovation going to go without nitrogen in the summer? What's your aerification schedule going to look like with a much slower healing time? Not trying to be a downer but think about what fertilizer blackouts will mean for you and your facility.

Golf courses are far more efficient and effective users of fertilizers now than, say, 20 or 30 years ago. The science and the technology have advanced to a point where industry performance has far outpaced perceptions with roots going back decades. But we can't expect to change those perceptions without presenting our case and bringing forward the science to back it up.

What can you do? Reach out to your local officials, city councils and county leaders. Talk to your committees and owners and let them know what's coming. Engage your golf professionals and general managers to see what members of the club might be able to help present golf's case.

Stay on top of your Golf BMPs and use them to help communicate how you are protecting your local environment. Talk to other superintendents in your area to help coordinate your efforts, you are not alone.

The Florida GCSA and your local chapters have some great resources but the most valuable ally you have is you! Please stand up with your local brothers and sisters to communicate the facts so that your facility can remain a viable, sustainable and environmentally sound business. As the old saying goes, if you aren't sitting at the table, you will likely be on the menu. ■

- Andy Neiswender, Belleair Country Club



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## Determined, Empowered And Civically Responsible

As I was contemplating a subject for this column, I looked back at columns from previous winter issues of the magazine. Most talked about seeing you at upcoming BMP seminars, the Golf Industry Show, the Florida GCSA Reception or upcoming chapter meetings. Although I will not see you in person this year at the GIS or the reception, please know I will still participate virtually.

Although it is far from the ideal situation, I will welcome the opportunity to see my colleagues and share stories during the chapter executives' session and to walk the virtual trade show floor. No, this is not how we expected things to be, but you have all proven to be resilient and have continued to make the best out of very unusual circumstances. And that's the approach I'm taking with the Golf Industry Show.

I encourage you all to make a similar effort if your schedule allows. I know the national association has worked extremely hard to prepare this conference and all it offers. Also, please remember that your participation might never be so important

to the continued health of GCSAA as it will be this year. Just as many of us have made that extra effort to support certain businesses in our communities, think of this, at least partly, as a chance to offer that kind of support to those who work so hard on behalf of your profession.

I am enormously proud of all our chapters as you have managed to safely host events and, in the months leading up to the holidays, successfully raised a lot of money and gathered loads of toys for various charities across the state. It is difficult to think how difficult these times must be for those in need in all our communities. Your charitable donations have never been more important, I'm sure. It warms my heart to imagine how much happier Christmas was for so many kids and families because of what you did. All of you should be proud of yourself and your industry.

So, as I reflect on the past year, I see an industry that is determined, empowered and civically responsible. All of you have managed to maintain some normalcy in a very abnormal time. Chapters have practiced CDC guidelines and kept the wheels turning. As I mentioned in my last column, superintendents have demonstrated innovative ways to keep the game safe and golf had an extraordinarily successful year. To keep that momentum going in the New Year, I encourage everyone to maintain that approach and that resolve.

We will continue to stay on top of state and local legislative issues. I will continue to do my best to communicate important issues to all our members and in turn, please know I am always ready to hear your stories. Our elected officials may often seem like they are far removed from what's going on at ground level but believe me, that is why your real-life experiences on the golf course matter. It helps them understand where the rubber meets the road, and they appreciate that.

I am hopeful this New Year will bring good health and normalcy, especially with the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines. Cheers to continuing to do what you do best and to seeing you in person soon. ■

- Jennifer Bryan, Executive Director

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## WEST COAST



Wayne Witzak of Florida Sherriff's Youth Ranches accepts a check for \$2500 from chapter officials Andy Neiswender and Todd Six.



Andy Neiswender presents a \$2,500 check to Brad Gregory of A Kid's Place of Tampa Bay.

We held our 5th annual Florida West Coast GCSA Christmas Charity event on December 7. We had 19 four-man teams and raised about \$3,500 for our designated charities. Because we had donated a total of \$5,000 the board decided to maintain that level of support and made up the difference with funds from our chapter operating account. So, once again, \$5,000 was shared between A

Kid's Place of Tampa Bay and the Florida Sherriff's Youth Ranches.

Along with a check for \$2,500 each, we also handed over a huge bag of toys for Christmas to both organizations. A Kid's Place provides residential care from birth to age 18, who have been removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect or abandonment. Their primary focus is to keep sibling groups together in a safe, stable, home-like environment until a more permanent place can be provided.

The vision of Florida Sherriff's Youth Ranches is to develop young men and women who, because of the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches, are able to face the future with a sense of direction, ability and hope. The mission of the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches is to prevent delinquency and develop lawful, resilient and productive citizens.

A huge thank you to Mike Strube and Feather Sound Country Club for hosting and donating use of the golf course. Without their support and donation, we'd have nothing to give these very deserving causes.

In all, we had 76 players in the field competing in a four-man scramble for one gross prize and first and second in the net division. Congratulations to our host, Mike, who was on the winning team in the gross division.

### Results -

#### Gross

1st Place 55 - Mike Strube, Kevin Baldwin, Chick Berry, Aaron Henson

### Net

\*1st Place 57 - Rich Miller, Darin Martinez, Jason Grey, Gerald Marquardt

2nd Place 57 - Cory Agar, Andy Neiswender, Matt Eichmann and Graham Johnson

*\*won on scorecard playoff*

### Closest to the Pin

No. 3 - Steve Epperson  
No. 8 - Matt Eichmann  
No. 12 - John Reilly  
No. 15 - Mike West

### Long Drive

No.1 - Aaron Henson

- Andy Neiswender, Belleair Country Club

## SEVEN RIVERS

Seems like every chapter in the state got back on the event wagon recently and many found themselves making multiple events each week. Seven Rivers was no different as we were able to successfully host a few events at member clubs over the past few months. It is always great to see everybody and hear their personal stories during this historical time.

The group met over at Juliette Falls Golf Club in Dunnellon for the annual Toys for Tots fundraiser back in December. This meeting was originally scheduled for November, but thanks to Hurricane Eta, it needed to be postponed to the later date. We hosted a sold-out crowd with players attending from all over the state. It's great to see such camaraderie and the support from other chapters for this event.

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Fittingly, for one of our largest events each year, host superintendent Steve Keller and assistant Chris Lechner provided more than exceptional playing conditions and a most enjoyable atmosphere. I am proud to announce that we received almost \$4,000 in donations for needy children around our community.

Pastor Ben Adams from New Life Family Church here in Ocala has graciously accepted the task of distributing these donations with the help of a team of volunteers from his congregation. Before we teed off, Pastor Ben shared his appreciation and some of the stories of his experiences while dropping these gifts off each year. The group made some very generous cash donations, and those proceeds were used to provide gifts for the hardest to shop for kids, teenage girls. We are very thankful for everything this industry continues to do to help this cause. Thank you all for the support.

Our originally scheduled December meeting over at SummerGlen Golf Club in Ocala went off without a hitch. Host superintendent Janet O'Dell and her awesome assistant Sara Kasper had the course dialed in for the group. Ralph Dain from GCSAA provided a presentation on hosting a First Green event before the group battled it out on the golf course.

Ralph's presentation was a lead-in to what we hope becomes an annual tradition for the chapter by hosting schoolchildren at member clubs for a day. This program not only gives back to the community, but also educates the kids (and parents) about what we do and why we do what we do. We have a great story to tell, and this is one method to get the positive word out about this profession and industry.

At press time, we were looking forward to returning to SkyView Golf & Country Club down at Citrus Hills in mid-January. This event was packed full in 2020. Host superintendent David Hoggard always has the facility in phenomenal shape, and I for one couldn't wait to see how the surrounding development has grown over the past 12 months.

On behalf of the Seven Rivers GCSA

board of directors, we hope that 2021 provides a prosperous and positive opportunity for all of our members. As always, if there is anything we can assist with, please do not hesitate to reach out.

– Andy Jorgensen, CGCS On Top of the World

## PALM BEACH



It's a sign of the times that masks make it hard to recognize Nate Watkin, Parker Ferren, CGCS, Brett Sanderson and Jeffrey Klontz at the registration area.

The Palm Beach GCSA has continued to push through these difficult times and we are thankful to our members for continuing to support our events and remain engaged. I would like to recognize our board of directors and volunteers for their diligence and extra attention to detail during these times. Also, I would like to thank our members for continuing to support our efforts.



Billy Browning, George Farmer and Parker Ferren, CGCS on the tee beneath a heavy sky at Palm Beach Par 3.

The 40th annual Future of Golf tournament was at Palm Beach Par 3 on October 30. Thank you to host superintendent Tim Campbell and his staff for providing us an excellent venue and great playing conditions. Par 3 was the perfect location to create a safe and enjoyable event with great prizes and silent auction items.

The format for the event was a best two balls of four and we had six closest to the pin prizes. Congratulations to the following winners:

**1st Place Gross** - Bradley Jacklin, Josh Fleisher, Scott MacPhee, Tony Price

**1st Place Net** - Steve Antal, Dave Oliver, Stephen Logan, Josh Mays

**2nd Place Net** - Chester Vandenburg, Jordan Treadway, Matt Eggerman, Taylor Griffin

**3rd Place Net** - Kevin Wasilewski, Rob Sicinski, Rob Uzar, Luke Ferin

A special thank you to all of the sponsors for continuing to support the Palm Beach GCSA by supporting the 40th annual Future of Golf. We are aware that these are uncertain times, and we cannot thank you enough for your support and understanding.

On December 3, we returned to Palm Beach Par 3 for our annual Toys for Tots tournament. The format for the event was 18 closest to the pin prizes. We once again received overwhelming support from our superintendents and vendors for the event. We collected truckloads of toys for the kids and raised a substantial amount of money that was gifted through a monetary donation to Toys for Tots.

Honestly, I have never seen so many toys donated. There were 43 people taking part in the golf event, but many others who couldn't participate, went out of their way drop off toys beforehand or at the event on the day. Members were well aware that the need would be greater this year and responded accordingly. It was inspiring to see.

Once again, many thanks to Tim Campbell and the entire team at the Palm Beach Par 3 for hosting the event and providing a great golf course and great service.

The Palm Beach board is working on putting together more great events for the first part of 2021. Stay tuned for details on our upcoming events and we are most grateful for all your continued support. We wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous new year.

- Ryan L. Swilley, Gulf Stream Golf Club

## EVERGLADES

Thanks to Everglades GCSA members who donated more than 1,000 toys at our



Everglades GCSA members with some of the more than 1,000 toys members donated for children in need at Christmas.

2020 Christmas Golf Tournament and Outdoor Reception at The Club at The Strand in December. When you consider that each toy was worth a minimum of \$10, that's a sizeable Christmas gift and served to brighten the season for about 200 families and kids in foster care.

We received a nice letter of thanks from Cynthia Hernandez of the Children's Home Society of Florida. In it, she wrote, "Toys collected at your annual toy drive went to help our young adults with kids that are in our independent living programs who aged out of foster care and are working hard to break the cycle with their own healthy families. As well as children who are currently in foster care and are away from or have no families. Your toy drives help us make Christmas that much brighter to the children we serve, and we are forever thankful for the opportunity and the wonderful generosity of your participants."

The Children's Home Society is a wonderful organization, and we were pleased to be able to partner with them to help children and families in need during

the holiday day season.

- Dan Brooks, Panther Run Golf Club

## SOUTH FLORIDA

On December 10, the South Florida GCSA gathered for our annual Toys for Tots event hosted by Billy Entwistle at Flamingo Lakes Golf and Country Club in Pembroke Pines. All the toys and donations went to the Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital. The event had a good turn out with some amazing toys, and cash donations.

The winning team comprised of Walter Chavez, Dustin Anderson, Nate Watkin and Kenton Gamache, who donated their winnings. That prize combined with the all the other cash donations meant we were able to raise \$310 for the hospital.

On behalf of the South Florida GCSA, we want to give a big thank you to Billy Entwistle and his staff at Flamingo Lakes for all their hard work, and to all participants and people who donated to a great cause.

- Kenton Gamache, The Club at Boca Pointe



Billy Entwistle, Chris Monserrate, Kenton Gamache and Ricky Reeves with table of donations for Toys for Tots.



Dustin Anderson leans into this drive at Flamingo Lakes.



Walter Chavez takes aim.

## CENTRAL FLORIDA



Larry Kamphaus Award winner Rob Torri and proud son, Nicholas.



Rob Torri is surprised by his wife, April, and son, Nicholas.

Congratulations to our 2020 Larry Kamphaus Award winner Rob Torri from Orange Tree Golf Club in Orlando. Rob received his award after a fine tribute, and a little roasting, from John Kopack at the 44th annual Larry Kamphaus Crowfoot

Open at Orange County National Golf Center and Lodge in December.

Rob is superintendent at Orange Tree Golf Club where he has been since arriving from Connecticut, where he grew up, 26 years ago. In his presentation speech, John told how Rob didn't go straight into golf course work out of school. He helped a friend's stepfather build houses for a time and even fell off a roof once. Later, he was a teacher, for just a few days.

"At one time he was a pretty good golfer," John, tournament co-chair of Diamond-R Fertilizer, told the crowd. "According to my sources, he won the chapter championship back in 2005, but hasn't won anything since!"

Rob married April in 2012 and they have a son, Nicholas, 7. Both April and Nicolas were there to surprise Rob at the award presentation. "Rob is loved by everybody in the chapter," John says. "He's just an outstanding human being and a great family man."

The Larry Kamphaus Award recognizes individuals who make an outstanding contribution to the advancement of the superintendent profession at the local level. Their efforts must be significant in both substance and duration. Larry Kamphaus was a legend of the profession and worked at Disney World for 27 years. He went from being a shrub cutter to director of golf course maintenance in change of 99 holes. He helped prepare for 26 PGA Tour events. He died in 1998.



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Congratulations, once again, to Deron Zendt from Pine Tree Golf Club who won the Crowfoot Open. Deron shot a round of 71 to win for the third time and become the seventh player to win the Crowfoot at least three times. Fred Klauk, Chris Cartin and Seth Strickland have all won it four times each.

Chester Vandenberg won the gross prize in the vendor division with a round of 69. Winners of the two-man scramble Flight A were Pat Garland and Rodney Griffim with a 62. Flight B winners were Ed Batcheller and Mike Dague with a 68.

Also, congratulations to a guest, Tom Taylor, a superintendent from South Carolina who had a hole-in-one. Thanks to host superintendent Jason Morris and of course, all of our sponsors whose support helps make this such a great event each year.



Deron Zendt won his third Crowfoot Open.  
- Lisa McDowell

## CALUSA



Winners of the pro, super, vendor, guest tournament Jim Leiseburg, Josh Brunet and Chris Allen from Eagle Lakes Golf Club.



Children and staff from The Children's Network of South West Florida with members of the Calusa GCSA board.

Happy New Year! I hope everyone survived the holidays and are full steam ahead already in 2021. With a recap of the Calusa GCSA's latest events, congratulations are once again offered to our pro, super, vendor, guest winning team from Eagle Lakes Golf Club, made up of superintendent Chris Allen and company.

Next was our Christmas tournament, the 7th annual Golf for the Children's Christmas Classic. With 34 team entries, we were able to raise \$27,000, our biggest year yet. With that success we sponsored 130 children from The Children's Network of South West Florida. They all received gift bags with toiletries and gift cards, each house was supplied their own Christmas menu, as well as decorations and gaming stations.

Looking ahead to the 2021 event, the Calusa GCSA plans to again hold the tournament at The Verandah Club but growing it into a 36-hole event. Let's keep raising the bar. I offer congratulations again to the winning team of Andy Englebrecht, Greg Caspio, Bryce Koch, CGCS and "touring pro" Deron Zendt. Well done gentlemen.

Next on tap is our Family Fun Night at the Alico Family Golf Center. The two-club game is a free event. Lastly, we

will engage the Suncoast chapter in a match play style skeet shoot, tentatively scheduled for March. It should be a great event and a nice change of pace.



Kids from The Children's Network of South West Florida explore Christmas bags donated by the Calusa GCSA.



A thank you card from The Children's Network of South West Florida.

- Mitch Miller, Legends Golf & Country Club

## NORTH FLORIDA



Nathan Carter accepts the Crash Cup from Anthony Baur.

We started our Ron Hill Classic off with a beautiful Friday afternoon back in October. Several gathered by the pool to socialize and have a few beverages before heading out for dinner. Saturday morning greeted us with a beautiful sunrise, and everyone headed to the golf course around 10am for a brunch buffet of fruit, pastries, eggs, bacon, sausage and other delicious eats.

Around 75 golfers headed out to start their round of golf at 11am with a beautiful day in the mid 70s. Around 6:30pm everyone headed to the reception and dinner where around 95 of us enjoyed a few cocktails, appetizers and socializing.

Bobby Weed, Allan MacCurrach and Tom Cowan gave a little history of Ron Hill's legacy in the golfing industry along with



Tim McKenna, left, and Anthony Baur, right, with Butch Singo Award winner, Tom Cowan.

a lot of funny stories. Both of Ron's sons, Ryan and Chris, were on hand to tell a few stories and let us know what it meant to them and their family for us to rename this tournament in their father's honor.

The big surprise of the evening was presenting Tom Cowan with the 2020 Butch Singo Award. He was beyond words, if you can believe that. Tom has been a fixture in the industry for so long that he received the Florida GCSA President's Award for Lifetime Service way back in 2002. After a long career as a superintendent, he moved to the sales side working for Pike Creek Turf, Wesco and now Diamond-R Fertilizer. He also served as chair of the Lake City Community College advisory board.

We ended the evening with a wonderful buffet of beef tenderloin, low Amelia boil, fried chicken along with all the fixings and topped it off with funnel cakes and

banana pudding for dessert.

Congratulations to Nathan Carter on winning the Crash Cup with a round of 72. Doug Andrade's 79 earned him low vendor honors. John and George Clifton won the low grass team event and Jayce Ramage and Matt Howes won the low net.

Our Christmas Tournament was on December 14 at the Golf Club at South Hampton. The day started with a light rain, but soon cleared by the time we gathered in the clubhouse for door prizes and a great lunch of fried chicken, mac and cheese, baked beans and all the fixin's. Everyone brought lots of toys to donate to Toys for Tots. The weather was in the mid-70s with clear skies for our 12pm tee off. All in all, it was a beautiful day with lots of fun and fellowship for all.

- Betty Hooten

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# ROUNDS 4 RESEARCH

## High Ambitions for Auction FUNDING TURFGRASS RESEARCH

The Florida GCSA is aiming higher than ever in relationship to this year's Rounds 4 Research auction setting a fundraising target of \$55,000. If successful, that number would establish a new record for the association in the online event that runs from April 26 to May 2 this year.

"Yes, we're aiming high but the only way we're going to get there is for superintendents to take the lead in getting their facilities to donate the rounds," says Florida GCSA Rounds 4 Research committee chair, Parker Ferren, CGCS, from St. Andrews Club in Delray Beach. "We stress how important this is every year but still we are way behind where we could be in a state with more than 1,000 golf facilities."

The math supports Ferren's contention. If every facility in the state donated one foursome and those foursomes averaged as little as \$100 each, that would generate \$100,000. Instead, last year, the Florida GCSA netted just shy of \$30,000 in the auction, which was delayed until late July because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It is unrealistic to expect 100 percent participation," Ferren says. "But we should be far closer to it than we have been because, the fact is, every single facility in the state is a beneficiary of turfgrass research. Imagine where the golf industry would be without the science to help us maintain our courses. Everybody who has a job in the golf industry benefits from this work – whether they are in the clubhouse or club manufacturing."

Ferren points out that some courses in the state have strict member-only policies and increasing numbers of them are choosing to make direct monetary donations. "We are grateful to those facilities for finding a way to lend their support and we encourage others to follow suit," he says.

"We urge all superintendents to at least have a conversation at their facility to make sure management or ownership is aware of the value Rounds 4 Research brings to the industry. I know superintendents are busy, but just a five-minute chat could make a major difference in helping us reach our goal."

The Rounds 4 Research committee encourages superintendents to help promote the auction on social media by using the hashtag #R4R21 in social media posts leading up to and during the auction.

With the help of GCSAA, the Florida GCSA has also produced a brochure encouraging donations and explaining where the



money goes. The brochure will be distributed by various means including at local chapter meetings over the next few months. The brochure lists examples of the research projects that Rounds 4 Research funds are currently supporting in the state, including:

- Influence of colored sand topdressing on plant health and water movement dynamics
- Evaluation of different aerification methods and topdressing materials for ultradwarf bermudagrass putting greens
- Developing golf course renovation programs with herbicide alternatives to glyphosate
- Developing comprehensive tropical signalgrass control programs for Florida golf course superintendents
- Risk thresholds for lance nematodes on ultradwarf bermudagrass
- Multi-location trials to identify experimental lines of bermudagrass, Seashore paspalum and zoysiagrass suitable for use on Florida golf courses.

Ferren points out that early donations will be important to help build momentum in the coming weeks. "The sooner that rounds are donated the more effective we will be in generating interest among the ultimate beneficiary, the golfer, the person who bids on the rounds and enjoys the great conditions the research helps provide," he says.

Donations can be made in minutes by visiting the Environmental Institute for Golf at [www.eifg.org](http://www.eifg.org). Monetary donations can be made by check to Rounds 4 Research, 1421 Research Park Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049, or by calling (785) 832-4445 to donate by credit card. ■

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## Struggling for Answers, Maybe

### IT IS WATER HOLDING YOU BACK by Andy Neiswender

Our irrigation water quality will not get better in the coming years and I believe we can expect it to get worse. When water quality deteriorates slowly, it can be very difficult to identify. But for me, it was a very abrupt change.

I had been at a property with great water and a successful turf management program and ignorance was bliss. Then I came to Belleair Country Club with the same turf varieties. Within two months of implementing the same program I had been successful with previously, I realized something was very different. Luckily, with the help of a few smart people around me and a few great books by Dr. Bob Carrow, Dr. Ronny Duncan and Mike Huck, we made a few adjustments and implemented a new and successful turf management program.

As I learned more over those first few years, I began to identify a vulnerability in our industry when it comes to managing turf with poor quality irrigation water. When explaining what we did to turn things around, I got a lot of “deer in the headlights” looks from a lot of fairly smart agronomists. Please don’t miss understand, I’m not telling you your water is your problem. What I am saying, is that if you are seeing things that don’t make sense and all you can come up with is nematodes or disease pressure, you should check your irrigation water.

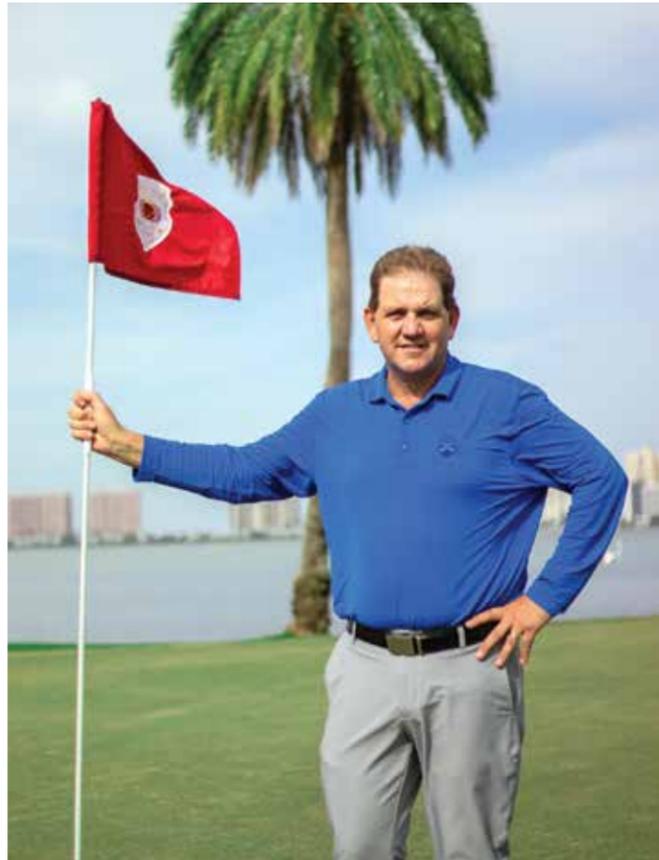
What we have found is that if we manage our water quality, then all of the other problems become easier to manage.

Your water is put out at a higher rate than any other input by far. As an eye-opening example, in one year, we applied 670lbs of sodium to an average size green through our irrigation water. That is equivalent to spreading 32lbs of sodium chloride on a green every week. As you may imagine, even if your salinity (or sodium) levels are low to moderate like ours, and you aren’t doing anything to mitigate accumulation in the soil and in the turf plant, then you will get in trouble pretty quickly.

If you suspect you have issues, get your water tested by a good turf diagnostic lab. Once you have identified some areas for turf management improvement, develop a plan to mitigate the water quality limitations and stick to it. Do your research on all options as there are a lot of great tools out there.

Don’t waste time and energy looking for the silver bullet that will change things tomorrow; it doesn’t exist.

I believe the main reason this is a difficult subject for many is that it will take time to see progress, even after you get on the right track. Have faith in your program and stick with it, especially when everything is running smoothly. Think in terms of a marathon approach to water quality challenges rather than a sprint with a quick-fix program.



Andy Neiswender

We check water samples at least four times a year. Don’t assume after one sample that your water quality is at that level all the time. Because of all the factors that influence water quality, it probably isn’t uniform all year round.

If you receive reclaimed water, reach out to your water supplier. They have to test constantly and should provide that data to you. Discuss how they treat their water and whether there are any options for you for improving that quality for you. Their primary concern is to make it safe for people and not necessarily for your turf. My provider said, “We usually only have problems with people with sensitive plants.” I explained I have seven acres of sensitive plants on greens.

When you are selecting your sample locations, it’s smart to collect samples from sprinklers out on the golf course since that applied water and quality is what is impacting turf on greens or other areas of the golf course.

We use both POGOs and TDRs to test moisture and salinity daily. Again, there are a lot of great tools; find ones that fit you best and use them. They help us forecast the need to increase or decrease aspects of our management program. On greens for instance, our salinity index can rise after just five days without rainfall. We have a threshold number that when exceeded, we notice the greens stop responding, and we see that in our clipping quantity or through cosmetic issues or loss of root volume. Your numbers will be your numbers and likely will not be exactly the same on another property. Through a little trial and error, you’ll be able to dial in what works best for you.

We had to increase our run times and the frequency of irrigation. Some principles to manage poor water quality may seem to go against normal sound agronomic practices. If you have crappy water, you will likely need to use more of it, and more frequently, to leach the negatively affecting salts below the roots.

You will not be able to let the soil profile dry out as this will cause salt-induced drought stress and plant desiccation. Once this happens, accumulated salt in the soil and in the plant can stunt growth rates that can drag on for two weeks or more. The otherwise smart method of deep root watering and then drying out will be a recipe for disaster. If you’ve seen bermudagrass turn yellow in areas, we refer to it as mottling, that’s probably a water quality issue.

We needle tine every three weeks and are on the aggressive side with core aeration in the summer. Soil health is imperative in managing poor water. You have to keep soil pores open through every type of aeration you can manage on a timely schedule. You need to keep sodium and chloride moving down and out of the profile continuously.

This will also help to pull oxygen through the aeration hole, which the turf plant needs for root system sustainability. Fortunately, over the last 20 years, we’ve seen some great aeration machines to help create avenues and maintain pore continuity with very minimal disruption at the surface, thus minimizing negative impacts on putting quality on greens.

We acidify our irrigation water. This is extremely important if you have high alkaline irrigation water and especially above 7.5 pH. But frankly, I would acidify in some fashion even if we had great water. We acidify our irrigation water mostly as a flush on greens on specific days. You can use it more or less depending on your needs.

In our case, our pH tends to run high from 8.3 to as high as 9.4. Part of this alkalinity increase is from the reclaimed water and part is due to clay or limestone in the irrigation ponds, especially if the irrigation pump intake is located on or near the bottom of the irrigation lake. High pH and bicarbonate concentration ties up nutrients in the soil. It can also tie up the calcium you need to combat the sodium problem. We have even built portable acid injectors to use with our syringe hoses when we hand water. There was a time you could identify every area we hand watered on greens every day. Not anymore.



Salt induced stress affects both the soil profile and the turf plant.

We apply prescription quantity gypsum to greens weekly or bi-weekly. We use calcium in the gypsum to help knock the sodium off the soil colloid and help leach it out of the profile. Our application rates and frequencies change based on our salinity index, noted above, and our forecast of rain for the next few days. If we have aeration holes in the ground that week, we use standard inexpensive gypsum. If we don’t aerify that week, we usually use acidified gypsum. As I said earlier, there are a lot of great tools.

Assessing and managing poor quality irrigation is a complex subject. Even relatively small problems can rear their ugly heads when you’re not paying attention. Poor irrigation water quality will cause a weaker plant that will have more difficulty handling every other stress. If you manage your water, you can improve your efficacy in managing all those other stresses.

If you’ve been scratching your head feeling like growing turfgrass is getting more and more difficult and seeing results that don’t fully add up, get your water tested and see what you learn. Do your research and ask questions. Remember that salts are accumulators in both the turf plant and in the entire turf ecosystem. Whatever your water quality, you apply that water quality every time that you turn on your irrigation system.

Here are some great places to start your research:

Turfgrass and Landscape Irrigation Water Quality Assessment and Management, Dr. Duncan, Dr. Carrow and Mike Huck

Best Management Practices for Saline and Sodic Turfgrass Soils Assessment and Reclamation, Dr. Carrow and Dr. Duncan

Salt-Affected Turfgrass Sites Assessment and Management, Dr. Carrow and Dr. Duncan ■

- Andy Neiswender is golf course superintendent at Belleair Country Club in Belleair, and Florida GCSA president.

## Award Winners Come FROM FAR AND NEAR

Someone who moved half-way around the world to further his career and someone who built theirs essentially on their own doorstep were honored by the Florida GCSA in 2020. Australian born and raised David Dore-Smith won the Distinguished Service Award and Jack Harrell, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Harrell's, won the Marie Roberts Lifetime Service Award.



David Court, CGCS



David Dore-Smith



Kyle Sweet, CGCS



Jack Harrell, Jr.

Dore-Smith, director of golf course and grounds maintenance at Copperleaf Golf Club in Bonita Springs, served as association president in 2015-16 and has served on numerous committees over the years, most recently chairing the membership committee. He also has long history of serving at the local chapter level with the Everglades GCSA.

Dore-Smith was also recognized for his efforts supporting his colleagues by hosting numerous field days, demo days, field trials and seminars, as well as visits from turfgrass students. A board member of the Environmental Research and Education Foundation, he has also contributed a number of times to this magazine and GCSAA's flagship publication GCM.

He came to the U.S. in the late '90s to participate in the international turfgrass intern program offered through Ohio State University and stayed. He became assistant superintendent at Tiburon Golf Club in Naples before becoming superintendent at Pelican Sound Golf and River Club in 2001. In 2003, he moved to Copperleaf.

Dore-Smith's award recognizes "outstanding achievements as a golf course superintendent, who has given of his or her time unselfishly in promoting golf course management and unification of the Florida GCSA."

In contrast, Jack Harrell, Jr. is a native of Lakeland where Harrell's is based. The company was founded by his grandfather and later, his father, Jack Harrell, Sr., helped take the company from serving the lawn and garden market to serving golf courses and marketing turf fertilizers. Jack Jr. served in myriad roles growing up, including retail sales, golf course sales, truck driver, dispatcher, inventory, purchasing, strategic planning, and accounting.

He joined the business full time in 1978 after graduating from Georgia Southern College with a degree in business

administration and management. Alongside his father, Jack concentrated on improving the quality and effectiveness of turf fertilizers which led to the opening of their first manufacturing plant in 1985 in Lakeland. He was appointed chief executive officer in 1990.

In 2003, he became chairman of the board and by 2015 the company had expanded to a nationwide presence through a series of mergers and acquisitions. In September, 2016, Harrell's became an employee-owned company through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan.

Harrell has received numerous awards outside the golf industry including honors from the Boy Scouts of America, Salvation Army and American Heart Association. In 2019, he received the Florida Turfgrass Association's highest award, the Wreath of Grass.

His latest honor, the Marie Roberts Lifetime Service Award was established in 2005 to "honor and recognize those persons who through their participation, support and achievements have made significant contributions to the Florida GCSA and the Florida golf industry, but who are not or were not necessarily superintendent members."

Normally, the Florida GCSA uses the roundtable and reception before the annual golf championship and team scramble to recognize award winners. But getting together was so tough in 2020 because of the pandemic that those events were canceled.

Other award winners in 2020 included David Court, CGCS. Now retired, Court received the President's Award for Lifetime Service (See story page 22) Kyle Sweet, CGCS from The Sanctuary Golf Club in Sanibel, became the first winner of the newly instituted Joel Jackson Award, for the best superintendent written article in The Florida Green. The award is named in honor of Joel Jackson, CGCS who later in his career, which also included a term as president in 1989-90, served as longtime editor of The Florida Green. ■



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*In being nominated for the 2020 President's Award for Lifetime Service, David Court, CGCS was characterized as a great mentor to many and a class individual.*

## Bus Boy with False Identity BECOMES ONE OF THE ICONS

by Trent Bouts

Like so many colleagues across the profession, David Court made his start in golf as casual help during high school. But none of them did it quite like he did. Just 14 at the time, Court had to “borrow” his older brother’s identity to land a job, as a bus boy in the club dining room. Upon graduating, he worried what more hours in and around the kitchen could lead to over time.

“So, after two weeks, I decided I was just going to do golf course maintenance, be outside and do the physical stuff,” he says. It was by no means a career choice. “My main goal was just to keep out of the refrigerator!”

Over the next 40-plus years, the kid concerned about his waistline grew to stand as tall as any among golf course superintendents in the state. It wasn’t just where he worked, although a resume dressed with Boca Lago Golf and Country Club, Black Diamond Ranch and World Woods Golf Club is certain to impress. It was also how he went about it and how much he gave along the way.

Certified in 1990, Court served every office in the Palm Beach GCSA ... twice. He was president in 1988 and 2000. He spent many years on the Florida GCSA board, serving as president in

2002-03. He played a significant role in creating the state’s golf best management practices. In 2005, he was honored with the Distinguished Service Award, as close as there is to a superintendent hall of fame in the state.

Then, last summer, a full year after his formal retirement, he was being celebrated once more, this time with the President’s Award for Lifetime Service. “It was a total surprise,” Court says. “Some of the guys were getting together for lunch one day. A salesman was hosting so I just showed up like he asked me to and presented the award. It was quite a surprise because I’d gotten the DSA so many years prior.”

Few, if any, others were surprised and the closing sentence of the nomination made jointly by the Seven Rivers and Florida West Coast chapters explained why: “David truly loves our profession, has been a great mentor to many of us and is a class individual all around.”

Court loves the job so much he still hasn’t really let it go. After retiring in September 2019 as director of golf course maintenance over 36 holes at World Woods, he went to Boca Rio Golf Club to help with preparations for an LPGA Tour event the following January. Today, he’s back home in Citrus Springs, but

**“To me, it doesn’t get out of your blood. So, I’m enjoying myself out there. All the pressure is off ... I’ll perform the tasks, do what’s needed, but I get to ask, ‘What settings would you like the spreader set to, sir?’”**

**- David Court, CGCS**

over about 20 hours a week, you’ll find him “mowing fairways and roughs, changing cups or spot spraying weeds” at nearby Skyview Golf Club.

“To me, it doesn’t get out of your blood. So, I’m enjoying myself out there,” he says. “All the pressure is off. As the superintendent, the job is always on your mind. Your mind is always working, what are you going to do tomorrow, or maybe about something you said to your crew member that day, or that you had to fire somebody. It stays with you. Now, I don’t have to be the one worrying about a hurricane coming, or the overseeing. I’ll perform the tasks, do what’s needed, but I get to ask, ‘What settings would you like the spreader set to, sir?’”

That Court still relishes the “physical stuff” that drew him out of the clubhouse all those years ago is hardly news to those who worked for him. Even as director of golf course maintenance, you could find him changing cups or jumping on a sprayer. At World Woods and Black Diamond, he would instruct his superintendents to put his name on the job board.

“I never let go of some of those things,” he says. “I thought it was important to get out and see the greens, see as many golf holes as I could in a day, or be sure to see every hole in a week. Sometimes it was because we were short-handed, but I would have them assign me those tasks even when we had the labor. I was one of those guys working 80-hour weeks.”

As too many can attest, that kind of dedication can come at a price. What you spend here you don’t have to spend there. But Court enjoyed bridge between work and home. His wife, Janet, worked as his secretary for 20 years. “It wasn’t like I was away from home and didn’t see her for 12 hours



*David Court, CGCS in earlier days with constant companion, Cosmo Kramer, a golden chow mix who was on the job for 13 years.*

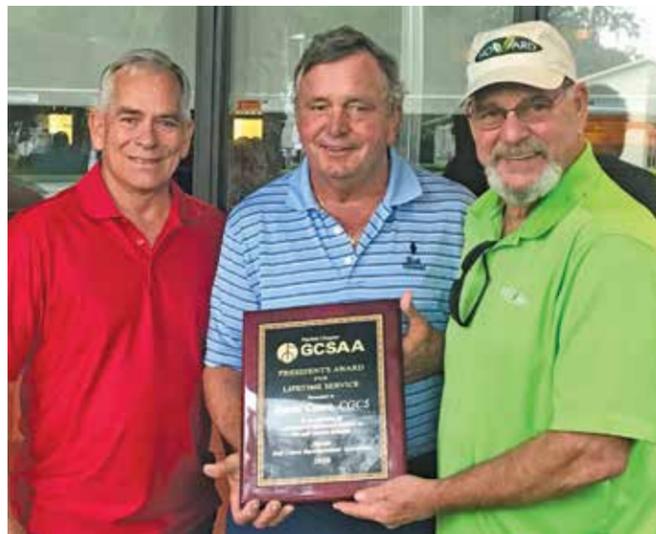
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David Court, CGCS after receiving the 2020 President's Award for Lifetime Service with, left, Don Delaney, CGCS who won the award in 1993, and right, Cary Lewis, CGCS who won it in 2014.

a day. We lived on the golf course and she was a tremendous support at work and at home," he says. "All of that afforded me the ability to go to meetings and seminars, to be away."

Being able to participate in his profession away from the golf course allowed Court to build an extensive network, not just of colleagues, but of genuine friends. He shoots out a list of names as easily as a ball dispenser by the range – Joe Pantaleo, Tom Alex, Mark Henderson, Pete Brooks, Mark Jarrell, Bill Jeffrey, Mike Perham, Greg Pheneger, Joel Jackson, Steve Pearson, Steve Wright. If you are indeed known by the company you keep, then that group, leaders all, speaks volumes of Court.

There is another tribute of sorts in that a son, Chris Jordan, followed him into the profession, albeit eventually. First, Chris took his master's degree in sports administration to the New England PGA Section where he ran junior programs.

"Then he came back to Florida and said, 'I think I want to do what you do,'" Court says. "My original idea was for him to be an assistant in training with me at Boca Lago. I was talking to Bob Randquist, great guy, who was superintendent at Boca Rio at the time, and he said, 'I could use your son. I have a third assistant position open.' Fifteen years later, Chris is superintendent on that golf course."

And as such, his son was who Court worked for in those first few months after he retired. It was a remarkable rounding of the circle. "Chris was the boss. I worked for him," Court says. The master of the profession and father to the child was now servant and taking direction from the son, and all, quite literally, across the street – West Palmetto Park Road - from the club where Court first made his name all those years before.

"I'm very happy that Chris chose the profession," Court says. "He knows what he got into. And when you've got the credentials

that Bob had, I know Chris got a good education under him."

Court's older son, Tibe, has a master's degree of his own and teaches at several colleges in and around Fort Lauderdale. "I'm equally proud of both kids," Court says. "They've both done great things."

Growing up in Plantation, Court remembers his childhood as, "Ideal, the best experience I could ever have." The family had a membership at Fort Lauderdale Country Club. "So, I could play golf all summer long and on weekends. It was rough," he laughs.

If that was a great circumstance to nurture a love of the game, he did just as well finding somewhere to build a life in it. A botany instructor at what was then Broward Junior College told him about Lake City Community College. Those were the early days of what became a legendary program for golf course superintendents under Dr. Gene Nutter. Court, like so many others over the years, was soon hooked.

"Maybe I could have gotten into the medical field, had I studied harder, gotten better grades in school," he says. "My father was a doctor, and my mother was a nurse. But looking where I'm at now, I'm happy with what I did. Heck, I had trouble with dissecting a frog in biology so that was a problem."

When he's not on the job at Skyview these days, there's a fair chance you'll find him playing with a regular posse at Twisted Oaks Golf Club. A two handicapper in his late 20s, Court is working his way back into form, from a 12 last summer to an eight now. One of his group, who was a member at Black Diamond when Court was there, walks by this day and eyes a camera and a recorder on the table.

"What? Are you writing a story about him or something," the friend asks, nodding towards Court. "You should be. He's one of the icons."

No kidding. ■



Black lab, Muggsy, is David Court's current "assistant."

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## Grass Debate on Capitol Hill is A CAREER HIGHLIGHT FOR MURPHY

by Trent Bouts

The words cut through the air like the voice of God: “Well, where he is then?” When none of those gathered broke the ensuing silence, Matt Murphy, right, felt a pit form in his stomach. Murphy realized that he was the “he” and that knot tied in his gut because the summoner was as near as there is to a god in golf, Jack Nicklaus.

Nicklaus was holding court during the critical pre-grassing visit to Seminole Legacy Golf Club in Tallahassee, the \$8-million reinvention of what was Don Veller Seminole Golf Course and Club, owned by Florida State University. Dozens hovered, hanging on

his every word, except Murphy, the golf course superintendent. He’d been drawn into a side conversation with Don Farr, director of Florida State’s PGA Golf Management program.

“I hadn’t seen Don for months because we’d been closed down for construction,” Murphy says. “He starts talking to me, and we kind of move away so we don’t distract anyone...and then there’s this voice and I just know, uh oh, he’s got to be talking about me.” It didn’t help that on Nicklaus’ his initial visit some months earlier, Murphy was vacationing in north Georgia.





*This plaque at Seminole Legacy honors the course's past with a tribute to Don Veller, who coached FSU to its first winning football season and also served as the longtime coach of the men's golf team.*

"Now, I finally get to meet him and I'm like that kid running his mouth in the back of the class, not paying attention."

Murphy, 35, was in diapers when Nicklaus won his 18th major at the 1986 Masters. That might have been helpful now as he stepped towards the great man's golf cart, with every eye and ear suddenly aimed his way. "I have no idea what they're talking about, no idea what's going on," Murphy recalls thinking on those longest yards.

Fortunately, Nicklaus quickly brought him up to speed: "So, you've got TifEagle. What do you think about it?"

**"That family is so great. I have so many stories of how good they are as people. And Jack Jr. is just a great person, really easy to work with. He was always asking what we thought and was really receptive to a lot of it. That didn't mean he was going to exactly follow our opinion, but he valued the input."**

"I go into this spiel about why it's good for this property and why I like it and I think Jack's going along with me," Murphy says. "When I'm done, he goes, 'I don't like it.' And he proceeds to tell me why, and why he's a MiniVerde fan. Jack likes to keep you on your toes. It was funny in retrospect. Everybody got a kick out of it. But, needless to say, I stayed very close for the rest of the ride-around."

It is history now that despite his shaky start, Murphy managed to sway Nicklaus on the grassing decision.

"It was one of the highlights of my career, actually getting down to the nuts and bolts of a grass conversation with the greatest player to ever play the game," Murphy says. "He explained that he's played on a lot of thatchy TifEagle that's softer and not as fast as he knows it could be. But TifEagle is such a resilient grass and can handle the variation in temperatures we see here. With the frontal systems that come through, it's not unheard of for us to have three nights in a row in the 20s, or to have a frost one morning and then be in the 70s in the same week."

Fittingly, their debate took place on what Murphy affectionately refers to as "Capitol Hill," an elevated section of the course - home to the eighth green and a new 3.5-acre irrigation lake - with a view of the statehouse dome about three miles away. That back and forth, that discussion before conclusion, was characteristic of the entire experience with Nicklaus Design, Murphy adds.

Seminole Legacy opened last year, as the first Jack Nicklaus Legacy Course in North America, a designation for co-designs by Nicklaus and son, Jack Nicklaus II. Both were there to hit ceremonial tee shots on opening day on March 7 last year, after an eight-month project.

"That family is so great. I have so many stories of how good they are as people," Murphy says. "And Jack Jr. is just a great person, really easy to work with. He was always asking what we thought and was really receptive to a lot of it. That didn't mean he was going to exactly follow our opinion, but he valued the input."

"Like the placement of the 12th green. We told them we couldn't grow grass there because of the size of the trees, so they found a spot where we could. It was a joint effort all the way around to find the best design to work with so we could deliver a good product. They are big on sustainability and what they leave behind. They don't want to build anything you're not going to be able to maintain. Budget talks were a big part of the process. They don't want create a monster we can't keep up with."

Partly to that end, other than deep rough and greens, the golf course is covered in drought hardy TifTuf bermudagrass. "People these days are doing collars in this, tee-tops in that. We've got a great piece of ground here and great topography and that's what we wanted to highlight and not get too caught up in being complicated with our grassing plan," Murphy says. "The only thing I oversee now is the Bahia in what I call our deep rough."

That rough provides clear definition from his fairways, tees, collars and approaches, to which he applies a pigment every three weeks during winter.

"It's a little weather dependent, but every three weeks at a modified rate is what works for us to keep a consistent color," he says. "It's also a slow foliar feed for the grass in the winter when it's not taking up nutrients through the roots as much. It does put a little coating on the plant too, just to protect it a little bit, keep it a couple of degrees warmer and it aids in a quicker green up when things do get warmer."

Other than the main corridors, little remains of the original Bill Amick design which opened in 1962, the year Nicklaus won his first major. The new layout stretches as far as 7,800 yards from the tips to test the new generation of limber-backed college players. And even on the 18th which wasn't lengthened, it now plays like a beast having switched from a par 5 to a par 4. What was a short par four 10th hole, now has an expanded dogleg adding 100 yards

to most approach shots. "It's definitely built for championship play," Murphy says.

A vulnerability with the old course was that a narrow miss was too often penalized more than one that skewed 30 or 40 yards offline. Judicious use of the rough, existing trees and new bunkers now demands and rewards greater precision. The Nicklaus team doubled the number of bunkers to about 80.

"They are the most extravagant element out here now in terms of manpower," Murphy says. "They are all maintained by hand. We flymo, edge, hand pull and push up the big faces. In creating a tougher golf course, we've essentially doubled our budget, because we've also added acreage. We definitely added difficulty to the maintenance, which is why it was so key for the Nicklaus folks and the university to work together so everyone knew beforehand what it was going to take. The university has been great in terms of giving us what we need."

That includes a new \$1.2-million equipment package and a commitment to capital improvements, that Murphy hopes will include a new maintenance facility. Murphy's responsibility now stretches across 220 acres, including a new 12-hole par three course and driving range on the practice facility for the men's and women's golf teams.

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west corner of Georgia and into Tallahassee, comprised of a roughly 80-20 sand and clay mix, the course boasts as much undulation and elevation as any in Florida. That's fun for a golfer but caused some headaches during construction and grassing, which was a combination of sprig and sod.

"We had such bad rains. In fact we had several three-inch rains where we'd just planted several holes. So, we were out there afterwards, regrading, resprigging and replanting," Murphy says. Those weather events, then the season that followed, were tough on new grass and resulted in some "washboarding and rippling."

"It's going to take a couple of years of a good, dedicated cultural program of aerifying as much as possible, fertilizing, verticutting, topdressing, then rinse, lather, repeat, as much as possible," Murphy says. "Right now, we know we have three closures on the books for next summer, but ideally, we'd close one week of every growing month to aerify this place."

If 2020 was any guide, demand might make that impossible.

It wasn't simply interest in the new course that kept Seminole Legacy humming. There was something of a double whammy from the pandemic, which prompted varieties of closures and lock downs across the country just a week after the golf course opened. Suddenly, more people wanted to play even more, and they were now riding one golfer per cart. Murphy's baby turf was getting pounded.

"And we've got a soil type with just enough clay in it that it compacts very easily," he says. "And so, all of a sudden we've got double the cart traffic on a property that is already compacted from construction. You want to aerify but while business is so good, you don't want to slow down. So, rounds were up, memberships were up, we were ahead of forecast, but in a turf sense, COVID hurt us."

The heavy traffic will ease, when golfers can share carts again, and also once the course's new business model moves fully into gear. What used to be roughly 50-50 member and public play generating about 45,000 rounds a year, will move closer to a private club operation with about 300 student members and 350 others from family, to corporate, to out-of-towners. "It will cost more because we feel like we've got something special now," Murphy says. "It is not an average golf course."

To find himself where is - with 11 years as a superintendent and a full-blown renovation under his belt - at such a young age, Murphy counts himself fortunate, blessed even. He regards Tallahassee as home, having grown up just an hour away in small-town Marianna. He started playing as a kid at state-owned Florida Caverns Golf Course, which is now closed. In summer, he washed carts and picked balls on the range for \$20 a week but the chance to play as much as he could was worth even more.

Out of high school, he spent two years discovering he really didn't



Matt Murphy beside the eighth green and site of that first conversation with Jack Nicklaus.

want to be a business major in college. A two-handicapper, at one point he seriously considered a career as a PGA professional. Then his father landed him a job at Indian Springs Country Club working for Kyle Beebe. Exposure to golf course maintenance convinced him there was more opportunity and swifter advancement away from the pro shop.

"Kyle did more for me than any superintendent I worked for because he taught me the true basics of golf maintenance," Murphy says. "The most we ever had, on an 18-hole golf course, was four people. He taught me the perfect example of how to run a golf course efficiently and my time there helped me develop a love for that side of it."

So much so, that Murphy enrolled at Lake City Community College. He worked part time at Southern Oaks Golf Club, now The Country Club at Lake City. But with many classmates spending time in Gainesville, he took an apartment there in his second year and, as so many turfgrass students have done over the years, worked for Joe Holden at Haile Plantation.

"Joe loved to teach. He just had that passion. You knew he wanted to see you do well," Murphy says. "He treated everybody like that, not just the turfgrass students. When you know your boss wants you to be successful, it goes a long way. I got a lot of turf knowl-

edge from Joe, but also learned how to treat employees. He's a true light in the industry."

Murphy also interned across town at Gainesville Country Club where he experienced a no-till conversion to Champion bermudagrass. After graduating from Lake City, he became an assistant at Capital City Country Club in Tallahassee and during 15 months there was immersed in a greens renovation. Then, as the Great Recession was biting hard, he secured his first superintendent position, aged 24, at what was then Wildwood Golf Club and Inn in nearby Crawfordville.

"I knew then I may not be ready, but it was an opportunity and I jumped at it," he says. "And it was one of the best choices I've ever made." He was now effectively Kyle Beebe, making a little go a long way and learned a lot in the process. But as the golf market continued to tighten, he sought something more secure and in January 2014 took a step back, becoming an assistant where he is now. Six months later, he was promoted to superintendent.

You never say never, but Murphy is comfortable with the thought of spending the rest of his career at Seminole Legacy. His wife, Sallie, is immersed and invested in the area. She was voted District Teacher of the Year, during the year of the construction, not to mention the birth of their second son, Lane, now 18 months



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old. "She's a superhero," Murphy says. "She did all that while I was working 70 hours a week." The Murphy's first born, Max, turns four in the first week of April, "A Masters baby!" Murphy declares. It helps that there are grandparents just a few miles away.

That backing at home pairs well with outstanding support at the golf course.

Murphy's assistant is Bob Cook, who came out of retirement after a long and successful superintendent career of his own, finishing up at Disney World. Cook's daughter Jilian Brewer has been on the maintenance staff at Seminole Legacy close to 20 years and maintains the FSU practice facility. Spray tech Tony Norton has been there 30. Other key crew members include Pemon Ham and equipment manager Kirk Brewer, each of whom has more than 15 years on staff. Charles Pulley may not have been there as long, but he worked for Murphy at Wildwood and came to Seminole Legacy during construction, so he too feels like he is part of the place.

"And we have a great group of college kids," Murphy adds. "It's the best staff I've ever had to work with, and they have all made my job a lot easier." And, if he should stay forever, he'll have an advantage many colleagues never get to enjoy. "It's really nice know what's under the ground now!" ■



Matt Murphy now maintains about 80 bunkers at Seminole Legacy on terrain that has more movement than most parts of the state.



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# PURSUIT OF THE PERFECT OVERSEED

## Leads to Green and Some Gray

*by Trent Bouts*

**T**hat salt amongst the pepper in Brandon Richey's beard is a result of overseeding, he says. Not that he sowed those gray hairs on his chin. Instead, he alleges, they are symptomatic of internal wear and tear from years of managing overseeded golf courses. "This job ages you like dog years," he laughs. "For every year a guy works in an office, it's seven for us out here."

At Lake Nona Golf and Country Club in Orlando, yearly overseeding casts Richey, right, as referee of a boxing match between bermudagrass and ryegrass. At the same time, he's manager of both fighters. There's also the *Poa trivialis* he puts on tees and approaches. Those competing interests wear on him just as they wear on the golf course itself.

"There's no doubt the annual overseed really puts more age on things," he says. "With the rainfall and the heat and humidity here in central Florida, weed pressure is at its highest level. But we're handcuffed with what we can do for control because of the overseed. We're just cool enough and just warm enough that there's this constant competition all winter long. It makes things pretty challenging. It takes a toll."

*Photo: Cameron Darby*





Lake Nona Golf and Country Club is home to some of the game's stars including Henrik Stenson, Ian Poulter and Lydia Ko.

Last fall, Richey was close to calling a truce, at least temporarily, to tackle the rising pressure from goosegrass and similar foes.

"I was given the green light to make the decision whether to overseed or not on greens," he says. "We did a lot of cultural preparation in summer to get us ready." But then the rains came in abundance during the second half of summer and persisted into fall. There was also a change in key leadership at the club.

Given the climate, Richey held off.

"We can take a non-overseeded golf course deep into winter here just fine," he says. "But our club events are really built around that February-March window. So, if we did have a cold January, early February, we might not be as good as we want to be."

A mid-January announcement by the LPGA Tour, that Lake Nona will host the Gainsbridge LPGA Championship at the end of February, made Richey's decision look like genius. The Gainsbridge marks a return of the professional spotlight to Lake Nona. Site of the inaugural Solheim Cup in 1990, the club then had the World Cup of Golf in 1993 and hosted the Tavistock Cup four times between 2004 and 2012.

The club, with about 300 houses inside the gates, is home to some of the game's stars including Henrik Stenson, Ian Poulter and Lydia Ko, not to mention the retired Annika Sorenstam. Their presence provides another incentive to oversee. "It's not an aesthetic thing, it's a matter of creating two surfaces," Richey says. "If it's warm we've got two grasses, but if it's cold we've still got grass."

There's good reason to tend to the interests of the pros. When Stenson, whose home is by the 13th green, asked that he step up verticutting on the pro tee at the range, Richey didn't hesitate: "The TifGrand is a very lateral growing grass and hitting all the irons he does was really starting to work on his wrists. So, I'm like, 'Yes, sir. You got it.' When those guys win our club wins, so we really want to do our best to accommodate them."

Being on first name terms with the likes of Stenson was never on the radar when Richey was growing up in Alabama. His father was "in the bread business," as was his father, but Richey was never tempted to extend that line to a third generation. At 16, the family moved to North Carolina and Richey's interests led him into electrical engineering at North Carolina State University.

"I was more intrigued by cool stuff like car stereos," he explains. "But in year two, I ran into computer programming and



Lake Nona Golf and Country Club will host the Gainsbridge LPGA Championship at the end of February.

that wasn't really my cup of tea. I made it through that class, but the next level chewed me up pretty good."

Switching to environmental engineering, he got talking to a fellow student in organic chemistry after noticing his Auburn Tigers book bag. "I was a big fan during my childhood," Richey says. "He'd transferred up in the turfgrass program and we became friends. I'd played some golf recreationally, and I just thought that was a cool thing he was studying."

Later that semester, Richey knocked on the door of turfgrass program advisor, Emily Erickson. Her husband, Bob, was superintendent at 54-hole Prestonwood Country Club in Raleigh at the time. She suggested Richey call him for a job, to see if golf course maintenance was something he truly wanted to pursue.

"It was a great environment, great people. I just fell in love with it," Richey says. "After a great summer there, I went back to her and said, 'Let's do this!' I won't ever forget calling my dad and telling him that I wanted to change majors. Here's my dad, a proud father of an engineering son, and all of a sudden, I'm calling and telling him I want to be Bill Murray. I didn't use those words, but he wasn't much of a golfer and wasn't exposed to anything other than the public courses we'd play on here and there. So, the Carl Spackler perception was all he had."

During school, Richey worked at a couple of courses and in his last semester applied

for a second assistant position at an Atlanta, GA course he knew little about called Peachtree Golf Club. A golf-only club, Peachtree was the inspiration of Bobby Jones and designed by Robert Trent Jones.

"I was aware it was a top 50 club, but I had no idea what high level golf was about then," Richey says. "I remember going down the day before and driving around the perimeter of the property and it's landscaped and fenced so you can't see inside. When I got inside the next morning, man, that was special!"

Richey spent a year under William Shirley, CGCS - "a legend

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A major upgrade of the irrigation system will give Brandon Richey more management options going forward.

in the industry who has done a lot of great things for a lot of folks” – before stepping to an assistant superintendent role at The Golf Club of Georgia.

“That was a grind,” he recalls. “I learned a lot about myself and the industry there. With 36 holes, obviously they had a different way of doing things. I got pretty wrapped up and involved with it. I was away from family and didn’t have any outlets so to speak. So, I immersed myself in my work to a negative degree and, after three and half years, ended up getting let go.”

Then he received a tip from a vendor friend about an opening coming up at 54-hole Sea Island Golf Club on St. Simons Island, about 30 minutes north of the Florida line. Soon after taking that job under Berry Collett, CGCS - another Georgia legend - Richey’s superintendent left and the club was awarded a PGA Tour event, the McGladrey Classic, now the RSM Classic. Around the same time, the club moved to E-Verify its employees.

“We lost a good part of our staff,” Richey recalls. “So, two and a half months before the tournament, we have 25 new guys show up from an employment service and Berry and I look at each other like, ‘Well, here we go.’ We grabbed the bull by the horns and had a great first year.”

Within a couple of years, Richey was promoted to superintendent of the Seaside Course where he stayed a further 18 months, before another contact reached out. PGA Tour

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agronomist, Bland Cooper, CGCS knew Richey through the McGladrey, and through working the Hero World Challenge at Isleworth Golf and Country Club in 2014, also knew that sister club Lake Nona was looking for a new superintendent. Cooper thought there was a good fit, in part because of Richey’s experience with overseeding at Sea Island and Peachtree.

Six years on, Richey pulls at that graying beard and smiles. “Obviously, I would love to go one year without overseeding anything,” he says. “Let me put in a program and see how we like it. If it doesn’t go well, let’s do something else.” But sound agronomics don’t always comply with business imperatives.

In the meantime, Richey is cautiously optimistic that this year he can forgo overseeding greens, approaches and fairways, thanks to a major irrigation project last summer. The club invested \$2.7 million on a new Rain Bird system installed by Leibold Irrigation and managed to complete the job six weeks ahead of the original schedule.

“We were able to start a little early after we canceled some events because of the virus,” Richey says. “It was a fantastic project. We now have complete control for tee tops, rough, fairways, bunker zones. It really has given us that next level tool. Being able to isolate surfaces is really exciting for us. It gives me the confidence to move forward and exclude some areas from the overseed. I can firm out the fairways, clean up some things, but keep the rough where we want it playability wise.”

Still only 38, Richey admits a literal look in the mirror 18 months ago helped him arrive at new, broader perspective he believes is critical for the next phase of his career. In fall 2019, he and wife, Stephanie, vacationed in Yellowstone National Park. “It was an incredible trip, a chance to enjoy nature, take it all in and quiet the mind,” he says. “Through that, I decided to grow my beard. I always knew I had some white hair but when



Brandon Richey's experience with overseeding made him an ideal candidate for the job at Lake Nona Golf and Country Club.

you grow out your beard, it really shows.”

It was one of several events over several months that became a collective “aha moment.” Some came from comments posted by colleagues on social media. Some came face to face.

On a John Deere-sponsored trip to Branson, MO, he spent an hour on a cottage porch chewing the fat with Winged Foot’s cigar smoking director of golf courses, Steve Rabideau. “It was so interesting to compare our worlds,” Richey says. “With their closures during winter, they go eight months of the year at 100 miles an hour, but then they stop. I tell people, here in Florida, particularly because of overseeding, it’s a 13-month-a-year job.”

Richey has since recalibrated.

“As an assistant climbing the ladder, you want to climb as fast

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as you can," he says. "Everything is personal. I've got to make it better. I've got to do this. I've got to do that. Then you transition to being a superintendent, and while you still want that same mentality, you've to get yourself in a position to be successful in the long term. So, understanding that and realigning yourself is something that's key and it really kind of hit me.

"I've shifted my approach with my assistants. I can't push them as hard as I push myself. It won't work, they will burn out. So, I'll take 85 percent for those 13 months, over 100 percent for seven and burn out for the rest.

"This is a business world, and there's a lot of things out of your control that have to fall into place if you are to get the ideal outcome. You can only drive your bus so much. Coming to that realization, just accepting that, has had a calming affect for me amongst the day-to-day grind. I'm learning. I'm still maturing every day."

Those assistant superintendents, Nick Dolimpio and Bobby Chesney, have each played their own part in helping the boss on that path.

"Those guys have been here four or five years now and have really weathered the storm well," Richey says. "They've accepted those battles I've had in my head, my pushing because we've



Brandon Richey makes a close-up visit to one of his putting surfaces.

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Brandon Richey is full of praise for the efforts of assistant superintendents, Nick Dolimpio and Bobby Chesney, at Lake Nona Golf and Country Club.

got to be better, those moments where you stress the need to step on the gas a bit. They've done a really good job staying even keeled and taking the message down to the staff."

Richey says he's had help at home too. Stephanie worked in merchandising at Sea Island when he was there. "So, she's familiar with the industry. She knows there's really no such things as weekends," he says. "She's also seven years older than me and has raised kids, so she has brought a lot of wisdom to my world."

In turn, one of those kids brought a granddaughter into his world. Not long ago the granddaughter was visiting. "I didn't have kids of my own, so when I go home this day, it was the first time I got to walk in and have a child run at me, calling out 'Poppa B!'" he says. "It melted my heart. Talk about something special. It was the first time that I'd ever walked through the door at the end of a day and actually felt everything release."

That moment was one more reinforcement of Richey's new-found commitment to maintaining balance. It's important, as he discussed with Stephanie after growing his beard, if he is to slow those dog years that come with the job.

"I want to get that down to two or three years for every one. Not seven!" he says. "We've got a lot of exciting things on our radar as a club and I'm looking forward to that next chapter for sure." ■

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# Golf Course in Need OF HELP: ROGER THAT

Most artists don't invite people to walk on their works or attack them with weapons, but golf course superintendents have no choice. That's kind of the point of their canvas. Yet, it doesn't mean they don't dream now and then. And so, for some, the early days of the pandemic were a gift, if only temporarily.

"In one sense it was a luxury," says Roger Hale from city-owned Palm Coast Golf Course in Palm Coast, which closed to play for two months last spring. Instead of poring over the calendar to identify gaps and windows for critical maintenance, the absence of golfers gave him free rein. "Oh gosh, I enjoy grow-ins and it was kind of like that. You could just do what you wanted to do."

Needless to say, when city authorities lifted their ban and golfers were allowed back mind-May, their course was in what Hale describes modestly as "pretty good shape." "As superintendents, you always think you could have done a half a dozen more things than you did," he says. "But that's just the nature of the job and who we are."

The fact is Hale was turning out a "pretty good" product even

when he was squeezing work in the between play. He came to Palm Coast, and his first superintendent position, in 2014 when things were not so great. The city had invested heavily to buy and resurrect the facility that had been shuttered for two years. The course reopened in 2009 but failed to find the black and there were some who felt the city had no business being in a losing business.

Still, some people saw positive signs. Diane S. Zeeman reported in the Daytona Beach News-Journal in 2017 that: "Despite losing money, the Palm Harbor golf course has been improved tremendously in recent years ... the course, in its early days, was not the greatest. The fairways had lots of hard pan instead of grass and the greens were uneven and bumpy. When Roger Hale, the current superintendent, took over, the improvement in the course was phenomenal."

Two years later, after Indigo Golf Partners took on the golf course management contract, and Hale, Zeeman provided an update: "The city-owned Palm Harbor Golf Club in Palm Coast has been open for almost 10 years and has continually lost mon-

ey, lots of it. But things seem a lot brighter these days, according to recently released figures from the city ... I'd like to add, as a former golfer there, the course appears to be in great condition, the players love what's been done."

Indeed, they do. Rounds grew every year after Hale arrived, from 36,600 in 2014 to 44,300 in 2019. Last year, came in just north of 37,000 but of course that number comes with a huge asterisk. In addition to being closed during two peak months, the course saw 73 inches of rain when the annual average is 52.

As heartening as the progress has been, Hale was perhaps most encouraged, at least personally, when a few months after that report, two prominent members of the men's golf association attended his mother's funeral in St. Augustine, 45 minutes away.

"For me, that was huge," Hale says. "I had old high school friends show up out of respect, but for somebody like those men to make the effort like that, that goes a long way for me. It gives you a feeling that maybe you're doing something right."

Roger Hale came to golf course maintenance later than most. Previously, he'd been in the motel business and for 10 years, he and his wife, Nina, managed a motel owned by a brother-in-law. "It was great thing to do while the kids were little," he says. "I enjoyed those years, but it became time to move onto something else. The writing was kind of on the wall."

His wife, who had no experience of golf nor what industry pay was like, found an advertisement for golf course maintenance worker at King and Bear Golf Course at World Golf Village. Hale had some idea but with some nudging from Nina became intrigued enough to inquire. He enjoyed getting his hands in the dirt and seeing the results of the work, whether it was a flower bed or a healthy lawn.

"I think I just wanted to see what was involved," he says of taking the plunge at age 38. He'd played some golf and seen some different courses during family vacations playing with his father. "But over my year at King and Bear, one thing I realized wasn't necessarily that I loved the game, but that I loved the golf course itself. I fell in love with it and knew if I was going to get anywhere, I needed a degree."

So, now 39, Hale became a college student in Lake City Community College's golf course management program. When he graduated in 2004, he took an assistant superintendent position back at World Golf Village, this time at Slammer and Squire under Steve Lafrance. After two years there, he moved to historic San Jose Country Club in Jacksonville to assist Clayton Estes.

"San Jose was one of the best experiences I could have had," he says. "I have a lot of respect and appreciation for all the superintendents I have worked for. But I consider Clayton Estes my mentor. He was very demanding but very fair. Just a great guy to learn under."

San Jose and Palm Coast may be close geographically, but they were worlds apart when Hale arrived. It would be challenging to

imagine a greater difference than existed between San Jose, privately owned, on the National Register of Historic Places with a gem of a Donald Ross golf course, and Palm Coast, a city owned daily fee facility still wheezing after being raised from the dead a few years before.

Hale was under no illusions coming in. "It is a public golf course, and it has public golf course budget, so it's not very big," he says. "With our morning assignments, our mechanic might be mowing greens, our assistant might be cutting cups and I might be spraying fairways. You do whatever you have to do."

Coming from San Jose meant his expectations exceeded resources but that wasn't going to stop him trying. Hale may have been late to the profession, but he'd seen enough to know that what defines a good superintendent is how much he or she makes out of what money they have.

"San Jose set me up pretty well because knowing that standard helps you drive for a better standard that is expected," he says. "It was a struggle at first, because you want to elevate the standard, you want it to look like where you came from. When I came in there wasn't much respect, the public perception was not good. In a lot of respects, we've been able to make a lot of progress towards that. We've gained some respect and built some momentum. It's just taken time."

Hale is by no means crying poor. "You hear some horror stories



Roger Hale went to college at age 38 to be where he is now, doing something he loves as golf course superintendent at Palm Coast Golf Course.

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out there of very low budgets and crews of three to four people,” he says. “I don’t know anybody maintains a golf course like that, but they do and there are plenty of them out there.”

By comparison, Hale has a nine-person team, himself included. The undisputed star is veteran assistant, Lorenzo Butler, something of a legend in the community as a former high school running back who played at Illinois State and tried out with the Miami Dolphins. Butler was a fixture at Palm Coast even before it closed down in 2006 and even then, never left. The city paid him to keep the grass down, if it was mainly weeds by the end.



Back row, crew members J.D. Green, Randy Crosby and Dieuno Dassas, assistant superintendent Lorenzo Butler, and crew member Darrell Britt. Front row, Roger Hale and equipment technician Erick Ramirez. Not pictured, crew members Eric Smith and Dave O’Connor.

“He was out here with a zero-turn just mowing everything wall to wall,” Hale says. “He’s been her more than 30 years. He knows the golf course inside out, knows where all the bones are buried. He’s a very humble person. He’s as loyal as the day is long, and to me that goes a long way. He’s my right-hand man for sure. I’m lucky to have a number of guys on staff who’ve been around and seen everything. They are the guys who really help you along.”

Hale and his team maintain about 80 irrigated acres on a property of about 180 acres. A saltwater canal flows adjacent to the first and ninth holes, bringing manatee and porpoise into view from time to time. In addition to live oaks and tall pines, the predominant feature is palm trees. Hale says he’s made a count as best he can and came up with a total of “5,496.”

“And that’s where most of our debris comes from,” he says shaking his head. “Any time the wind blows through her more than 15 or 20 mph, you’re going to have a mess. We spend a lot of time picking up from the palm trees.”

Agronomically, his biggest challenge - “our Achilles heel” - is shade from the oaks and pines. That compromises the health of his TifDwarf greens but on a city-owned course, it’s a headache he has to live with. He’s worked with the city arborist and a lengthy permitting process to make some changes but mostly he’s limited to thinning underbrush and propping up branches to let filtered sunlight through.

“We have a couple of greens that will never get 100 percent sunlight. They’re just not going to,” he says. “Every year we battle it. All you can really try to do is limit your stress factors. So, we pick an area every year and do what we can. If you wanted to bring TifEagle in here, you couldn’t do it. To me, TifEagle mirrors the sky as much as any grass out there. At least that’s my experience.”

A lot has changed in Hale’s world from the days of playing with his kids around the motel between checking in guests or making beds. He credits his wife Nina, who works in banking, for her support across 33 years of marriage, and especially in the days when he was on a crew laborer’s pay. “She went without a lot,” he says. “I’m extremely grateful.”

If there is a bigger surprise than finding himself as a golf course superintendent, it is knowing that his son, Alex, is on the same path, as an assistant superintendent at Sawgrass Country Club in Ponte Vedra Beach.

“It’s funny,” Hale says before breaking into a chuckle. The story goes that, out of high school, Alex threw himself into the college experience more than the learning. His dad brought him home and, attempting to emphasize the value of a good education, got him a job on the crew at Palencia Golf Club.

“I said, ‘Put him on the bad end of a flymower or a weedeater or whatever you want,’” Hale says. “My intention was for the work to scare him back into college and the kind of doors it can open. Anyway, it didn’t work. He fell in love with it. He’s doing well.” As is daughter, Trishna, who is a registered nurse.

Of anyone, Hale perhaps understands best that sometimes it takes some time to find your path, and then your place. “There are times when I say, ‘I wish I had started this work earlier,’” he admits. “But I doubt I would have been the same manager. I was young and high strung at one point. It took me a while but in the golf industry, I’ve found what I want to do. I used to say I was a jack of all trades and a master of none. But I like to think I’m getting closer.” ■

- Trent Bouts

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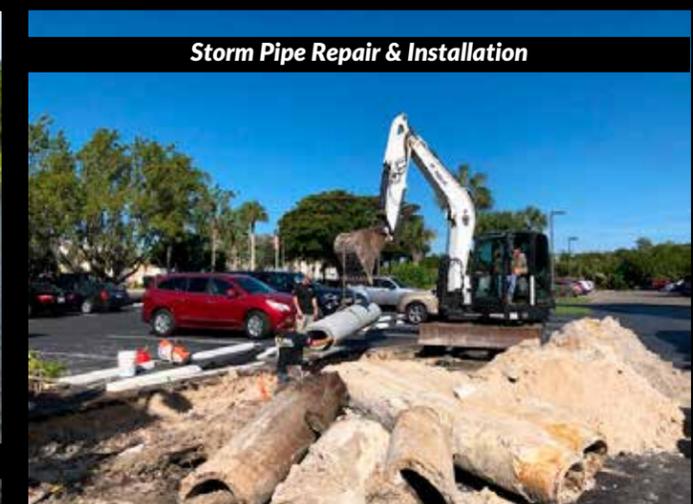
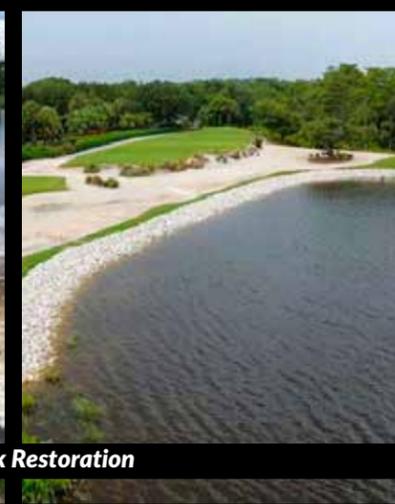
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# How Did You Fill Your Cup TO BEAT A DRAINING 2020

by Kyle Sweet, CGCS

By the time this hits your mailbox, we'll be into the New Year and onto what many of us hope is a much better year. This might be the most anticipated turning of the calendar that I can remember. But undoubtedly the muted festivities and ongoing threat of illness put a damper on those traditional celebrations that we have enjoyed for so many years. I have faith that you all figured out a way to celebrate safely in your own way, welcoming in 2021.

There's been no escaping the feelings of the events of 2020, even the most happy-go-lucky people I know sent me a Christmas card titled, "2020 was elfed up," which of course it was in some ways but hopefully not overwhelming every aspect of your life.

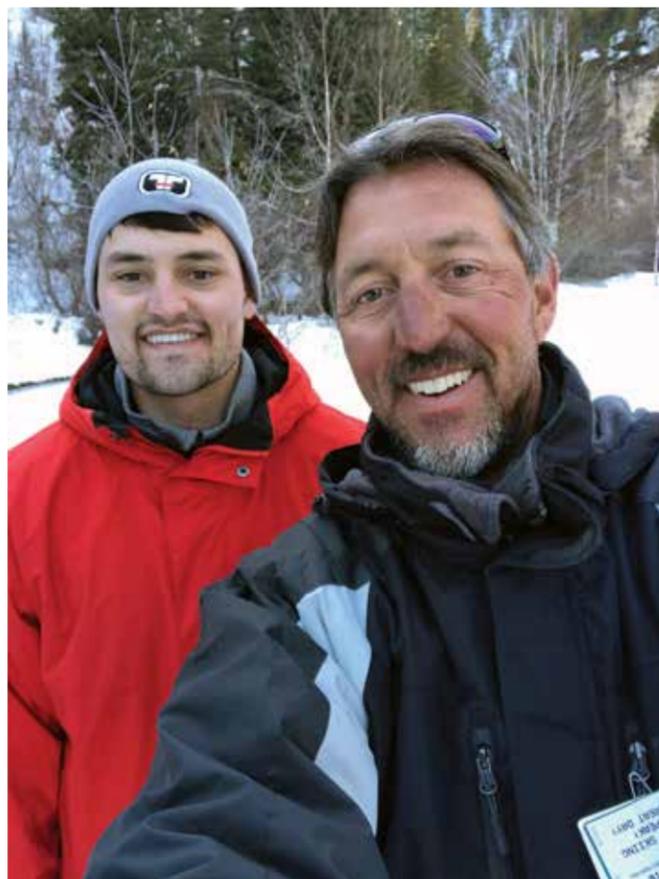
I'll give you a little insight into Kyle...I'm the cup half-full guy. I've always been that guy that looks for the good in the situation and then worked to fill that cup up with more good stuff. We're golf course superintendents and I'm guessing somewhere in our sun loving, hard working DNA there is a similarity with us all. I mean, if I was a cup half-empty guy I wouldn't be doing this job, yikes.

So, cup half-full guy meets 2020 head on and I can say that damn, it was a pretty good year actually. Here's my short story, and I ask you to reflect on your own 2020 and what you made happen in the midst of everything. I bet you might just be surprised. I'm hoping you kicked butt and realized that you were filling your cup, overcoming the difficulties like you do every day in your career.

Well...I started 2020 with issues on several greens. Ouch! Yeah, after 20 years of good greens, I decided it was time for a stressful season, a million emails, buckets of green sand and of course multiple questions about what happened while out working on the other 99 acres of the course. To hell with the pandemic, this hit me much worse. Cup half-full...hmmm...questionable.

With the support of the club, we began to identify multiple reasons for the issues we were having on greens. I invited other superintendents to visit me and critique and eventually reached out to the USGA Green Section's Dr. Steve Kammerer. We began with an in-depth evaluation of our Paspalum greens and I'm pleased to say that with ongoing work throughout the year, I won't be starting 2021 with problem greens. So, yes, cup half-full. It was time for this old dog to learn some new tricks and build more relationships. I'm better for it and glad that my staff and the club were behind me the whole way.

Even though there were some issues on my greens in late February, I decided to take a five-day trip with my son, who is now 26. We hit the slopes on skis and snowmobiles, ate well, stayed with family and had a blast. This was just before the Coronavirus hit and man, was I glad we did. It was a chance to get away that was taken away from us this summer and we actually kept our



Josh and Kyle Sweet, CGCS didn't let the pandemic interrupt their tradition of an annual "boys' trip."

annual boys' trip alive. Definitely filling the cup with that trip.

After 27 years of working on the island, the opportunity to live on the island came around in the spring and we seized it. I never thought it would be possible, but the uncertainty of the pandemic in society affected the real estate market and voila, there was this place that was just what we wanted. So, bought a house on the island and that will save a ton of time commuting.

Sanibel will be a small town forever and in a small town you get to know your neighbors. It didn't take too long before we met our neighbors, who consist of golfers, artists, entrepreneurs, engineers and one of our local ministers. An incredible group, who have led me to value friendship, day-drinking and the fact that golf balls are basically currency in Florida...nice!

One thing I realized about my neighbors, they all had dogs and I'm not going to buck the system. So, we got a dog. Heck, we

even met more neighbors with just a walk or two around the community. It's an interesting dynamic. All different people but with everyone having a dog there is just that similarity that bonds. He'll be a year old before we know it and still a pain in the backside, I'm sure.

Got the house, got the dog, then got married despite the virus and the nay-sayers. Heck, even picked a cool date, 10/10/2020 to tie the knot. If you know me, you'll know this wasn't my first time at the altar, but it was my first with the altar being in my own backyard. Family and close friends were there, and it couldn't have been better. I mean this is some serious cup half-full stuff.

Lastly, social distancing has been a big deal for outdoor sports and just overall outdoor recreation. With the recent great weather, we took a trip up the middle of the state and enjoyed some tent camping. There is great value in not holding a phone, looking into a good campfire and relaxing, especially after a year like 2020.

I hear ya, this is a lot of writing about me, but I really want it to be about you. I challenge you to look back at 2020 and grab those highlights that filled your cup. Once you do that, you might even look ahead a little more keenly in 2021 and make good things happen again. Get better at the job, take the trip, make the step to make that move, get to know your neighbors, love the dog and love the one you're with and then find that campfire somewhere to let it all sink in before 2022 rolls around. ■

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# IN THE NEWS



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

## Chuck Pierson

### Dennis Swander

The Villages Daily Sun, October 20

Setting up a golf course isn't just about cutting new holes and positioning tee markers. Stakes and ropes get most of Chuck Pierson's attention as he makes his morning rounds at Cane Garden Country Club. Those get repositioned daily, too, though the typical golfer might not notice as he drives off the cart path toward wherever his tee shot settled.

In the effort to protect vulnerable turf near cart paths, said Cane Garden's superintendent, "ropes and stakes are often the only defense you've got." It's a challenge shared by Pierson's peers across The Villages' vast golf array. As COVID-19 safety procedures have more than doubled the number of golf carts rolling across fairways, it's heightened the test faced by superintendents.

So far, it's a task they've met with distinction. With an additional nod to a new maintenance timetable, conditions have drawn few complaints. "Depending on Mother Nature, it's not always going to be perfect," said David Williams, golf operations administrator for The Villages Golf & Tennis. "But we have very hard-working people."

At the same time, the challenge is just beginning. As temperatures cool and wet conditions turn to dry, grass needs longer to recover — with prime golf season just around the corner. "We can play defense only so long. We need the golfers to really help us out, too," Williams said. "It's a collaborative effort between our maintenance teams and the golfers."

As operations have returned to near-normal, golfers are being asked to double up in carts again if playing with someone in the same household or with whom they otherwise socialize away from the course. Golfers won't be denied the single-rider option, but the fewer tires on turf, the better.

"It's going to be a challenge to see where we are at the end of the season," Pierson said. "This is something we haven't done."

When single-rider carts became the standard in late March, it doubled the amount of cart traffic on any given day. In addition, rounds played increased sharply as Villagers turned to golf when other activities were shut down. This summer, a typical day saw more than 9,200 rounds played in The Villages. Even factoring in the occasional walker, that's 9,000-plus carts scattering about the fairways every day.

"It's just wear," said Dennis Swander, superintendent at Palmer Legends. "Anytime a tire goes across a (grass) blade, it creates wear. It's stressing the plant out."

## Shannon Wheeler

### The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach

Ponte Vedra Recorder, November 12

The board of directors of The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach recently announced Shannon Wheeler has accepted the position as golf course and grounds superintendent, succeeding retiring Fred Theus. Wheeler most recently served as the golf course superintendent at TPC Sawgrass – Dye's Valley Course.

Wheeler will direct and oversee the maintenance of the signature championship golf course designed and built by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay in 1988...and will also oversee the 40 acres of common grounds in this private equity seaside community with 577 single-family homes.

Before joining TPC Sawgrass – Dye's Valley Course, Wheeler held superintendent positions at various courses in Florida, including Fernandina Beach Golf Club, Wycliffe Golf and Country Club in Wellington, Fountains Country Club in Palm Beach County, The Club at Admirals Cove in Jupiter and St. Andrews Country Club in Palm Beach County.

"I'm proud to join The Plantation community," Wheeler said. "During my career, I've had the opportunity to experience tournament golf highest level and on the largest stage. I look forward to bringing that knowledge with me to this this pristine golf course and property."

## Erin Stevens

### Coral Creek Club, Placida

Golfweek, November 17

Three months ago, Coral Creek Club didn't look anything like an enclave for an elite membership. Just that short time ago, almost all the grass was missing... "Then it was like a miracle," said Alan Pope, membership director at the club that sports such famous members as President George W. Bush (as well as formerly his late father, President George H. W. Bush) and Alabama football coach Nick Saban.

"We were in here (in the restaurant) one day looking out, and it was all dirt," Pope continued as he looked across the 18th hole. "I swear, it wasn't but a couple days later and the whole place was green. It was just that sudden ... beautiful."

The club, which has a six-figure initiation fee, was determined to maintain pristine playing conditions and in April began a multi-million-dollar restoration. All the grass was removed, bunkers were rebuilt with modern capillary concrete drainage systems and many tee boxes were reconstructed. The greens, which feature SubAir Systems to better control playing conditions, were recovered with TifEagle bermudagrass, and the fairways and tees

were sprigged with TifTuf bermuda.

The result is a fresh carpet of green that awaited members when the course reopened in early November...Members gushed about the conditions – courtesy of superintendent Erin Stevens and his team – and the newly reclaimed pin locations in rounds played in the days after the reopening.

## Scott Fabulich

### River Bend Golf Club

Daytona Beach News Journal, December 13

Barring a last-minute holiday miracle, River Bend Golf Club will close at the end of the day December 31, one year shy of turning 30. "My wife and I borrowed money to keep it running, but can't afford to do it anymore," said Wes Norwood, the 18-hole public golf course's general manager. Norwood and his wife Stacie have been the course's majority owners since purchasing it from Stacie's father Harold Layman in 2010. The course's superintendent Scott Fabulich and his wife Samantha are minority partners in River Bend.

"We can't afford the crushing debt and the effects on business caused by the coronavirus pandemic on top of that this year has been brutal," said Norwood. "We're substantially down in terms of number of rounds of golf played and much more so in revenue compared with 2019."

Also factoring into the decision to close River Bend Golf Club is a past-due county property tax bill that has grown to more than \$230,000. Norwood said his understanding when he and his wife and the Fabulichs bought River Bend is that it was exempt from property taxes. The two couples lease the land for the 171-acre course from the City of Ormond Beach. River Bend opened in 1991.

"We are tax-exempt. The city and its lawyers have supported our cause," said Norwood. "We pay all our taxes and they're substantial with the exception of the property tax because we don't own the real estate. The city does." That's not how the county sees it. "If the city ran the golf course then it would've been exempt. But when the city leases city-owned land to an entity for a for-profit business, then that entity has to pay taxes," said Volusia County property appraiser Larry Bartlett.

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## Easter Wins Again In Enviro Awards

Shannon Easter from Broken Sound Club in Boca Raton is once again a winner in the Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards presented by GCSAA and Golf Digest in partnership with Syngenta. Easter was honored in the natural resource conservation category, which recognizes effective strategies for water conservation, energy conservation and sound wildlife management. Awards were also given for communications and outreach, healthy land stewardship and innovative conservation.

David Dore-Smith, director of golf course and grounds maintenance at Copperleaf Golf Club in Estero and a Florida GCSA past-president, was recognized as second runner-up in the natural resource conversation category. He was one of seven runners-up across the four categories.

Easter has been the maintenance director at Broken Sound for six years and has been part of a number of environmental awards the club has earned during that time. Easter also received ELGA honors in 2016 and 2018. His golf course operation has made great strides in pollution prevention; reduction of energy use; water savings via low-volume and low-pressure sprinkler heads; and protection of water sources and wildlife from chemical runoff via vegetation, carbon buffers and no-fertilizer zones.

Broken Sound, a PGA Tour Champions event host for 13 consecutive years, has become 97 percent waste-free, added



Broken Sound Club's emphasis on healthy land stewardship has been recognized once again by GCSAA and Golf Digest.

thousands of plantings to enhance wildlife habitat, and has zeroed in on improving water conservation, water quality and energy efficiency.

"Environmental stewardship is a focus of the golf course management industry," says GCSAA chief executive officer Rhett Evans. "These winners are tremendous examples of leadership in creating quality playing conditions while committing to environmental management practices. Congratulations to all of the recipients for their efforts to keep golf sustainable."

Winners will be recognized during the annual Golf Industry Show, which runs as a virtual program in February.



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The Palencia Club is one of a growing number of golf facilities in the state receiving positive news coverage for its water stewardship.

**Tide Turning on Golf and Water**

Golf might finally be seeing a turning of the tide when it comes to news coverage of the industry's relationship with water. A recent article in the St. Augustine Record extolled the efforts of The Palencia Club where David Levin is director of turf care and grounds. The article said in part: "Golf courses like The Palencia Club are proving that water-intensive recreational facilities and resource sustainability can coexist."

Better yet, that sentence came from St. Johns Water Management District, which was also quoted as saying: "Contrary to commonly held beliefs, recent studies show that many golf courses - especially those built or redesigned within the last decade - are among the state's most efficient water users."

"It was awesome to see that in print," says Levin, who was also quoted in the article. "Because we've been doing a lot of cool things environmentally, when it comes to conserving water and all kinds of things. Historically, the perception of golf's water use has fallen short of the reality. It's great to see coverage that goes some way to setting the record straight."

The report in the St. Augustine Record follows other similarly positive articles earlier in the year in outlets such as Gulfshore Life, featuring Kyle Sweet, CGCS from The Sanctuary Golf Club on Sanibel Island, and Gulfshore Business, quoting Jason Zimmerman, CGCS from Pelican's Nest Golf Club in Bonita Springs.

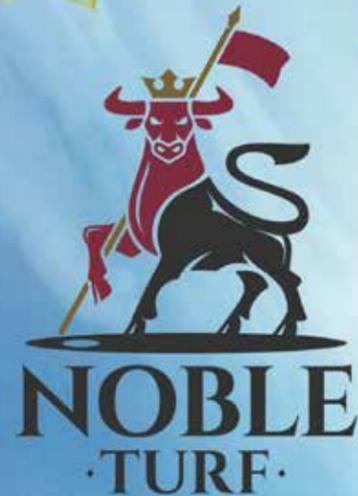
"They say no news is good news, but good news is even better news," Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan says. "All we've ever asked is for people to look at the science and the reality on the ground, not just echo misconceptions and mistruths. Golf has come a long way environmentally over the years and it is encouraging to see more and more coverage catching up with that fact. It will be an ongoing battle but it's great to see some progress."

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**PGA Golf Club Names DuBose to Lead Role**

PGA Golf Club has named Clay DuBose, CGCS as director of golf courses and grounds. With over 25 years of multi-course management, warm season and ultradwarf grass experience, DuBose is responsible for directing and administering all agronomic practices, golf course maintenance and conditioning, and overall management of operations that relate to the golf courses, common grounds and buildings. Owned and operated by the PGA of America, PGA Golf Club features 54 holes designed by Tom Fazio and Pete Dye.

For the past four years, DuBose managed the golf course maintenance operations at TPC Myrtle Beach. In addition, he served as south end regional superintendent for four years, where he was in charge of golf course maintenance for The Tradition Golf Club, Willbrook Plantation Club, River Club and Litchfield Country Club. DuBose also spent four years each as superintendent for Diamond Back Golf Club and first superintendent at Prestwick Country Club in the Myrtle Beach area.

“With Clay DuBose’s vast expertise with grasses in a southern climate, and his experience with golf courses designed by both Tom Fazio and Pete Dye, he is a tremendous addition to our facility,” says PGA Golf Club general manager and director of golf, Jeremy Wiernasz, PGA.



Clay DuBose, CGCS

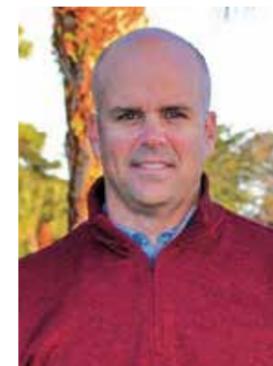
“I am extremely excited about the opportunity to lead the agronomy team into the future and introduce the facility to the newest advancements and techniques in golf course management,” DuBose says. “We plan to produce some of the finest playing conditions that represent the PGA of America at the highest possible level. We will also focus on enhancing and developing the skill set of our management team, so that they may reach their career goals in the turf management business.”

**Floridians Recertify**

Congratulations to Tom Vlach, CGCS from Gray Oaks Country Club in Naples and Robert Waller, CGCS from Marriott Golf on recently renewing their certification with GCSAA. Vlach is a member of the Everglades GCSA and Waller is a member of the Central Florida GCSA.

**Watkin Takes New Position**

Nate Watkin has taken a new role as golf industry specialist with SOX Erosion Solutions. Watkin spent almost two decades as a golf course superintendent including terms at The Seagate Country Club and Trump International Golf Club. He can be reached at 561 322-9008 and Nate@soxerosion.com.



Nate Watkin

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## NEW MEMBERS

### Welcome New Members

The Florida GCSA welcomes the following new members who joined over recent months:

**Jacob Albright, Class A**, Director of golf club operations, Mount Dora Golf Club, Mount Dora

**Richard Anderson, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, The Club at Cheval, Lutz

**Mills Ankney, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, John's Island Club, Sebastian

**Katie Apple, Honorary**, Audubon International, Troy

**Rob Beatenhead, Affiliate**, Wesco Turf, Sarasota

**Tom Biggs, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, Hunters Run Golf & Racquet Club, Boynton Beach

**Glen Black, Affiliate**, Air2G2/GT Air Inject, Jacksonville

**Joda Brown, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Timber Greens Country Club, New Port Richey

**Nathan Carter, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, White Oak Conservation, Yulee

**William Cevaal, Affiliate**, Owner, South Florida Tractor Service, Lake Worth

**Monty Clark, Affiliate**, Managing partner, Debris Kings, Sarasota

**Austin Clinton, Affiliate**, Owner, Turf Equipment Solutions, Fort Myers

**Tony Disano, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, Lake Jovita Golf & Country Club, Dade City

**Clayton DuBose, CGCS, Class A**, Director of golf course and grounds, PGA Golf Club, Port St. Lucie

**Todd East, Affiliate**, Glase Golf, Bonita Springs

**Craig Foley, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Down to Earth - Continental Country Club, Wildwood

**Julio Fuentes, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Cypress Golf Course Services, Pompano Beach

**Samuel Furniss, Roe, Class C**, Second assistant golf course superintendent, White Oak Conservation

**Mark Gerstung, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, The Saints at Port Lucie Golf Course, Port St. Lucie

**Frank Giacobelli, Affiliate**, Owner, Briggs Golf Construction, Jupiter

**John Glomski, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Cypress Golf Services, Pompano Beach

**Kyle Harris, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, Streamsong Resort, Streamsong

**Steve Harrison, Affiliate**, FIS Outdoor, Sanford

**Gracee Hendrix, Affiliate**, Syngenta, Jacksonville Beach

**David Husar, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Timber Greens Country Club, New Port Richey

**Don Jardine, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Chi Chi Rodriguez Golf Club, Clearwater

**Niels Kappeyne, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Bonita Bay Club Naples, Naples

**Hunter Keech, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Grey Oaks Country Club, Naples

**Matt Keto, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, The Dunes Golf & Tennis Club, Sanibel

**Christopher Leklem, Class C**, Second assistant golf course superintendent, BallenIsles Country Club, Palm Beach Gardens

**John Madden, Affiliate**, FIS Outdoor, Sanford

**Blake Mckinney, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Palma Ceia Golf and Country Club, Tampa

**Rich Miller, Affiliate**, Sales agent, Axis DE, Largo

**Joseph Moore, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Hunters Run Golf & Racquet Club, Boynton Beach

**Jeffrey Nuckolls, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, ABM Golf Services, Beverly Hills

**Devin Oswald, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Shadow Wood Country Club, Estero

**Charles Perdue, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, BVGM The Club at Boca Pointe, Boca Raton

**Walter Peretiatko, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Laurel Oak Country Club, Sarasota

**Richard Perez, Affiliate**, Turf Control, North Port

**Kyle Petrick, Affiliate**, Florida Soil Builders, Immokalee

**Hugo Reyes, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, Club Pelican Bay, Naples

**Brad Robbins, Affiliate**, Florida Soil Builders, Immakolee

**Rocky Robbins, Affiliate**, Florida Soil Builders, Immokalee

**Mark Salomone, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, Cypress Golf Course Services, Apollo Beach

**Pamela Schofield, Class A**, Golf course superintendent, Royal Oaks Golf Club, Ocala

**Jim Schwartz, Affiliate**, Florida Waterways, Jacksonville

## NEW MEMBERS

**Aaron Seaman, Class A**, Director of grounds and greens, Boca Lago Golf and Country Club, Boca Raton

**Michael Smith, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Rotonda Golf and Country Club, Rotonda West

**Steve Swanhart, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, The Little Club, Gulf Stream

**Tony Taylor, CGCS Affiliate**, Noble Turf, Mount Laurel

**Gustavo Velez, Affiliate**, Florida Waterways, Jacksonville

**William Vickers, Class C**, Assistant golf course superintendent, The Wanderers Club, Wellington

**Bobby Weed, Affiliate**, Bobby Weed Golf Design, Ponte Vedra Beach

**Burt Williams, Affiliate**, Nu-Pipe, Mount Pleasant

**Rafael Zamudio, Class B**, Golf course superintendent, Pelican's Nest Golf Club, Bonita Springs

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## Stick to the Fight When You Are Hardest Hit

I am sure that many of you, like I am, were thankful for the conclusion of 2020 and the many challenges we faced over the last 12 months. Who knew back in January and February what a different world we would be living in by the end of December?

In spite of the obstacles thrown in our path, I think the golf industry as a whole and the individual members who make up GCSAA and the Florida GCSA rose to the challenge and persevered during these trying times. The efforts of so many have provided numerous examples of how important it is to remain nimble and responsive in our approach to daily life.

I know that just because the calendar turns over to 2021, everything is not going to return to the life we knew prior to March of 2020. With that being said and knowing there will still be challenges and difficulties ahead, I wanted to share with you a poem that I always hung in my locker from the time I started playing football. I found it inspirational then and appropriate today. It has actually been my desktop background during the past several months. The poem was, to the best of my knowledge, written by John Greenleaf Whittier. The poem is titled "Don't Quit."

*When things go wrong as they sometimes will,  
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,  
When the funds are low and the debts are high  
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,  
When care is pressing you down a bit,  
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.*

*Often the goal is nearer than,  
It seems to a faint and faltering man,  
Often the struggler has given up  
When he might have captured the victor's cup;  
And he learned too late when the night came down,  
How close he was to the golden crown.*

*Life is strange with its twists and turns  
As everyone of us sometimes learns  
And many a failure comes about  
When he might have won had he stuck it out.  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,  
You may succeed with another blow.*

*Success is failure turned inside out  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,  
And you never can tell just how close you are,*

*It may be near when it seems so far;  
So stick to the fight when you are hardest hit,  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.*

So, to all of you I wish you a safe and prosperous 2021 and when things seem a bit much, I hope you recall this poem, and that it provides you with the encouragement to persevere. ■

- 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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