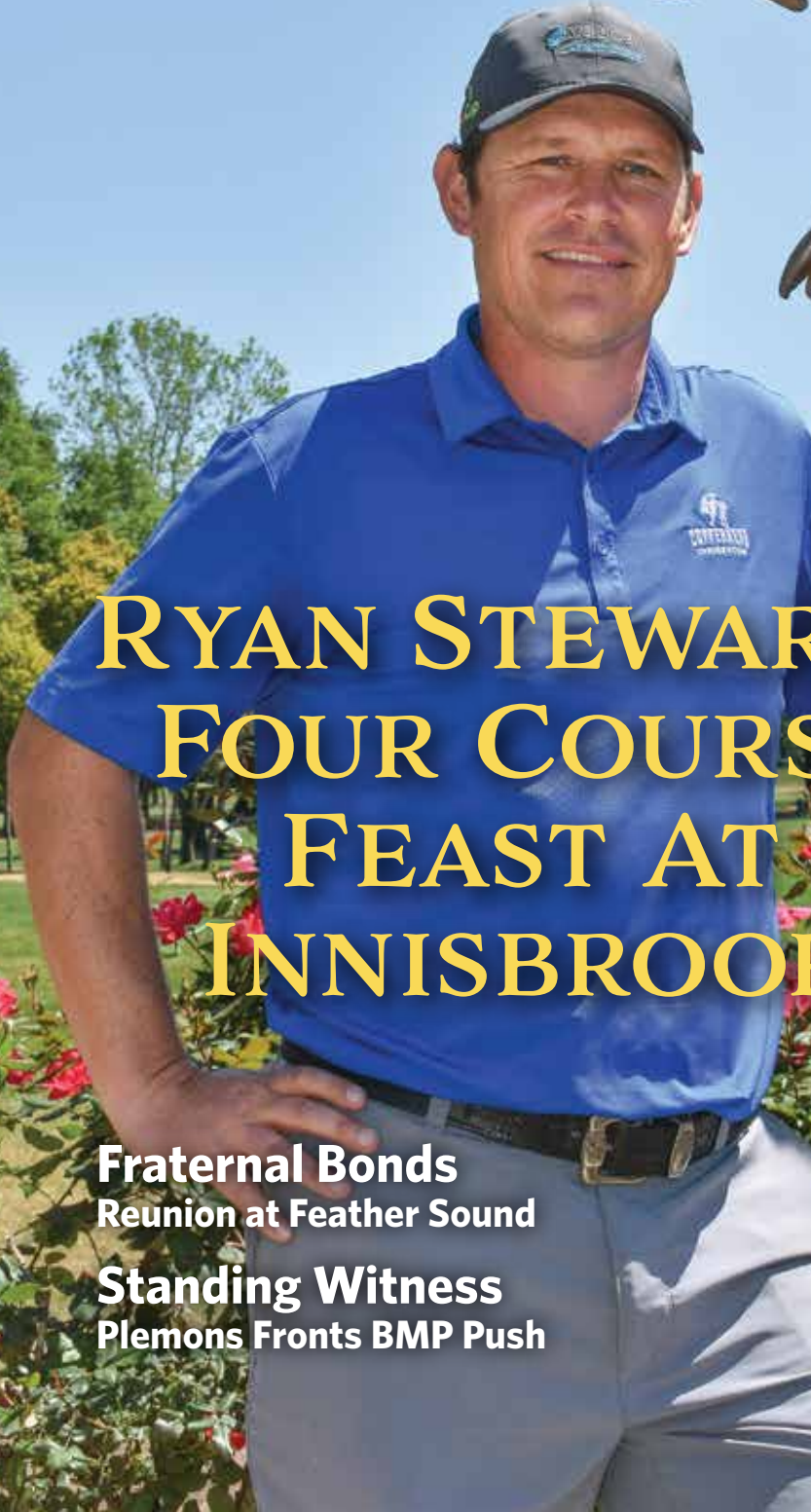


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The FLORIDA Green



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ON THE COVER:

Ryan Stewart oversees four courses at Innisbrook Golf Resort including Copperhead, host venue for the PGA Tour’s Valspar Championship

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Florida Shines on Big Stages Of All Kinds, and All Over

Back in the Swing

It was great seeing so many of you in San Diego, CA at the GCSAA Conference and Show. Not only was there great education and networking opportunities during the week, we also hosted an outstanding reception at Tin Roof to wrap up the festivities on Thursday night.

Congratulations to our very own Seth Strickland for winning his fifth GCSAA National Golf Championship and taking home the trophy. Congratulations also to Stuart Bothe for his hole-in-one during the competition that not only left him with a smile from ear to ear, but also a hefty bar tab after the round.

I also have to pass on some congratulations to Kevin Sunderman, CGCS for moving up to the GCSAA vice-president seat during the annual meeting. I can't wait for the return to Orlando next year to show once again how Florida leads the way.

Florida Swing

Florida GCSA superintendents were on full display during the PGA Tour's Florida Swing over recent months. Our weather and prime course conditions make it a perfect time of the year for golfers to hit the links. The PGA Tour makes it a point to show-off what Florida has to offer, typically while the rest of the country is blanketed under snow.

Starting with the Honda Classic at PGA National in Palm Beach Gardens, the tour makes pit-stops around the state each spring at the Arnold Palmer Bay Hill Invitational in Orlando and The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, before wrapping up at the Valspar Championship at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor. The PGA Tour also hosts an end-of-year event with the QBE Shootout at Tiburon in Naples.

But did you know that Florida hosts 11 other events that draw worldwide attention? The LPGA holds four of those events starting with the Tournament of Champions at Lake Nona Golf & Country Club in Orlando, the Gainbridge LPGA at Boca Rio in Boca Raton, the LPGA Drive On Championship at Crown Colony Golf & Country Club in Ft. Myers and the CME Group Tour Championship at Tiburon in Naples.

The Korn Ferry Tour and the Epon Tour, the developmental leagues of the PGA and LPGA Tours, also have events that put Florida on the map. The LECOM Suncoast Classic held at Lakewood National in Lakewood Ranch leads the way for the Korn Ferry Tour, while the Florida's Natural Charity Classic at the Country Club of Winter Haven, the IOA Golf Classic at Alaqua Country Club in Longwood and the Inova Mission Inn Resort Championship play a part in the Epon Tour. Their season ends in Daytona Beach with the Epon Tour Championship at LPGA International.

This year we also hosted two international qualifiers for the PGA Latinoamerica Tour with events at Mission Inn Resort and the Country Club of Ocala.

These events show-off the beauty our state offers and really puts the spotlight on our host members. Numerous Florida GCSA members volunteer at each event to make sure the courses are in prime condition. Volunteering also provides a great opportunity for your assistant or key crew member to gain practical, professional experience. Kudos to all the host superintendents, their staff and all the volunteers that made Florida look great while under the worldwide spotlight.

Golf BMPs

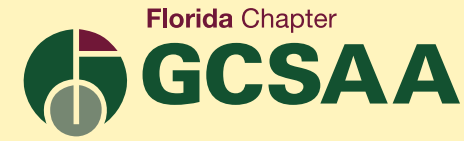
Several members of Florida GCSA made their way to Tallahassee for a "day on the hill" with our government relations firm, The Southern Group, to meet with legislators and gain support for the Florida Golf BMP program.

Representative Keith Truenow and Senator Joe Gruters both wrote and sponsored bills memorializing the Florida Golf BMP program into Florida statute. These two bills rolled through the Florida Senate and House of Representatives and are now awaiting approval by Governor Ron Desantis.

When signed into law, Florida BMP certified golf course superintendents will be exempt from any additional local testing and requirements included in a fertilizer ordinance. That being said, I can't think of a better time to make sure your certification is up to date. More information can be found at flgolfbmp.com.



Andy Jorgensen, CGCS



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Adapting in all Kinds of Ways Leads to All Kinds of Progress

When deciding what information to share with you in this column, I sometimes look back at previous columns to see what was important last year or the year prior. As I reflect, it is remarkable how far we have come in the two years since everything, but golf, closed due to COVID-19. Golf course superintendents adapted, families adapted and your association adapted.

In July of 2021, the Florida GCSA signed a contract employing The Southern Group as our government relations firm. This expense was previously shared with the Florida Turfgrass Association. However, they were unable to renew their commitment to share the costs.

Our board of directors fully understands the importance of lobbying efforts and having a voice in Tallahassee, so we adapted and took on this expense as our own. Many of our chapters have also contributed, as they see the value as well. The need for a constant government relations presence was further reinforced as we encountered fertilizer ordinances in Miami-Dade County and more recently in Orlando.

Our focus this year was to introduce legislation that would memorialize the Golf BMPs, giving them legislative recognition so our arsenal would be stronger at the local level. Well, we succeeded. Both the House and Senate approved HB 967, and the next step will be for the Governor's signature.

The Golf BMP manual has been updated and the manual is available online to download, or, for a limited time, you can purchase a copy from our website. You can find all things BMP at fgolfbmp.com. It is difficult to express just how significant and meaningful our progress has been with the BMP effort. It is arguably the most important initiative your association has been involved with in recent years.

Also during this time, the Florida GCSA golf committee has been adapting and reviewing, improving and reconfiguring our golf qualifying events. New this year, the golf committee will debut a points race. Points will be accrued by participation and score in each of the five events: The Everglades GCSA POA Championship, The Florida GCSA Steven Wright Memorial Golf Tournament, The Florida GCSA Benevolent Tournament (new this year), The Ron Hill Fall Classic and The Central Florida GCSA Crowfoot. The top 10 finishers in the points race will earn a spot on one of the two Florida GCSA teams at the National Championship. (See story page 16.)

And finally, the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show adapted with a new name and an in-person event in San Diego, CA this year. I know there was concern about attendance prior to the

event. I personally know some of our own members that did not make the trip as a result. But I was pleased to see a larger than expected Florida contingency and a great turnout at the Florida GCSA Reception. It was a good feeling to be back together again. I am looking forward to the coming months of more in-person events.

The Florida GCSA Assistant Superintendent Task Group is currently hard at work preparing for an Assistant Superintendent "Road Show" education event. Watch for more information, but we plan to visit three Florida regions to provide education and camaraderie for assistant superintendent members at no cost to them.

I hope to see you all soon. ■

- Jennifer Bryan, Executive Director

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Palm Beach GCSA members head out for a field tour of progress at the new Coore-Crenshaw design at McArthur Golf Club



Jeffrey Klontz Jr., Brian Birney, CGCS, Rees Jones, Joshua Fleisher and Case LeVally



Taylor Griffin, Spenser Tovar, Landon Campbell and Oscar Tenorio on the tee at Palm Beach Par 3

PALM BEACH

It has been a busy start to 2022 for the Palm Beach chapter. We appreciate the support of all our members and vendors that take the time out of their busy schedules to attend our events

We started the year off with our annual ABC meeting on January 27 at McArthur Golf Club. This was a unique opportunity to tour the new 18-hole Coore and Crenshaw design, which is currently under construction. A wide variety of topics were covered while seeing the course under construction firsthand. A special thank you to our host Thomas Barrett and his team. The tour was followed with a reception at Tiki 52.

On March 3, we held our annual Assistants Only meeting at The Breakers Rees Jones Course. We would like to thank our hosts, Mark Reid and Eric Snell, for a great day of camaraderie, golf and a very special question and answer session with our guest speaker, Rees Jones.

We would also like to thank our event sponsor, Hector Turf and Joe Limberg, for their continued support of the Palm Beach GCSA. The event included nine holes of golf followed by networking, dinner and education.

The golf format was a two-man scramble. There were also two closest-to-the-pin contests and a long drive contest. The education portion of the event started with a short presentation by Ralph Dain from GCSAA discussing the importance of the Rounds for Research drive for donations.

It was a special night having world renowned golf course architect Rees Jones sitting in front of this group of assistant superintendents fielding questions. The question-and-answer session was moderated by Mark Reid, director of operations at The Breakers.

We held our Vendor Appreciation Event on March 17, St. Patrick's Day, at the Palm Beach Par 3. We would like to thank our host golf course superintendent Tim



"U.S. Open Doctor" Rees Jones listens to a question from Mark Reid

Campbell and his team for a wonderful day of golf. As always, the course was in excellent condition.

The golf tournament consisted of 18 closest-to-the-pin contests. Golf was followed with appetizers and cocktails on the outside patio provided by Al Fresco Restaurant at the Par 3. There was also a contest for the most festive attire since our event fell on St. Patrick's Day. John Swaner was our vendor winner and Jeremy Chesson was our superintendent winner. Thank you guys, for adding additional green color and fun to our day.

At press time we were looking forward to a joint event with the Treasure Coast GCSA - an education symposium - at BallenIsles Country Club in Palm Beach Gardens. Our speaker lineup included Drs. Bryan Unruh and Billy Crow from the University of Florida and Carol Rau of GCSAA. This was going to be a terrific opportunity to receive education points and meet our speakers in person.

Keep your eyes open for information coming soon on our 2022 Future of Golf Tournament, which will take place on Saturday, June 4, at The Falls Club of the Palm Beaches. Also, the Steve Wright Classic Fishing Tournament will take place at Blowing Rocks Marina on June 11.

- George Kervern, Palm Beach Country Club

EVERGLADES

At press time, the Everglades GCSA was getting ready for some of the biggest events of our year with the Spring Symposium and the Poa Classic and G.C. Horn Memorial Tournament.

The Spring Symposium was coming up mid-April at Royal Poinciana where Matt Taylor, CGCS was to host what is always a great event. Speakers this year were top of the line and included the University of Florida's own Dr. Bryan Unruh, Drs. Travis Gannon and Rick Brandenburg from North Carolina State, Dr. Beth Guertal from Auburn University, Dr. Edward Nangle from The Ohio State University, Dr. J.C. Chong from Clemson University and Frank LaVardera from Audubon International.

By the time you're reading this, you already have your plans in place to attend this year's Poa Classic at Tiburon Golf Club from May 12 to May 15. The G.C. Horn Memorial Tournament is on May 13 with the scramble and stroke play championship the next day. We look forward to seeing everyone at what is a great venue.

In the first week of May, Darren Davis, CGCS was to host our assistant superintendent meeting at Olde Florida Golf Club. Darren has been the superintendent at Olde Florida since the club's inception in 1992. He is a

past president of the Everglades GCSA, Florida GCSA, the Florida Turfgrass Association and served as the 82nd president of GCSAA. He was also going to give a presentation, "Keys to successful renovation: beyond the turfgrass selection."

On March 23, we hosted the annual dinner meeting at the Club at Pelican Bay, after a two-year delay because of the pandemic. A big thank you to host Bob Bittner, CGCS for a wonderful event. The topic of this year's meeting was something many of us often forget about - health and wellness. We often get wrapped up in taking care of our turf and forget about ourselves.

The lineup of speakers included cardiologist Kevin Leung MD, FACC, Gia Edge ARNP (dermatology), Kristen McLaughlin PA-C (dermatology), Rose Balyeat LMHC (human development), and health and behavior specialist Lori-Jane Leo, RN. Thank you to all who attended the event this year, and we look forward to another great event next year.

Our Christmas Tournament was at the Club at the Strand back in December. We had 180 people attend what was a great event. The event benefits the Children's Home Society, and participants were encouraged to bring an unwrapped toy as a donation. The event was a huge success, with hundreds of toys donated to the charity.

The Everglades GCSA would like to thank the Club at the Strand for hosting this event for the second year. Thanks also to Scott Ryan, director of golf maintenance, and his team. The golf courses were in excellent shape. The event ran smoothly thanks to the fantastic golf staff led by Nick Dwyer. The reception after golf was incredible, with great food and service led by Angie Cheatham and the food and beverage team.

We would like to remind everyone of the importance of BMP Certification. With state and local regulations looming, we as superintendents must do our part to show our efforts toward environmental sustainability. The certification is now

available online through the UF extension website.

- Jesse Metcalf, *The Forest Club*

FLORIDA WEST COAST



Dr. Bryan Unruh addresses Florida West Coast GCSA members at Palma Ceia Country Club



GCSAA's Ralph Dain talks BMPs to Florida West Coast GCSA members at Palma Ceia Country Club

Early March, the Florida West Coast GCSA had a fantastic education event at Palma Ceia Country Club thanks to host superintendent Carson Kamps. Dr. Bryan Unruh of the University of Florida and GCSAA's Ralph Dain presented the Florida Golf Course Best Management Practices

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American Society of Golf Course Architects

(BMP) Certification Program.

Our chapter is making a concerted effort to get behind this program, as certification will be critical to the future success of every superintendent in the region. This was also a great opportunity for superintendents, assistants and spray techs to attain continuing education points and credits.

In January, we met at Clearwater Country Club thanks to host director of golf Greg McClimans. Nearly 40 members attended the morning education based on water management. Tony Taylor, Andy Neiswender and Matt Shaffer presented outstanding and knowledgeable education. Out of the group, 22 players braved a chilly afternoon to get out on the golf course and the golf course conditions were excellent. Thank you to everyone involved.

- Todd Six, *On Top of the World*

CENTRAL FLORIDA

The Central Florida GCSA had our Memorial Tournament at Orange Tree Golf Club on March 7. Host superintendent Rob Torri welcomed everyone and also took time to pay tribute to Bill Horner of Golf Specialties, who had passed away, along with my husband, Ron McDowell.

We had Chris Cartin of Brandt supply us with long-sleeve tee shirts. Thank you, Chris. Each year he provides a gift for the players, and his support is greatly appreciated. We had a total of 90 players this year. The winning team was Nick Cole, Alan Lichter and Shane Wiley, coming in with a 102 points in a modified stableford format.

Kai Coleman from MetroWest Golf Club won the split-the-pot contest with Arnold Palmer and Winner Palmer Hospitals. His child was born at one of the hospitals and had some health issues and they were able to assist. All monies were donated to the hospitals.

At press time, we were looking forward to our Chapter Championship at the end of April at Debarry Country Club with host superintendent Louis Lugo. Our annual

meeting is at Orlando Country Club thanks to host Luke Gancarz on June 28.

- Lisa McDowell

NORTH FLORIDA

The North Florida GCSA raised \$11,000 for turfgrass research at the annual Glen Klauk Research Tournament at Pablo Creek Club in March. It was a beautiful day with some great food, beverages and great fellowship. Thanks to Al Clements, Ricky Finlayson and all the staff for once again hosting a wonderful event.

David Levin and Chris Stringer won the two-man scramble. In the individual format, Joey Flinchbaugh won the gross event with a score of 72 and Bob Solms won the low net

At press time we were getting ready for the 29th annual Memorial Scholarship Tournament at a new venue, Grand Haven Golf Club in Palm Coast late April. As most know, this tournament funds our scholarship grants we give to children of our members who are in college.

Our next event is the Benevolent Tournament on the Creek Course at Hammock Dunes with a noon shotgun start. After that we have our Inshore Grand Slam Fishing Tournament on June 18 at Camachee Cove in St. Augustine.

As always, thanks to our many sponsors whose generous support helps us present these great events.

- Betty Hooten

SUNCOAST

Thanks to Everglades Equipment Group, Suncoast Turf Products, and Rainbird and FIS Outdoors for making our recent sporting clays event free to all 60 attendees. It was a great event in combination with the Calusa GCSA at Knights Trail Park and Shooting Complex.

Congratulations to our winner, Eric Ruha, from the Calusa chapter, who shot

a perfect 50/50 clays. Also, to Marshall Evans on being the highest-placed shooter from the Suncoast chapter. Maybe not so many congratulations to Bill Tyde who claimed the "prize" for saving the most clays by missing 45 of his 50

At press time, we were all geared up for our showpiece event of the year, The Suncoast Scramble at Laurel Oak Country Club in Sarasota with host superintendent Charles Johnson. Our guest speaker was to be Mac Carraway, president of Carraway Consulting Group and executive director of the Environmental Research and Education Foundation and the Florida Turfgrass Association.

- Nick Kearns, *Venice Golf and Country Club*



Jake Tenipor, Calusa GCSA and John Scott, Suncoast GCSA



Dan Haubein with Calusa GCSA winner Eric Ruha and Suncoast GCSA winner Marshall Evans, and Kyle Cheek



Nick Kearns takes aim during competition at Knights Trail Park and Shooting Complex



Ryan Dillinger, Calusa GCSA and Preston Stephenson, Suncoast GCSA were runners up

Golf BMPs Making Ground AND CERTIFICATION IS CRITICAL

Long-running government relations efforts by the Florida GCSA achieved a significant milestone recently when legislators approved memorializing the Golf Course Best Management Practices Certification Program in Florida Statute. At press time, HB 967 was awaiting signatures of the House Speaker, Senate President and Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Those signatures represent the final seal on state government level credence for the BMP certification program for golf course superintendents, which the Florida GCSA and University of Florida instituted in 2007.

The program, which teaches environmentally optimal golf course maintenance strategies, remains voluntary but is increasingly being used by municipalities to determine whether golf courses qualify for an exemption from fertilizer ordinances. Orange and Miami-Dade counties, for example, now provide such exemptions for golf courses with a BMP certified superintendent.

“The bottom line is that golf course superintendents will need to be BMP certified if they want to qualify for exemptions from ordinances and restrictions that local municipalities continue to bring forward,” Florida GCSA executive director, Jennifer Bryan,

says. “We know superintendents already operate at a BMP level when it comes to environmental stewardship. Taking the certification program helps confirm that and provides documented proof.”

Bryan says the onus is now squarely on individual superintendents to make use of the system that is in place to enable them to complete the certification process, now available online at fgolfbmp.com. “The certification program is not a way around these ordinances,” Bryan says. “Instead, it provides a bar or a standard that local governments can look to and know with confidence that golf courses with BMP certified superintendents are not causing the problems they are looking to solve.”

A key moment in moving the bill along came in early February when Florida GCSA board member Dustin Plemons, from Cleveland Heights Golf Course in Lakeland, traveled to Tallahassee to meet with legislators and testify in support of the bill. It was a busy day for Plemons that began with a two-hour stint at the golf course before a four-hour drive to the Capitol, then another four hours of meetings before standing to testify. Then he drove home and was back at work first thing next morning.

“It was a blast though. A highlight of my career,” Plemons says of

Senator Ben Albritton (white shirt) meets members of the Florida GCSA delegation Andy Jorgensen, CGCS, Dr. Bryan Unruh, Jennifer Bryan, Dustin Plemons and Aaron Martin



Gov. Ron DeSantis, right, speaks with Florida GCSA delegation members Josh Kelly, Ralph Dain, Andy Jorgensen, CGCS, Dustin Plemons, Dr. Bryan Unruh, Aaron Martin and Robert Waller

the chance to represent his profession in front of state lawmakers and to be able to do so with full confidence in the information he presented. “I go by the BMPs every day, looking to be environmentally sound, like we all do. I was certified in 2007 and recertified again in 2020, so I know what the BMPs are all about.”

Plemons was subsequently recognized by the City of Lakeland for his representation on behalf of the Florida GCSA. A statement from the City Commission said:

“Dustin Plemons was recognized at today’s City Commission meeting for his outstanding efforts representing the City of Lakeland and the golf course industry. Dustin is superintendent of your municipal Cleveland Heights Golf Course. Through his efforts he has ensured a vital green space in the heart of South Lakeland is maintained and available for the public. Dustin recently spoke to the legislature in Tallahassee regarding best practices and his time there left an impression on policy makers.

“In addition to leading a dedicated group of Parks and Recreation employees at the Heights, Dustin is currently the president of the Ridge Golf Course Superintendents Association, he is a board member of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association, and a Grassroots Ambassador for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

“The Cleveland Heights Golf Course not only provides a welcome park space it is also a vital location for many fundraising drives in Lakeland. In February, over \$100,000 was raised for non-profits in our area through efforts hosted at the golf course.

“Dustin Plemons is an All Star in our community, and it’s an honor to work with him every day.”

Not long after his visit to testify, Plemons was back in Tallahassee with colleagues for the annual Golf Day on the Hill. A delegation of Florida GCSA leaders met with a host of legislators and key staff during a busy day.

A Tweet from The Southern Group, the Florida GCSA’s government relations counsel, made it clear that outreach efforts like the Day on the Hill are making a difference: “With over 48 million rounds of golf played annually it is easily the Sunshine State’s unofficial sport. Leaders from the Florida GCSA met with Gov. Ron DeSantis to continue the partnership between golf course superintendents and state leaders in making Florida the best place to play golf.” ■



Lakeland city manager Shawn Sherousse, left, and mayor William “Bill” Mutz, right, after honoring Cleveland Heights superintendent Dustin Plemons, with general manager Brock Witmeyer

Golf BMPs Become Statute: THE PROCESS STEP BY STEP

by Seth McKeel and David Shepp

The Florida GCSA developed legislation to memorialize the Golf Course Best Management Practices (BMP) Certification Program in Florida Statute. Working with our advocacy team at The Southern Group, the Florida GCSA identified potential legislative champions and discussed the concept with Representative Keith Truenow (R, Mount Dora) and Senator Joe Gruters (R, Sarasota). Both members agreed to sponsor the legislation and submitted language to House and Senate Bill Drafting to begin the process.

HB 967 and SB 1556 were introduced in early January, and both received three committee references in their respective chambers.

The first time the bill was heard in committee was on January 24, when SB 1556 was heard by the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee. Florida GCSA board member Dustin Plemons from Cleveland Heights Golf Course in Lakeland traveled to Tallahassee to meet with committee members prior to the meeting as well as testify on behalf of the bill. Senator Gruters was unable to attend the hearing, so committee chair Jason Brodeur (R, Sanford) presented the bill. Following testimony from Dustin and Dave Shepp of The Southern Group, as well as opposition from Sierra Club, the Committee passed SB 1556 by a vote of 5-0.

Two weeks later, HB 967 received its first hearing in the House Environment, Agriculture and Flooding Subcommittee. Prior to the committee meeting, Dave Shepp was contacted by DEP, asking if we could clarify that rules and regulations for Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) were not to be exempted in the portion of the bill exempting certified golf courses from local ordinances. An amendment was drafted and introduced by Rep. Truenow.

Members of the Florida GCSA were unable to attend the hearing due to the national conference taking place at the same time. A couple of committee members had concerns over the local ordinance exemption as well as some confusion over terminology relating to local testing. Dave Shepp and Rep. Truenow vowed to address those concerns at the next committee. The bill passed by a vote 16-1.

Following the hearing, DEP contacted Dave Shepp again and asked if the bill could be amended to put UF-IFAS in charge of the program, with DEP listed as a coordinating agency. The reason was to remove any fiscal impact for DEP in implementing the bill upon passage. The amendment was further expanded to change local "testing" to "training" to alleviate concerns raised at the prior hearing. An amendment was prepared and ap-



Dr. Bryan Unruh of the University of Florida with Representative Keith Truenow (R, Mount Dora) who helped champion efforts to have the Golf Course Best Management Practices (BMP) Certification Program memorialized in Florida Statute

proved by all parties for the next hearing.

The Florida GCSA had its annual Day on the Hill visit the following week. Coming on the heels of the national conference in California, members were not scheduled to arrive in Tallahassee until Tuesday, February 15. In a very quick turnaround, HB 967 was scheduled for its second committee hearing on Monday, February 14. The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Committee heard the bill, accepted the proposed amendment and, with very little discussion, passed it by a vote of 22-0.

During the Day on the Hill, Florida GCSA members visited with Governor Ron DeSantis, the bill sponsors and all of the members of the next Senate committee of reference. A key moment of the visit came during a meeting with that committee's Chairman, Senator Ben Albritton, when he called his staff director and instructed him to place SB 1556 on the next committee's agenda.

That visit was critical to getting the bill, which had been waiting in the committee hopper for three weeks, moving again. SB 1556 was presented to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Agriculture, Environment and General Government on February 22, amended to match the House bill, and passed by a vote 10-0.

The next day, HB 967 was heard in its final House committee, State Affairs. The bill was once again amended, a slight tweak to appease local governments, and passed by a vote of 22-0. With that committee's passage, HB 967 was ready to be heard by the full House.

On Monday, February 28, SB 1556 was placed on the Senate Appropriations Committee agenda. With that being the final time the Appropriations Committee would meet, it had a full agenda, with 60 bills to be heard. Fortunately, SB 1556 had not received any No votes up until that point, so the bill was placed on a "Consent Agenda," clearing its way for passage. The bill passed 19-0.

The next day, March 1, HB 967 was on Special Order Calendar in the House where it was Read a Second Time. There were no amendments, or questions, and the bill was placed on Third Reading. On Wednesday, March 2, the bill passed the House by a vote 112-1. The bill was placed In Messages and sent to the Senate. On Friday, March 4, the Senate took up SB 1556, substituted HB 967 for it and passed it by a vote of 38-0.

HB 967 was Ordered Enrolled and is now ready to be Signed by Presiding Officers (Speaker and President) and presented to the Governor for final approval. There is no specific timeline on when the Governor will receive HB 967, but it is set to go into effect on July 1, 2022. With the Governor being such a huge propo-

nent for golf, our hope is that we will be able to do a "signing ceremony" with the Governor at a golf course, however, that is certainly not a guarantee.

The team at The Southern Group would like to thank the Florida GCSA members, and Dr. Bryan Unruh at UF-IFAS, for their strong advocacy and assistance in the bill's success this year. Of the 3,735 bills filed for the 2022 Session, only 285 passed and will be presented to the Governor for his approval. ■

- Seth McKeel and David Shepp are with The Southern Group which provides government relations services to the Florida GCSA.

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New Partnership Introduces Points Race AND SUPPORT FOR SUPERINTENDENT GOLFERS

A new “points race” modeled on the PGA Tour’s FedEx Cup will lend even greater interest to the showcase annual golf events across Florida going forward. Under a three-year major partnership with BRANDT Consolidated, the new program will provide an annual trophy for the overall winner plus travel, entry fees and uniforms for a total of 10 Florida GCSA members (two teams) to represent the state in the team event at GCSAA’s National Golf Championships.



Chris Cartin

earner will get to keep the BRANDT Cup for one year as well as a trophy they keep permanently.

“We are very excited to help ensure that superintendent golfers who qualify will actually get to go the national,” BRANDT turf and ornamental territory manager, Chris Cartin, says. “It gets more and more expensive to attend the national show each year and not every superintendent or their facility has the resources to meet those costs. We’re looking to help guys have that chance to participate, show their skills and proudly represent their state.”

A former superintendent and two-time winner of the Florida GCSA Golf Championship (1996 and 1999), Cartin has wonderful memories of competing in the GCSAA National Championship. The experience of the golf competition was only one aspect of the overall benefit, he says. Additionally, the camaraderie and networking between golfers from across the country was energizing on both a professional and personal level.

Florida GCSA president, Andy Jorgenson, CGCS from On Top of the World-Ocala, says the new partnership will also increase access to education for superintendents who finish in the top 10 of the points race.

“While at face level this partnership focuses on the golf, it will greatly increase the chance for qualifying members to participate in the national education conference and trade show, wherever it is held,” he says. “Many members have limited travel and education budgets. Some don’t have any at all. With BRANDT covering the costs of getting to and from the national championships that will certainly open the door for team members to attend seminars and take part in the entire show experience.”

The partnership will also ensure the Florida GCSA has the best chance to build on an impressive record at the national golf championship. Over the past 20 years, Florida has produced the winner of the individual championship nine times and the winners of the team event eight times. Seth Strickland from Miami Shores Golf Club won his fifth national championship in San Diego, CA in February and was also a member of the championship winning Florida No.1 team.

Golfers will earn points based on their performance in the Everglades GCSA Poa Annuua Golf Classic (May 14), the new Florida GCSA Benevolent Fund Tournament (June 13), the Florida GCSA Steven Wright Memorial Golf Tournament (August 26), the North Florida GCSA Ron Hill Fall Classic (October 22), the Central Florida Larry Kamphaus Crowfoot Open (December 5).

In 2022, the points race will be known as the “Florida GCSA Race to Orlando presented by BRANDT.” The highest points



The Details

To qualify for the Florida GCSA Race to Orlando presented by BRANDT, a player:

- Must be a current member of the Florida GCSA and GCSAA
- Must be employed in golf course maintenance at a golf facility in Florida

Each of the five qualifying events will be worth 50 points awarded to the winner, 30 points to second place, 20 points to third place, 10 points to fourth place, and five points to each additional player that turns in a scorecard.

Also:

- Each qualifying event will carry bonus points distributed based on the number of players in each field
- Each player that turns in a scorecard will receive one additional point for every player that they beat -
 - o For example, if the field has 30 players, the winner will receive 29 bonus points for beating the other 29 other players. Second place would receive 28 bonus points because that is how many players they beat, and so on
 - o Third to last would receive two bonus points because they only beat two players. Second to last would receive one bonus point because they only beat one player. And last place would receive no bonus points because they did not beat anyone in the field
- Points progress will be managed by the Florida GCSA Golf Committee and published on Golf Genius
- The top 10 finishers will represent the Florida GCSA at GCSAA’s National Golf Championship
- Winners will receive reimbursement of the championship entry fee and travel expenses up to a predetermined amount depending on the top 10 points ranking
- Winners will be provided with team shirts. ■

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Florida Faces Prominent AT NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Florida GCSA president Andy Jorgensen, CGCS from On Top of the World in Ocala, was among a number of “winners” from the Sunshine State at this year’s GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in San Diego, CA in February. The biggest winner of the week from Florida though was Seth Strickland from Miami Shores Golf Club who won his fifth GCSAA National Golf Championship. (See story ...) A Florida team also won the national team championship.

About 280 people gathered at the annual Florida Reception at Tin Roof. The turnout was less than normal but still a strong showing given concerns over the pandemic and protocols in California.

“We were thrilled to see so many members come together again. It was a great night,” Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan says. “And of course, none of it would have been possible without the support of our industry partners. We are extremely fortunate to be able to count on our partners, through good times and the not-so good.”

Jorgensen received the GCSAA President’s Award for Environmental Stewardship for championing water-conscious and low-input golf course management strategies. Since December of 2005, Jorgensen has had charge of golf course maintenance over three golf courses, Candler Hills Golf Club, The Tortoise & Hare



Florida GCSA president Andy Jorgensen, CGCS, center, receives his environmental leadership award from then GCSAA president Mark Jordan, CGCS, right, with GCSAA chief executive officer Rhett Evans, left

and The Links, which are all part of On Top of The World Communities.

Nearly half of his irrigation is reclaimed water. No pesticides or fertilizers are used in out-of-play areas. He has also introduced wildflower pollinator areas, further reducing inputs and was an early user of solar energy.

Also in San Diego, Jorgensen had the chance to present the Joel Jackson Award, for the best superintendent written article in The Florida Green, to immediate past-president, Andy Neiswender from Belleair Country Club. That presentation was made at the Florida Reception.

Other winners during the reception included Mike Read from The Toro Company who won a Curran Custom Blade in the raffle. Chris Anderson, of Toro, won the 50/50 contest then ensured that someone more deserving would be the ultimate beneficiary



Kevin Sunderman, CGCS



Florida GCSA's check for more than \$28,000 from the 2021 Rounds 4 Research auction



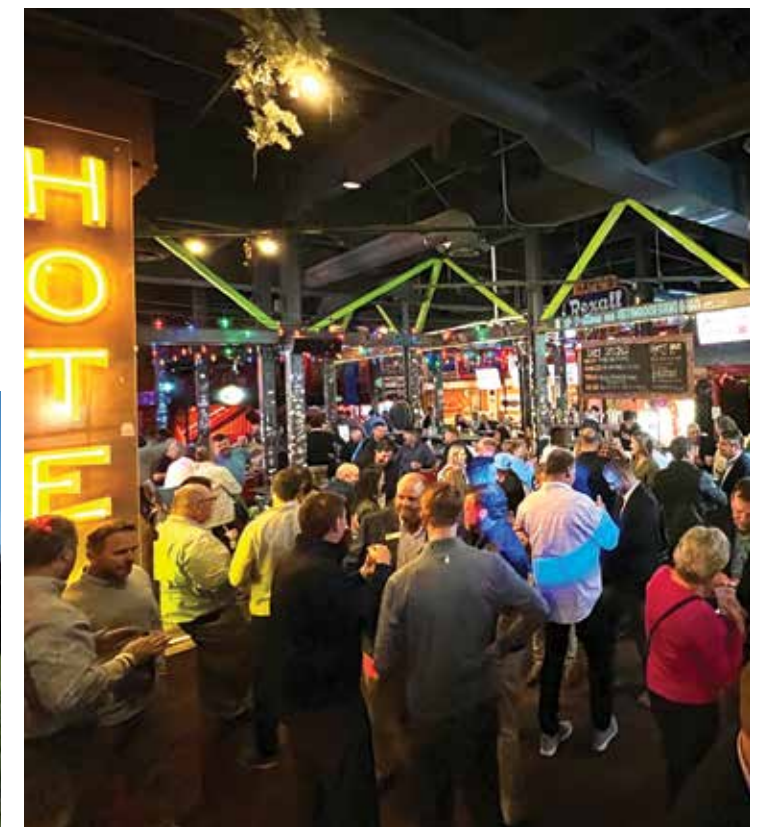
Ruby, Gabe Gallo's award-winning calendar "girl"

by donating his winnings back to the association for the benevolent fund. As a result, the association raised \$2,570 for the fund.

At GCSAA's annual meeting, Kevin Sunderman, CGCS from Isla Del Sol Yacht and Country Club was elected vice president. His election puts him on track to next year become the third Florida superintendent to lead the national association in just six years, following Darren Davis, CGCS from Olde Florida Golf Club in 2018 and Rafael Barajas, CGCS from Boca Grove Golf and Tennis Club in 2019. Sunderman was president of the Florida GCSA in 2013-14 and won the Distinguished Service Award in 2015.

Finally, Gabe Gallo from Fiddlesticks Country Club won \$500 when his dog Ruby, a three-year-old yellow Labrador, was voted Dog of the Year in Lebanon Turf's Dogs of Turf calendar. Ruby's win also earned \$3,000 for the Florida GCSA, which will go towards the Golf BMP program and government relations.

Gallo is director of agronomy at Fiddlesticks and a graduate of Lake City Community College where he earned a degree in golf course operations. He decided to enter Ruby in the calendar competition after an appeal by Jennifer Bryan at an Everglades GCSA meeting. Ruby had already proved her calendar “chops” by making it into TurfNet's Superintendent's Best Friend Calendar as a six-month old in 2020. ■



Smiling faces were easy to find at the annual Florida Reception

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Surgery Leads Old Team TO GET BACK TOGETHER

One of Mike Strube's early bosses in golf course maintenance told him, "Your good people always leave you." It's one of those unfortunate realities of the golf course superintendent profession. With only so much room at the top at any facility, young talent is often recruited away or forced to move to get ahead.

Accordingly, Strube eventually left that boss, Stuart Taylor, and The Plantation Golf and Country Club in Fort Myers, to make his own way at Feather Sound Country Club in Clearwater. That was way back in 2008.

Then last summer, as Strube went elbow deep into a major renovation at Feather Sound, there was a rare occasion when the "good" person and the boss came back together, this time with the roles reversed. It wasn't just a rare event, it was a special one, a case of the superintendent fraternity at work.

Make no mistake, Strube needed qualified help on the multi-million-dollar project to significantly expand green sizes, redo bunkers and regrass the entire course. And he certainly found it

in Taylor. A veteran of the profession, Taylor began his golf career near Manchester in England before embarking on a nearly 30-year career in Florida.

Some of the facilities he's worked at in that time include Riverwood Golf Club, TPC Prestancia, Wilderness Country Club, Bonita Bay Club and of course The Plantation. He also spent two years as Calusa GCSA president and served on the Florida GCSA board of directors.

But it is also true that Taylor needed the right position when Strube gave him a call. He'd just been through a kidney and liver transplant and was 60lbs lighter. "I've lost some muscle mass and can't throw things around like I used to," he says, wryly. "But this has been a great opportunity. It's worked out pretty nice. I've enjoyed it. Just to find out that I can still do the job."

Taylor had been fighting illness for some time. A Type II diabetic, he gave up alcohol about a decade ago. But in 2020, the year the pandemic arrived, he went to bed one day and slept for 23 hours straight. His liver was shutting down.

"I didn't realize how much your liver has to do with your protein levels and energy and muscles and everything," he says. "I was just wiped out." His doctor referred him to specialists in Tampa, who found him to be a suitable candidate for organ transplants because he was otherwise healthy and, in his early 50s, young enough to cope with the procedure and rehabilitation.

In September that year, donor organs became available, and Taylor underwent successful surgery. Strube learned of his friend's illness through the golf course maintenance "grapevine." They actually first worked together in 1999 when Taylor hired Strube on at Riverwood in Port Charlotte.

"I remember him coming in and telling me he wasn't quite finished his degree, but he wanted a job," Taylor says. "I was happy to have him because, quite honestly, in Port Charlotte then, we didn't have a lot of young bucks come in to do the heavy work. It was mostly older workers and retirees."

Strube became the course's aquatics technician for a year then moved on. He was in North Carolina and looking to get back to Florida when in 2006 he called Taylor, who was building The Plantation, to see "if anything was available." "I told him, 'I need an assistant, like yesterday!'" Taylor recalls. "I was running it on my own with maybe five crew members."

Over the next couple years, the Taylor and Strube reunion served the facility well and strengthened the ties the two had formed years before. In short, they worked really well together.

"It was good for me to have an extra pair of eyes, and someone who had an extra vision for things," Taylor says. "The funny thing is how similar our visions are when we put our heads together. We see it so much alike at times it's kind of scary."

Which makes Strube's "recruiting" call last year all the more understandable.

"It wasn't until after Stuart had his surgeries that I found out through the grapevine," Strube says. "Everyone was so secluded during the start of COVID. No one knew what was going on. It was a strange time. We were even going to be open for golf?"

When Strube learned Taylor was being treated at nearby Tampa General Hospital, not down in the Fort Myers area, he reached out.

"There's a bond there...loyalty...trust. All that good stuff," Strube says. "I'm answerable to an owner who is investing millions of dollars in this project so that puts the pressure on me to get it right. So, surrounding myself with people like Stuart, that's imperative."

Strube has two other key allies on his team. Second assistant Chick Berry, who played in the 1976 U.S. Open and 2008 U.S. Senior Open, has been with Strube for nearly a decade. And Keith Baldwin is a retired superintendent. Throw in Taylor and Strube says that it's not only experience he has, "It's depth."

While Taylor's official title may be assistant superintendent, Strube doesn't see it that way. "I don't micromanage. Once a superintendent, always a superintendent," he says. "That's how I look at it. And it's never 'I' when we work together, it's always 'we.'" Stuart is one of those guys in the business that you build a relationship with, and you stay in touch with. We golfed a little bit together and just shared life. He's easy going and has a good eye for detail. So, he's taught me quite a bit."

Strube's first lessons in golf came growing up in Arcadia, north of Fort Myers, playing with his dad, the city manager, on the town's nine-hole golf course. He studied turfgrass management at the University of Florida. Through a high school friend, Strube met two-time U.S. Open champion Lee Janzen who in turn introduced him to his first golf course job at Kissimmee Bay Country Club and a career was born.

Feather Sound, a private club where membership is sold out at 385, is tentatively planned to reopen on Fourth of July weekend. Like many projects of this magnitude, there have been hurdles appear. But Strube and Taylor and co. can see daylight.

The catalyst for the renovation came during the weekend of The Masters Tournament in 2021 when Strube took a phone call from his owner, the third in his time at Feather Sound. "He's really good," Strube says. "He was watching The Masters and asked



Mike Strube and Stuart Taylor are back together at Feather Sound Country Club, more than 20 years after Taylor hired Strube into the business



Mike Strube nears the end of an extensive renovation at Feather Sound Country Club

me how big the greens were at Augusta National. I'd been telling him that for golfers, bigger greens are better than smaller greens, and we had these little bitty postage stamps for targets.

"From doing some research and talking to my peers, it seemed like 6,500 sq. ft. was optimal for both maintenance and playability. So, he said, 'Let's have them that big.' We had about 2.5 acres before and now we have about four acres so we're right in the optimal wheelhouse."

Strube regrassed with Tifeagle on greens but switched to Bimini

on fairways after experimenting with test plots and visiting Bellair Country Club where Florida GCSA immediate part-president Andy Neiswender maintains Bimini after a recent renovation. "Andy raved about it, and I went and saw it and really liked its color attributes," Strube says. "I'm really looking forward to working with it."

Anticipation is bound to be high for members who have been waiting since last spring to return to their golf course. Strube expects rounds might run as high as 20,000 in the first 12 months after reopening, up from about 17,000 a year pre-COVID. But golfers will find a different golf course.

"We have all new greens complexes, and no bunker is in the same spot," Strube says. "We have new greens loops and irrigation satellites. We also repaired some concrete cart paths." While some permitting challenges extended the original timeline, Strube is as enthusiastic as ever to see golfers return.

He sometimes describes himself as the captain of someone else's yacht, and now the "yacht" has been overhauled and updated, he's ready to get back out on open waters. And with a crew like Strube has in support, why wouldn't he be. ■

- Trent Bouts

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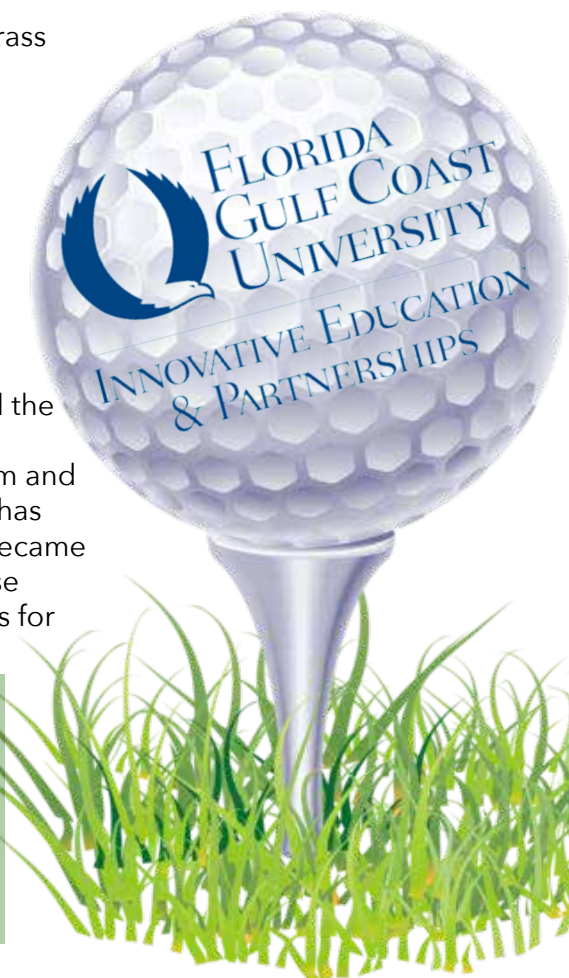
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▶ Dr. John "Trey" Rogers, is a Michigan State University professor and the primary instructor for this program. Dr. Rogers has over 30 years of experience as the Coordinator for the Golf Turf Management program and Sports and Commercial Turf programs at Michigan State. Dr. Rogers has provided assistance to Major League Soccer stadiums and recently became a turf consultant for Keeneland Association and Churchill Downs horse racetracks. He has also agreed to perform research and consultations for the FIFA World Cup 2026 tournament coming to North America.

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Seth Strickland holds the GCSAA National Golf Championship trophy aloft for a fifth time

Strickland Produces his Best WITH GCSAA TITLE AT STAKE

Any kids who love a sport dream of moments where they triumph on the biggest stage when all eyes and all the pressure is on them. Few ever get to test themselves in such a crucible. Fewer still live up to those dreams when the chance does come. Seth Strickland is an exception.

Strickland, from Miami Shores Country Club, may be a golf course superintendent by profession but for a few holes at GCSAA's National Golf Championship in February, he was pure golfer. Playing on the famed South course at Torrey Pines in San Diego, CA he staged the kind of comeback that makes legends of some of the best.

To win his fifth national championship, Strickland birdied three of his last five holes, including the first hole of a sudden-death playoff against Tanner Westbrook, from Maridoe Golf Club in Carrollton, TX. Sure, it wasn't Augusta National on a Sunday but how many of us have ever been tested with a few hundred people gathered behind the green.

And in Strickland's case, some of those in the gallery where his professional peers and friends in golf - Walter Chavez, Bryce Koch, CGCS, Chris Zinna, Jim Torba, Jason Bagwell, Joe Pantaleo and more. "All those guys hung out to watch," Strickland says. "It was awesome."

Those guys witnessed two of the best big-moment shots of his career.

The first came on the final hole of the championship, after Strickland stood on the tee one shot behind Tanner. Strickland found

a fairway bunker with his drive on the par 5, which in hindsight, he says, was "probably a blessing in disguise." Forced to lay up instead of taking on the water in front of the green, he left himself about 95 yards. Tanner also laid up to about 100 which meant he played first, knocking his approach to about 20 feet.

"I knew he'd left himself a difficult downhill, left to right breaking putt and I felt he was going to have a hard time making it," Strickland says. "So, I figured he would make par which gave me a chance."

Strickland didn't have to visualize the shot he needed to play, he'd already seen it, watched it when Luke List won a playoff in the Farmers Open on the same hole on the PGA Tour just a week before. "I took a little extra club because I didn't want to spin it back into the water," Strickland says. He choked down on gap wedge, landed the ball pin high, watched it take a hop to the top of a crest then trickle back down inside two feet.

"I knew exactly what it was going to do," he says. "It was one of the most awesome moments I ever remember having. My heart was pounding, I was super nervous. And to be able to pull off that shot off under that kind of pressure, knowing what I had to do and doing exactly that, was really an amazing feeling."

He still had to make the putt which he describes as "the longest two-footer I've ever had" on greens that he says were the fastest he's ever played. "It was like putting on the hood of a car the whole tournament," he says. "They were still jazzed up from the Tour event the week before."

Off course, he made the putt. Then something happened - maybe it was experience kicking in or confidence gained from the test he just passed - but by the time he was back on the 18th tee for the playoff, Strickland says he was "so relaxed."

On this occasion, he found the fairway with his drive and with everything on the line, he pulled a hybrid - again a little more club than he needed from 195 yards. Again, he hit the shot he wanted, landing the ball in the center of the green and watching it come to rest about 20 feet away, around about where Jon Rahm made his putt to win last year's U.S. Open.

With Strickland having two putts for birdie, all the pressure now moved to Tanner whose drive was "20 or 30 yards" further down the fairway. "I don't know what club he hit, but I thought he hit a great shot," Strickland recalls. "I thought he stuffed it to be honest. But for some reason it seemed to lose its energy and just fell out of the sky and ended up in the water. At that moment I knew I had a 99 percent chance of winning."

And he did, of course, with a birdie while Tanner finished with a bogey. After 12 years between his third national title and his fourth last year, Strickland had now won two inside five months. The 2021 championship was delayed until October because of the pandemic.

Having turned 47 in March, Strickland clearly has plenty of good golf ahead of him and now he is in striking distance of Emil Mashie, who holds the record with six national titles. To get there, Strickland jokingly suggests he might need help from his "agent" again. "I shared a place with Chris Zinna (from Mayfair Country Club) and he says he's the reason I won was because he took care of all the arrangements," Strickland says. "I didn't have to worry about anything."

He might need some help next time given the first-time showing of another Florida GCSA member, Max Rudder, from Venice Golf and Country Club. Rudder, assistant superintendent to Florida GCSA past president Nick Kearns, finished third, two shots behind the leaders after some challenges on the closing nine.



Walter Chavez



Max Rudder finished third in the national championship at his first attempt

Strickland says Rudder's swing was so impressive that after the first few holes, he "actually tried not to watch." "It is an amazing golf swing," Strickland says. "I thought he had a distinct advantage over the rest of us in the group. Because he's probably got 125mph clubhead speed. It's remarkable. He crushes it. He'll be back in contention at some point, I'm sure."

Strickland's five over winning total reflected the challenge of the golf course compounded by bitterly cold starts each day. Temperatures were in the 40s both days when he teed off. "I don't know how the other guys felt but I couldn't seem to get a rhythm going in the mornings," he says. "Once the day started heating up a little and I could take layer off, and swing freer, I seemed to play a little better."

His scorecard backs him up. Over the two days, Strickland was a total of six over on the front nine versus one under on the back. "Torrey pines is so friggin' hard. It's so difficult," Strickland says. "You get yourself in a bad position and it is almost impossible to get the ball up and down. It is really, really hard to make birdies."

Since returning to Miami, Strickland says he has been overwhelmed by the reception he has had from golfers, colleagues and ownership at Miami Shores. "Everyone is just so excited about it. When I won in October there was huge support and now everyone is like, 'I can't believe you won it again!' My head pro, Chris Baetzel, is probably my biggest advocate. He and my owner of the company, Johnny LaPonzina, love to tell people they have the best playing superintendent in the nation. I guess it affects a lot of people and they enjoy it. I'm just really grateful we get the opportunity to play in an event like that. So grateful."

Strickland and Rudder were also members of the Florida No. 1 foursome that won the national team championship. Other team members were Bryce Koch, CGCS from Cypress Lake Country



Parker Ferren celebrates with Kevin Sunderman who later in the week was elected vice president of GCSAA

Club, Dylan Foster, from Gulf Harbour Yacht and Country Club; and Nathan Cater, from White Oak Conservation.

Other notable achievements for Florida GCSA members in the national championship included a 10th-place finish by Walter Chavez, from Miami Beach Golf Club. ■

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 National Championship - Round 2 1st Round Score: 80

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Out
Stuart Bothe	5	5	4	4	6	5	5	①	4	
<i>Pace of Play</i>	9:30	9:45	9:57	10:12	10:27	10:45	11:00	11:12	11:30	
National Championship I	419	344	146	420	393	505	424	149	514	3314
Par	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	3	5	36
Stroke Index	5	15	13	3	11	9	1	17	7	

LEGENDARY!

Stuart Bothe's hole-in-one is clearly marked

Bothe Drops Ace With Cameras On

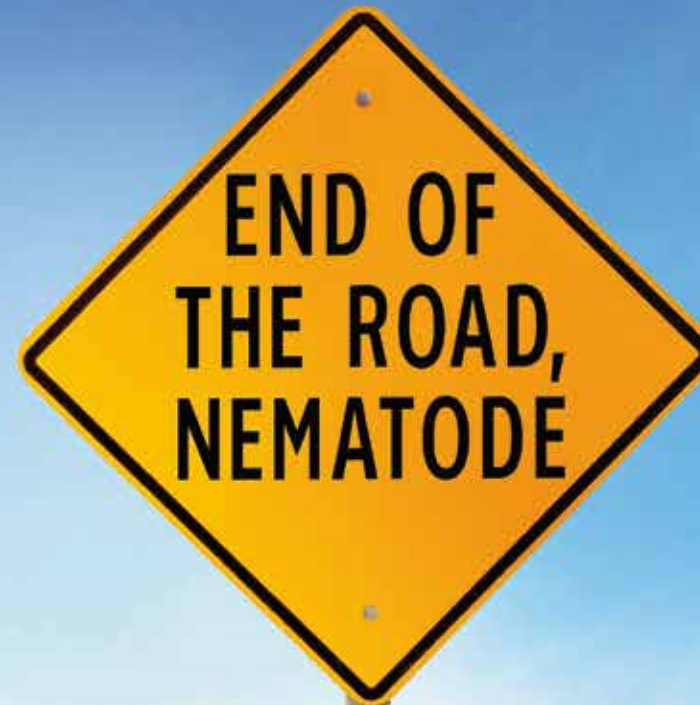
Stuart Bothe, from Emerald Dunes Club in Palm Beach, was miked up and on camera when he played his tee shot on the par 3 8th hole at Torrey Pines during the GCSAA National Championship. So, what did he do? He knocked it straight in the hole for an ace. Better yet, he called it!

"I called the shot after I hit it," he says. "We couldn't see the ball going in and I was just messing around with the camera, and it actually did go in. How about that?"

Bothe later Tweeted, "Hole in one on the 8th hole at Torrey Pines while GCSAA TV and ToroGolf were filming. What are the odds of that?" Bothe said afterwards that he was "so geed up" that he almost eagled the 9th. Six over through his first seven holes, his hole-in-one then birdie finish brought him back to three over for the nine.



Stuart Bothe, second from left, celebrates his hole-in-one with a selfie along with playing partners, Riley Boyette, NC left; Kyle Embry, TX; and Kevin Kienast, CA



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FROM CARNOUSTIE TO COPPERHEAD

by Trent Bouts

Golf runs deep in Ryan Stewart's veins. He grew up in Carnoustie, home of the classic Scottish links course where the likes of Hogan, Player and Watson etched their names into British Open history. His maternal grandfather, Doug Adam, earned his own place in club lore winning the men's championship back in the '70s. It was beside Adam and his father, John that Stewart learned to love the game and the land on which it is played.

Through summers in high school, Stewart, left, "basically lived at Carnoustie" playing the club's three courses. No one was surprised when he enrolled to study greenkeeping at Elmwood College about 10 miles from St. Andrews, the very home of golf. Nor when he left for the U.S. and internships through The Ohio State turfgrass program. His first placing was at Merion, which like Carnoustie is known around the golf world and has hosted five U.S. Opens.

That was more than 20 years ago and today Stewart is director of agronomy at Innisbrook Golf Resort in Palm Harbor, where he oversees four courses including Copperhead, home of the PGA Tour's Valspar Open. Ironically, after all that time, travel and experience, Stewart's office is barely a two-minute walk from...Carnoustie, or at least a Carnoustie.

A sprawling 900-acre property, Innisbrook draws heavily on the game's history and international roots. Blocks of guest villas are named for some of the game's greatest courses – Troon, Turnberry, Dornoch, and yes, the nearest of all to the golf course maintenance facility, Carnoustie. Such a prominent reminder might make Stewart homesick, if he weren't so busy.

The week after huge crowds trampled the property watching Sam Burns win a playoff to earn back-to-back Valspar titles, Stewart was still rolling in soon after 4am each day setting up for tournaments. "There's no wind down mode here," he grins. "It's go, go, go, all the time. Being a resort course, we've got tournament after tournament. It's non-stop throughout the whole year."

Innisbrook sees about 125,000 rounds a year across the four courses, but the lion's share always falls on Copperhead - 42,000 of them last year. That Stewart and his team produce a Tour caliber product under that load is remarkable by any standard. But a look at what happens before the TV cameras arrive makes it even more so.

Where most Tour hosts nurse their course into the event, it is pretty much business as usual at Copperhead. "If we were closed a week before, or a week and a half, it would be easy," he says. "But two days before the event it's a full tee sheet, sold out. Play is out there, teeing off from 7.30am to 2pm. There's not one spare tee time. Leading up to the tournament, it's insane around here."

The obvious question then is how does Stewart's team get its work done? The answer, just as obviously, is with difficulty.



Innisbrook's Copperhead course was in excellent shape to welcome the PGA Tour in March

"We're not mowing tees, fairways and approaches in the mornings. We're mowing in the afternoon," he says. "The challenge is that we are open and we've got sold out play and we're trying to burn fairway lines and tees and approaches and there's golfers hitting balls. There's no waving anybody out of the way. Our guys are out there, and the golf balls are flying. That's our biggest challenge, trying to get things done during play."

That is not say there are no concessions in preparation for the Valspar. About six weeks out, the course closes on Mondays and Tuesdays. Wednesdays and Thursdays are open for morning tee times but on Fridays and weekends, it is "wide open."

"It is amazing how much money comes in that week or week and a half before the tournament," Stewart says. "We make more in that period than we do in July, August and September."

Of course, it helps from a demand point of view that the early March time slot is in peak season. But prime time makes it difficult for Stewart to find volunteer help. Where some facilities benefit from dozens and dozens of superintendents stepping forward at tournament time, "We have maybe 12 or 14 volunteers," he says. "Mostly they're assistants or vendors, only occasionally a superintendent because it's busy season for everybody."

The Tour helps out some bringing four superintendents "from up north" each year to help monitor soil moisture content and green speeds. "They try and bring the same guys each year which helps," Stewart says. "And our Tour agronomist, Chuck Green, has done seven tournaments with us now and we have good relationship. We know what he wants."

Still, exacerbating the underlying challenge is the fact that

Stewart's year-round team is thinner than it was before COVID-19. Like many facilities fearful of what was to come, Innisbrook trimmed staff levels at the onset of the pandemic. No one predicted the surge in demand for play, nor the subsequent shortage of labor spurred by a host of factors, not least of which were booms in the construction and landscaping industries.

Consequently, Stewart's management team for four golf courses consists of him and two superintendents, Andriy Maksymiv and Greg Hausch. No assistants. "That's a big headache. It means probably 65- to 70-hour weeks for me and the superintendents," Stewart says. "It would be huge to get the assistants back and with business being as good as it has, we're hopeful. But I've been reading about the overall lack of assistants and the shortage of good people coming out of the colleges."

Stewart says he is feeling the dearth of available talent at all levels. "Even when we can hire two people, it's like we lose four," he says. "It's just a never-ending battle right now. We've increased our hourly rate which meant we had to do it for our existing staff too. It's definitely made the job more stressful, the labor shortages."

Of course, he draws staff from Innisbrook's three other courses, but they remain open for play throughout as well. "They have pro-ams and other tournaments that week too. So, really the problem is not Copperhead but maintaining the other three courses up to that level when we just have bare minimum staff for them."

Despite it all, Stewart relishes tournament week.

"We tell our staff it is going to be long hours but let's enjoy ourselves and have fun because it is an awesome week," he says. "We're on TV for the whole world to see, the top golfers are here, and they always have good comments. To hear those guys praising the golf course, that's awesome."

Stewart also fields positive comments from far afield. He may have left Scotland shortly before turning 21 but as far as folks in Carnoustie are concerned, he remains one of their own. "Everybody back home watches it," he says. "I get a lot of nice messages Valspar week. And whenever any friends or family travel to the U.S., they always come to this area and look to play the golf course that they see on TV."

This year, Stewart had even a little more support in that regard than he's used to. His parents visited for



Ryan Stewart's office walls are covered with mementos from two decades working at Innisbrook Golf Resort

a month including tournament week. Because of COVID travel restrictions, it was their first time they'd seen their son and grandchildren in two and a half years. Stewart and his wife, Virginia, have a daughter Isla, 16, and son Logan, 13. Isla was a competitive dancer and Logan, like his dad, is a soccer player.

In fact, a huge Dundee United fan, Stewart's first passion growing up, even more than golf, was soccer. But when it was time during high school to find a week of work placement,

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he reached out to a friend's father who was head greenkeeper at Panmure Golf Club. "It was in winter, and he had me dew whipping greens, hand raking bunkers and doing some sod work," Stewart recalls. "It wasn't the glamor stuff, but I thought, 'Oh, this is awesome.' From day one, I loved it."

That didn't mean he stopped loving soccer. Or lost his ability. These days Stewart plays in a Monday and Wednesday league in Clearwater. Last year, he played on an over 40s Florida team that won a national championship in Michigan. He won another title on an over 30s team in 2019 and another in open age in 2008. "That's like my stress relief," he says. "That's my big thing."

It is telling that Stewart finds a highly competitive pastime as a stress reliever. Like hosting a PGA Tour event, that's not everyone's cup of tea. "I know it's not for everybody," he says. "But I knew I wanted to be at my own golf course as a superintendent...now I've got four. And I'd always wanted to do a Tour event and see how that was."

"It's definitely a lot more detailed when it comes to the consistency of the greens and the conditioning of the golf course and the way the watering program is managed. We even hand water bunkers to help keep the sand packed. And of course, we hand water greens."

"Because the Tour do put it on the edge to the point where the greens are teetering. Some people get stressed out and scared that they are taking it that far. I can see somebody getting scared the first time they encounter that. But it is amazing to see how far you can actually take them without running overhead irrigation, how they can survive on so little water."

To be ready for the early March date, Stewart overseeds his Tifeagle with Poa trivialis, as an "insurance blanket." "If we shut down a lot more before the tournament, we'd probably not overseed," he says. "But with a typical lead up, the warmth and all the brushing and rolling takes out most of the Poa. By tournament time they are really putting on about 85 percent Tifeagle."

After his internship at Merion, Stewart was shipped to Florida where he spent some time at Bonita Bay Club and Shadow Wood Country Club in the Naples area. He met his wife down there, but she was from the Clearwater

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area and Stewart's boss at Shadow Wood, Kenyon Kyle, was aware the young couple had interest in getting back there.

"Kenyon called Keith Einwag up here and I got an interview for an assistant's job and have been here ever since," Stewart says. In 2007, he became superintendent of the Copperhead and Island courses and early 2020, got all four with the title of director of agronomy. He's in no hurry to be anywhere else, and certainly not back in Scottish winters.

"Growing up there, it's not the warmest of weather," he laughs. "But you come here and you're in shorts and T-shirts every day. From day one, I was like, 'This is the life!' You can't beat this. I tell people in the business back home, 'You've got to come across and experience it. It's a different world.' When I call my parents back home and it's May or June and they've all got jackets and hats and gloves on...no, I can't see myself ever going back." ■

Stewart Puts Best (Management Practices) Foot Forward

Shortly before the onset of the pandemic, Ryan Stewart, above, was already feeling some pressure as local authorities turned an eye on Innisbrook Golf Resort and its four courses as a potential cause of elevated pollutant levels in nearby waterways.

"They were on about phosphorous levels being high, but we don't use any phosphorous fertilizer," Stewart says. "And they were concerned that nitrogen we were putting on the golf course was causing problems. We told them we put out slow-release fertilizer, but they wouldn't believe us. They thought we were spraying all kinds of stuff.

"We probably had three or four meetings with them. We showed them our BMPs and how we treat the lakes, the fertilizer we use. We showed them our maps where the water comes into the property and where it goes out and showed them their own data that said levels were high before the water got to us."

A turning point in the conversation came when Innisbrook hosted a Florida Golf BMP certification session. Talk about putting your money where your mouth is – with Stewart in support, the Florida GCSA invited Pinellas County staff to sit the session and take the exam.

"I think that really opened their eyes to what golf course superintendents do and how we respect and treat the land," he says. "They could see we are not polluters just throwing fertilizer out all over the place. Two or three of them never passed the exam and we haven't heard from them again."

Each year Ryan Stewart spends as much time and effort recovering from the Valspar Championship as he does preparing for it



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Andriy Maksymiv helped host the Valspar Championship while his family was sheltering from bombs in the Ukraine

Andriy Hosts the PGA Tour WHILE FAMILY CAUGHT IN WAR

When crowds were cheering birdies during this year's Valspar Championship, their roars went largely lost on Andriy Maksymiv. Even though, as one of the hosting golf course superintendents, he was about as close to the action as you can get, Maksymiv admits his heart and mind were elsewhere during tournament week at Innisbrook Golf Resort. Indeed, they have been since Russia's invasion of native Ukraine on February 24.

Maksymiv and his wife, also Ukrainian, both have immediate family and friends caught up in the war. He calls home daily, as he did throughout tournament.

"Every morning I have a 30-minute drive to work so I talk to my sister, my dad and my cousin, every day," he says. "It was very difficult while we were preparing for the tournament. It was like I was here physically and giving directions but mentally, I was somewhere else. It is hard to explain but it's difficult when you have to manage people here and your family member calls and tells you, 'They are bombing us. We are in the shelter.'"

One of those bombs dropped within a third of a mile, another was just over a mile away.

"We have homes in two different locations," Maksymiv says. One in Lviv is near the main airport and also near a factory, both of which were strategic targets for attack. Once the bombing began there, the family moved to the other side of town. "Then they started bombing near there," Maksymiv says. "Luckily everyone is okay and safe right now."

Yet the war goes on and it is writing a nightmare chapter for what Maksymiv had otherwise crafted into an American dream story. He arrived in the U.S. in 1998 to visit his mother who migrated several years earlier. Not long out of the Soviet Union, Ukraine offered only limited prospects at that point.

A friend of his mother suggested he find work on a golf course, and despite having very little English, he did just that at Innisbrook, where he has been ever since.

"One of the superintendents liked my work ethic and one thing led to another," he says. "He promoted to irrigation tech, to spray tech and so on. When I realized these guys believed in me, I thought I've got to change something up, I've got to go to college to have some education background for a brighter future ahead of me."

Maksymiv enrolled at St. Petersburg College's Clearwater campus and, eventually, graduated with a bachelors degree in business management and project management. "It almost took me nine years because my English was still not great and I was working and the expense of it out of my own pocket," he says. "But I liked the way the U.S. was, and I could see how a young man can achieve something in his life."

Because he has clearly done that, becoming superintendent of Innisbrook's Copperhead and North courses, Maksymiv is in a position to send financial support back home. His father struggles with motor and mobility issues on his left side after a stroke. He tries to visit his family every year, but the pandemic interrupted that schedule. He and his wife did make it back last summer when travel restrictions were relaxed. As unlikely as it sounds, they are investigating ways to visit this summer.

There is precious little hope of his family coming here. "My dad is not doing well and basically his wife is not going to leave him and my sister is 23 and she is not going to leave them," Maksymiv says. "Whether the situation is good or bad, we're

going to have to try and visit our families and help them out. We help them out financially now, but they also need the moral support."

Such a trip would entail flying to a neighboring country like Poland or Hungary then traveling by bus or train to the border, already crowded with refugees looking for safety. "It's a mess," Maksymiv says. As it is when the sirens sound back in Lviv.

He explains that many people in the city live in multi-story towers. Residents are allotted storage spaces in the basement of the buildings that have come to serve as bomb shelters. "Think about this," he says. "These are little places under the building, maybe six feet by six feet, maybe not even that. But when they are bombing, there are three people sleeping in that space."

Asked how the conflict will end, Maksymiv doesn't hesitate. "We're going to win," he says. "There is no other way around it. Obviously, Russia has nuclear weapons and they are stronger with more resources. But Ukrainian people, we have a will to protect our own land. We're not invading anyone. We're trying to protect our land and create a brighter future for our kids."

In the meantime, the Maksymivs are helping as much as they can from afar. Andriy's wife has organized community donations of all kinds of supplies to ship back home. They also hope people beyond their community will step forward in support. "If anybody can donate, there are plenty of websites," he says. ■

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Battle Continues For AGAR'S "LITTLE MAN"

Folks by the pool at last year's Florida GCSA Golf Championship at the Resort at Longboat Key might have noticed a youngster dozing in his mother's lap while other kids splashed about in the water. Now, almost a year later, Cory Agar, a distributor for Plant Food Company, and his wife, Diana – that mother by the pool, have scarcely known a moment since to match that peace and calm. And frankly, it might well be a long while still before they can truly relax again.

Their son who was sleepy that day, tested positive for COVID-19 soon after. In fact, the whole family did, including daughter, Aviana, 10. While everyone else bounced back quickly enough, Brakdon, 6, struggled severely and was admitted to hospital then rushed to the trauma room for an emergency blood transfusion.

Meanwhile, his maternal grandfather, Norm, had been admitted to another hospital a few days earlier. Over FaceTime, they took on a challenge to see who would be the first one to go home. At a time when hospitals were still on high guard and visitation severely limited, the back and forth was good for the spirits.

But there was worse to come, far worse, to the point where today Agar says, "We've seen bills coming in for amounts bigger than the house we're living in."

Doctors discovered Brakdon, who was undergoing almost daily blood transfusions to correct his hemoglobin levels, was suffering from a new and rare condition known as Multiple Inflammatory Syndrome, or MIS-C. MIS-C can affect the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes, or gastrointestinal organs and can be fatal.

Then it became apparent why Brakdon's blood cells weren't what they should be. He had leukemia. Doctors recommended an aggressive approach, and he underwent three chemotherapy treatments in short order. The day he was scheduled to go home, August 20, what should have been a day of hope, his grandfather died in hospital.

The following weeks were grueling as the Agars not only grappled with what happened but with what they still faced. And



The Agar family - Diana and Cory with Brakdon and Aviana - shortly before Brakdon's complications surfaced

even then, there was worse to follow.

After several more chemotherapy treatments, Brakdon developed alarming physical behaviors. "Uncontrollable movements of his body," Diana says. "He was just jerking and jerking, his arm and leg flailing about." Then came stroke-like symptoms, including slurred speech paralysis on the left side of his body. "It's so scary, you don't know if any of these things are going to be permanent."

In the emergency room, doctors administered drugs rendering Brakdon unconscious. It turned out that he was among the four percent who respond adversely to methotrexate, the strong chemotherapy drug he'd been receiving. As a result, there was a toxic buildup in his brain.

"They told us they were giving him medicine to make him sleepy, but he wasn't waking up," Diana says. "At that point they told us it sometimes takes

weeks to a month or more for the person to wake up. We've had so many scary moments but going through days of Brakdon not waking up was the hardest time of our lives I would say. He's lying there with electrodes on his head and you're just waiting for any signs of anything, a squeeze of the hand, just anything."

Eventually, Brakdon did wake up but for three weeks only one parent was allowed to visit because of pandemic restrictions. "It separates your family when you really need your family and there's no one around," Diana says. Finally, two parents were allowed in, and the Agars appealed for Aviana to also be allowed to visit. "The day she came in, I feel like she lifted his spirits so much."

That was in October. It was one of the first times the family was in the one room together since their ordeal began.

"It's hard to imagine being a superintendent and going through something like this just because golf course doesn't care if you're son has cancer," says Agar, who spent about a decade as lead assistant at Old Memorial Golf Club in Tampa. "But coming onto the sales side five years ago, and with a company like Plant Food that has been overwhelmingly supportive, there has been more flexibility to take care of what we need to take care of."



Moments from Brakdon's ongoing battle with leukemia

Now based in Palm Harbor, Agar, who played minor league baseball back in the early 2000s either side of a year at Cove Cay Golf Club in Clearwater, is working to establish what is "kind of newer territory" for Plant Food Company. Clearly, that hasn't been easy with what has transpired in the last six months. "Obviously, I haven't been out on the road so much building new business as much as I would like but the support and understanding of the company has been incredible," he says.

So too has been that of friends like Chris Doutt, athletic director at St. Paul's School in Clearwater. Doutt established a GoFundMe page to help the family with the financial impact of Brakdon's treatment. As Doutt wrote in his initial post last year, "The Agar family needs your help. Please pray for them; for healing and peace that surpasses understanding. They also need financial help. Norm's funeral expenses, coupled with the expenses incurred from Brakdon's hospital stay, treatments, and loss of work easily reach six figures."

And that was in September, before Brakdon's adverse reaction to the chemotherapy.

When he did come out of sedation, Brakdon still had weakness on his left side, a limp and his eyesight was "off a little bit." He is now on a seizure medication and will be for the duration of his new chemotherapy regime, which is expected to be a three-year process.

While the medication quells the seizures, it generates agitation and frustration. Moreover, the chemotherapy "causes a lot of ADD (attention deficit disorder)" Diana says, "And he's also on a steroid, which adds to all of it."

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With Brakdon's immune system so compromised, the Agars decided to keep him out of school. Instead, Diana, who has degrees in educational leadership and administration and in teaching, is home schooling. "He's a smart boy. He will catch on quickly," she says. "But even with all my experience teaching, he's been one of my most difficult students (because of the treatment side effects)."

Physical, occupational and speech therapies have helped Brakdon regain ground after the seizures. But the family has used their quota of outpatient therapies allotted by the insurance company, meaning any continued therapy is at full cost. "The insurance situation has been difficult," Diana says. "We would like to continue the speech, occupational and physical therapies for him, and find appropriate holistic therapies as well."

Still, Brakdon's status is at a point where the family can turn at least some of the focus beyond the immediate and most urgent concerns. "For a long time, it was just 'Are we being fed. Are we being clothed?'" Diana says. "Bills and complex things like that, we haven't been able to keep up."

Recently, she took a job as an after-care worker at a local school with what time she can spare away from the family - three hour shifts four times a week. "I had to do something because the bills were crazy, and it was kind of getting out of hand," she says. "That first influx from GoFundMe was helpful, just to survive."

Cory says life has been such a whirlwind that it has been a challenge to provide regular updates on the GoFundMe page. "We're trying to get organized with all of it," he says, and that includes dealing with insurance companies. "There has been a lot of back and forth. We were able to upgrade to a catastrophic-type policy but we're still figuring out things with our old insurance company."

Even having endured so much since August, the Agars remain positive. They are looking at establishing a foundation to help families find balance and ways to manage when their children face similar hurdles. There are so many challenges beyond the illness itself, they say, everything from ensuring ready access to nourishing food to helping make sure siblings get the care and attention they need.

While some charities offer support, the Agars have found many have strict limitations on what any grant can be spent on. They envision support that puts trust in the families to do decide where



Donations to support the Agar family can be made by visiting gofundme.org and searching for Brakdon Agar. As of press time, the fundraising campaign initiated by a family friend had raised \$30,901 of a target of \$60,000.

the money could help them best in the moment. "If it helps you to take your stuff to a dry cleaner, then you should be able to take your stuff to a dry cleaner," Diana says.

Through it all, Brakdon himself has been a soldier.

"Our son is like a little man," Diana says. "He's like his dad, he hides his pain, and that's what hurts me the most. He won't tell us what's wrong. He says he's fine and we know he's not because we can tell from the numbers in his blood."

Early stages of Brakdon's new chemotherapy treatment have gone well but as with the first regime, the medicine builds up in his system. Now, Cory explains, "We're heading into the phase that is going to hit him hard." ■

- Trent Bouts

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News Assistants Committee GATHERING MOMENTUM

By Tyler Robb

I started working in the golf industry 11 years ago. Through trial and error, success and failure, I've thoroughly enjoyed choosing this as my career. I have worked at facilities ranging from nine-hole public courses to high-end private exclusive clubs. My preference is in the high-end clubs. The resources allow you to provide the best quality of turf, which is what it is all about. If there is a problem, you can fix it. If the turf looks good, it can look better.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned throughout my career is the importance of networking. I would say without networking, I would not be where I am today. Over the past four years, I have made it a point to get more involved at the state and local chapter level.

It started out with going to local chapter golf events where I got to meet some of the industry leaders in the area. Educational events are also important to attend to see what techniques superintendents are using to help out their courses.

By attending these meetings and events consistently, I was able to move from professional relationships to real friendships with like-minded people within the industry. Even when I first started working in Florida, I would reach out to assistants in the area via Twitter to see if they would like to socialize after work.

Meeting up with other assistants after work and attending chapter events are fantastic ways to broaden your network and develop friendships. The golf course industry has provided me with some of my closest friends to this day.

Through these friendships I was given opportunity to get involved in other aspects of the industry beyond the grass itself. Over the past couple years, I have served on the Treasure Coast GCSA board of directors. This has been exciting to be a part of as well as helpful in my overall professional development.

Getting to work with some of the top superintendents in the area and to see how they run the meetings has been invaluable. The camaraderie and mentorship I have seen in action throughout my service on the board has been fantastic. There are always good conversations, and we get to hear about each other's current issues and how we're handling them. I always look forward to going to our board meetings.

Last year Andy Jorgensen was elected Florida GCSA president and he reached out to me about starting something that would benefit assistants. Collaborating with Andy, we decided to create the Florida GCSA Assistant Superintendent Task Group and I was appointed the chair.



Tyler Robb at work at the Loxahatchee Club

Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan and GCSAA field representative Ralph Dain have been tremendous, helping out in any way possible. I got to reach out to assistants across the state, some of them I had met before, some of them I heard of and needed them to help build this team.

It is sometimes difficult to get together and meet because of the distances involved, but Zoom has been very accommodating for us. Working with this group of assistants is fulfilling and we're accomplishing a lot. We're hoping to build something worthwhile for assistants that lends value both professionally and personally. We are in the planning process of hosting an Assistant Only meeting for the state this fall.

I highly recommend to assistants to get out there and get involved with their chapters. It is extremely rewarding to be a part of something bigger than yourself. If there is something that is missing or an event you would like to attend or host, reach out to your chapter to work on making it happen.

Being an assistant superintendent can present challenges at times, but by sharing our combined experiences and drive, we can create something together that gives us all the best chance of success. ■

- Tyler Robb is assistant golf course superintendent at the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter



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Challenge Presents Opportunity So Now is a Time to Go For It

by Kyle D. Sweet, CGCS

Let's face it, we're all feeling the squeeze. Time seems to be going by faster and faster and there is always more to do. It makes for a long, busy winter season that I'm sure you're glad to have wrapped up. But time is just the beginning of the squeeze.

Let's add in the rising prices at the pump, equipment delays, employee shortages, employees leaving to take higher paying, less skilled jobs, plus the lack of contractors to handle the recent boom in the industry, and you've really got quite a list. You know all these things; you're living it and at your course you're taking the weight of this square on your shoulders.

It's important to realize that you are not an island, and your general manager, committee or owner are feeling the squeeze too. Hopefully, they are working with you through this period. Their support of your efforts in these times is especially important and will provide what it takes to get through it and to the other side.

In addition to the workplace, your family is a great source of support. I'm not saying that you have to go home whining every night about the job, but being able to communicate about it with your loved ones is important. Let's keep mole hills mole hills by communicating with our employers and families during these busy, demanding times.

Let's talk about being busy. I bet your course has been busy and has again set records this past winter. I'm hearing about record rounds and record green fees, both true indicators that golf is on the rise. Beyond that, private clubs are raising initiation fees and building large waiting lists for people just to have the opportunity to spend their money. For some, there is more money in the bank than ever before. This is a good thing. This is a good thing for you in the midst of the list we just put together.

The value of the course is obvious. It's been said so many times that the course is the most valuable asset of any club so now it's time to put that to the test. Here are a few ideas that might help your team and the course today and beyond.

Close that 1st tee!

This isn't just for the top courses anymore. With play on the rise, clubs are making more money and the course is getting more punishment. So, it only makes sense to be able to have an afternoon to accomplish needed tasks without having to fight with golfers. This approach helps with staffing and is a great morale booster too. Ask this question of someone if they disagree: "Do we vacuum the clubhouse carpets in the middle of dinner service?"

Go electric!

Nope, not talking about saving fuel in that truck of yours. I'm talking about all-electric mowers. If you're up against noise ordinance issues, electric mowers could be a saving grace. Their availability and reliability is improving with the advent of lithium ion batteries. Getting out early in the morning can save you a staff member as well and have the course ready in time. Truly a win-win. The one-two punch of an electric mower and roller is a game changer when we're all searching for valuable time.

Pay 'em more!

Of course your employees want a great place to work, but they also want to work somewhere where they can afford to have a life. Keep your eyes on local wages for landscapers, construction, etc. and be proactive in adjusting wages. Look at the picture today and forecast where you need to be in 12 months. Let's be honest, golf maintenance has always been the lowest paid staff, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Mix up your managers!

Add supervisory responsibilities to your managers. Having them manage small projects, supervise a weekend and be in the know about the department beyond irrigation and IPM can only help. Plus, those employees are already invested in the operation and want to grow in their roles at your club or beyond. Giving them the responsibility can free the superintendent and assistant to handle the myriad other tasks that are always there.

Plan ahead!

A thorough review of your course and maybe even your facility may be in order. The increased play and fees of today are allowing clubs to catch up and hopefully get some money in the bank. Be proactive in creating plans for the near future to improve the golf course and maybe even your maintenance facility. This may entail a master plan for the work or maybe even just the creation of a sub-committee to start the process. Either way, get the ball rolling.

Avoid burnout!

This is for you and your team. Plan a trip or an activity to get away from there for a day or even just a few hours. How about an afternoon on a pontoon, a lunch at a local restaurant, a few frames at the bowling alley? A little effort goes a long way and as we are entering into the summer months a little something like this might be a big help.

Go for it!

Show your value and pursue the compensation that you deserve. This is a highly competitive time in the industry and a time of great growth. Your compensation, like that of your employees, should be looked at closely. In the past I've talked about value and the value of what you do is paramount right now. Look beyond today's paycheck. Look at enhanced retirement programs, improved benefit packages, bonuses based on course revenue and see what would fit best for you to present to your club. Go for it! You're worth every penny!

You are not alone in this quest for a great career, a great family, a great golf course and ultimately a life that you can be happy in. We're all there. That list that we started with isn't easy to overcome but keeping open communication with your club and your family is key. Don't go it alone.

The value of that ground that you maintain is growing and you are in the seat to make sure that everyone understands its value. Taking some steps to implement some new ideas and processes may be a great start to make both you job and your course better. That would be a combination that we'd all be happy to have. Take the steps, your success ultimately relies on your abilities and your choices. You are able. I suggest that you make the choice to go for it. ■

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

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IN THE NEWS



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

Shannon Wheeler

The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach

Ponte Vedra Recorder, January 6

Several members of the Northeast Florida golf community were honored December 15 at Deerwood Country Club as recipients of the 2021 Jacksonville Area Golf Association Awards (including) Superintendent of the Year, Shannon Wheeler from The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach.

Since becoming The Plantation's superintendent in late 2020, Shannon Wheeler has significantly enhanced the golf course conditions and playability, much to the satisfaction of the club's golf membership. The North Carolina State University business and turf management graduate performed similar excellence in his previous role overseeing TPC Sawgrass/Dye's Valley just up the road from his new club. Wheeler has held superintendent positions at a number of other clubs in Florida, including Fernandina Beach Golf Club and several in Palm Beach County.

Bob Cook

The Golf Club of Summerbrooke

Tallahassee Democrat, March 5

Talk about a mood swing. Friday night, the Kappa Alpha Order Fraternity (KA) at Florida State and The Golf Club of Summerbrooke members helped raise more than \$1,000 for the Children's Miracle Network. Saturday morning, owner Reagan Hobbs was alerted that hole No. 11 green had been damaged by deep tire gouges from most likely a truck that was driven on the course overnight. Hobbs is uncertain of the extent and cost of the vandalism, though he said rebuilding a green can cost \$25,000.

Course superintendent Bob Cook, who previously worked at Disney World and Seminole Legacy Golf Course, also reassured Hobbs the damaged green would be repaired. "The responses have warmed my heart and it makes me feel that we're doing the right thing," said Hobbs, whose wife Stacey is the course's general manager. "Bob's text said not to let it bother me, that they had it and would get it right."

Steve Keller

Juliette Falls Golf Club

Ocala StarBanner, March 9

Living in Marion County has many advantages, with one of the best being an abundance of golf courses. Golfers constantly are trying to find the right course that is enjoyable to play and suits all handicaps. The search should include Juliette Falls Golf Club.

The stellar reviews continue as Juliette Falls recently was named the eighth-best public course in the U.S. by more than 320,000 reviewers on NBC Sports Next's GolfPass. The Golfers Choice 2022

list ranked public courses on pace of play, condition of course, staff friendliness and more and is determined by recreational golfers who shared their reviews.

"To get in that bracket is pretty special," Juliette Falls superintendent Steve Keller said. "That's all based on thousands and thousands of people and their reviews of thousands of courses, so that's pretty neat."

Keller, who has been at Juliette Falls since 2007, makes sure the course, located 20 miles from Ocala, is in pristine shape and ready for play during the entire year. "Our site is so sandy and well-drained that Juliette Falls stays in playing condition year-round, even when we get our typical Florida summers," Keller said. "Each hole has some memorable aspect, whether it's a water feature, a repurposed phosphate mining pit, or an enormous oak tree that has been worked into the design. There isn't one forgettable hole."

Jeff Plotts

TPC Sawgrass

Florida Times-Union, March 13

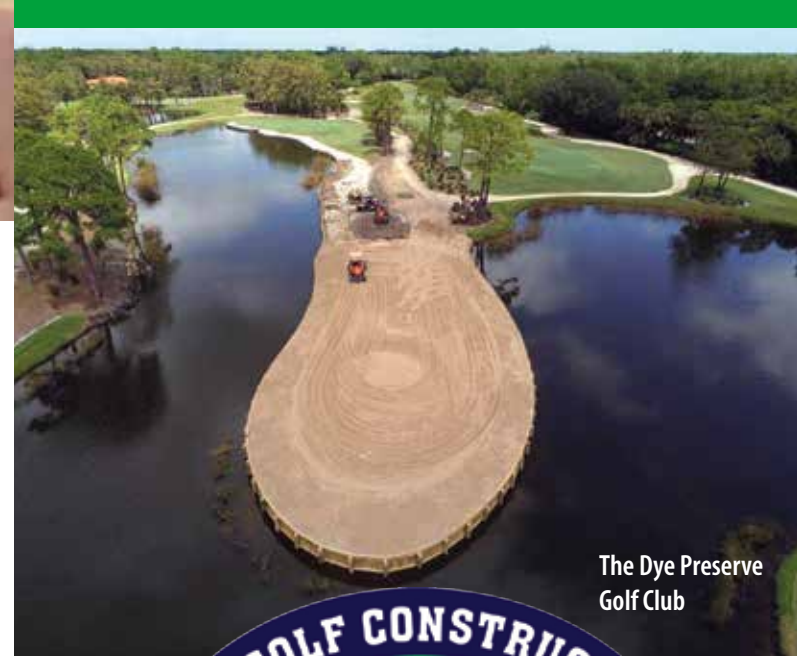
When The Players Championship returned to March in 2019 it came at a bit of a risk in terms of weather. March can be an odd month on the First Coast, with extremes of cold and heat and storm fronts that come raging from the West or out of the Gulf of Mexico. But it also can be pleasant and moderate – as the first three years of the tournament were after the May era of 2007-2018 ended. This year?

Let TPC Sawgrass director of agronomy Jeff Plotts answer that question. "We've seen all four seasons here this week," he said. "It's a tough task but our team was able to answer that challenge."

That team, more than 180 strong, has been working from pre-dawn hours to after dark, getting the Stadium Course ready for the world's best golfers prior to Thursday, then responding to one wave of rain and storms after another to get it in the same condition for the weekend. The total rainfall on the course this week was nearly 5 inches, with more than 2 inches on Friday.

However, the fact that the course was ready for play at all is a testament to the teamwork and toil of the workforce at Plotts' disposal, a combination of 90 workers on his TPC Sawgrass staff and 90 volunteers – the latter doing it without pay.

"They've done an unbelievable job," said Harold Varner, who shot his second 69 on Sunday to take the 36-hole clubhouse lead at 6-under-par 210. "I couldn't believe how dry it was from [Saturday] evening when I played four holes, how soft it was, to this morning. Super-impressive. They did it right here, so I didn't expect anything less, really."



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Business School Returns To In-Person Format

Golf course superintendents have until August 22 to apply for the 2022 Syngenta Business Institute professional development program in Winston-Salem, NC. This year's event will return to an in-person format and run from December 6 to 9.

"Two years of virtual SBI certainly exceeded our expectations, but we are really excited about the idea of being back in-person for the 2022 program," Stephanie Schwenke, turf market manager for Syngenta, says. "While our virtual programs have been very successful, learning together in person helps create even stronger bonds for the participants. We will continue monitoring updates from government and health authorities and will be fully prepared to transition the program online via Zoom if needed."

In partnership with the nationally ranked Wake Forest University Executive Education, the 2022 program curriculum features educational courses designed to teach superintendents critical industry skills. Superintendents will also be given the opportunity to build valuable connections with industry professionals during various networking sessions. Upon completion, participants will earn 1.5 GCSAA Education Points.

To be eligible, applicants must be employed as a superintendent, director of agronomy or at an equivalent level in the U.S. Applications at GreenCastOnline.com/SBI must be submitted online by midnight PDT on August 22. Selected participants will be notified in early October.

Postel Attends National Through Bayer Program

Joseph Postel, from The Boca Raton Resort and Club in Boca Raton, was among nine golf course superintendents at this year's GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in San Diego, CA thanks to the Bayer Superintendent Grant Program. The program, which began in 2004, provides grant winners with airfare, hotel accommodations for four nights, full conference registration, registration for two education seminars of their choosing and \$200 spending money.

As part of the selection process, a Bayer press release says an emphasis was placed on "diversity and inclusion – embracing and encouraging individual differences, life experiences, knowledge, innovation, self-expression, unique capabilities and talent that superintendents invest in their work."

"We are grateful of Bayer's ongoing commitment to providing educational resources and professional development opportunities for GCSAA members," GCSAA chief executive officer Rhett Evans says. "GCSAA appreciates its partnership with Bayer and Bayer's focus on diversity and inclusion."

Stalvey Snap Wins Twitter Contest

Jason Stalvey, second assistant at Old Palm Golf Club in Palm Beach Gardens, has won the Florida GCSA assistant superintendent Twitter competition with a photo he snapped on the spur of the moment. Stalvey was spraying tees about 7am when he saw a colleague mowing a green with the sun rising in the background.



Jason Stalvey

"I jumped off the sprayer to move the tee markers and everything kind of came together," he says of the image that captures the greens mower between trees with the sun rising off to the right. Stalvey says he spent his life in Florida including more than a decade working outside. "I try and make a point of stopping to admire what's around me when I can," he says.

The message he posted with his photo on Twitter was entirely appropriate, "Golf maintenance in all its glory!"

Stalvey has been at Old Palm with director of golf Blair Kirby for four years. In the past, he spent some time as head groundskeeper for the Palm Beach Cardinals baseball team. A brother, Matt,



Jason Stalvey's winning photo

is head groundskeeper at Indian River State College, where both played baseball, in Fort Pierce.

"He's a real photo nut and takes tons of great photos. Every now and again I manage to get something that's pretty good," Jason Stalvey says. For his win, Stalvey receives a Yeti day cooler. As for what might go in the cooler, he says with a laugh, "That depends on where I'm going? If it's to the beach it might be a few Coronas. But we've been growing in after a full renovation last year so there hasn't been a lot of opportunity for a lot of that lately!"

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Davis Chairs GCSAA Centenary Committee



Florida's Darren Davis, CGCS is helping steer preparations for GCSAA's centenary celebrations next year. As chairman of the centennial committee, he attended a meeting at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, KS recently. Above: GCSAA centennial committee members Patrick Finlen, CGCS; Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D., Mark Jordan, CGCS; Jason Tharp; Mitchell Savage; Darren Davis, CGCS, chairman; Bob Farren Jr., CGCS; Bruce J. Burger, CGCS and Bruce Williams, CGCS by the statue of Old Tom Morris outside GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, KS. Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan attended the committee meeting via Zoom

In Memory of Late Ronald McDowell

The Florida GCSA extends sincere sympathies to family and friends of Ronald Ray McDowell, who died January 25 in Orlando. McDowell was the husband of longtime Central Florida GCSA administrator Lisa McDowell. He was medical doctor in Florida from 1974 and in 2001, he and Lisa opened Windermere Family Practice where he worked until he retired in 2014.

McDowell was predeceased by his parents, Charles Raymond McDowell and Rosemary June McDowell (Campbell) of Arcola, and is survived by his wife Lisa Lloyd McDowell; his children, Matthew Ray of Land O'Lakes, FL, Melinda Anne of Steamboat Springs, CO, Ryan Christopher of Key Biscayne, FL and Jennifer Leigh; and his siblings, Richard (Jan), Renda (Roger) and Riggs of Danville, IN. He is also survived by nine grandchildren.

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James Sprankle
Superintendent



Just north of Palm Beach, the Loxahatchee Club stands out as one of the most eye-catching courses in all of South Florida. Superintendent James Sprankle has been working with Latitude 36® Bermudagrass for a number of years, shaping it to highlight a spectacular Jack Nicklaus design of 7,240 yards. His constant innovation with the grass has this course in the top 100 in North America on a regular basis.

Loxahatchee Club
Jupiter, FL

“The Latitude performs well. We have nine holes of cart paths and there is very little wear and tear that’s visible. The members love the Latitude.”

– James Sprankle,
Superintendent – Loxahatchee Club



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South Florida Field Day Offers Bilingual Tour

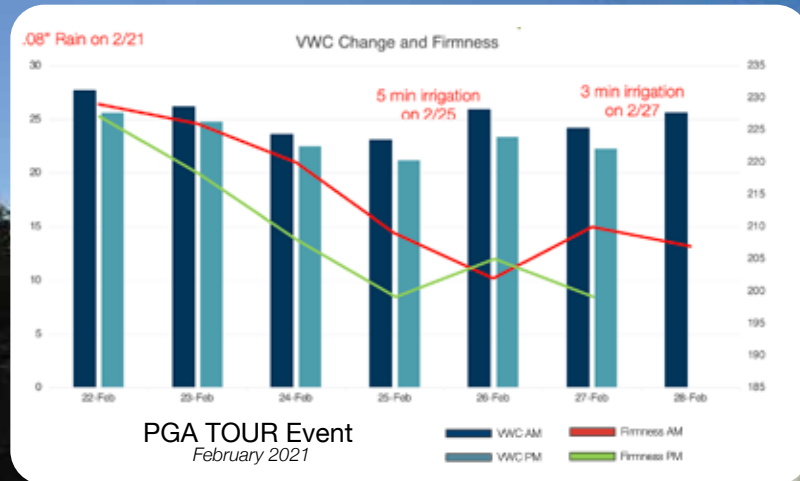
The 33rd annual South Florida Turfgrass Field Day and Expo was in March at the UF/IFAS Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center in Davie. It marked the return of an in-person event after a two-year hiatus because of the pandemic. A special component of this year’s field day was the bilingual – English and Spanish – landscape field tour.

After the tour, there was a demonstration and vendor show followed by lunch and afternoon classes. Education was presented by Michael Orfanedes, Ph.D. on ‘Building Wind Resistance in Your Tree Canopy’, Pawel Petelewicz on ‘Herbicides for most common and/or troublesome weeds in Florida turf-grasses,’ and Jamie Buhlman on ‘Visual Identification of St. Augustinegrass Cultivars.’



A bird’s eye view of the 33rd annual South Florida Turfgrass Field Day and Expo in Davie (Photo: Nick Kearns)

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Olde Florida Honors Leadership Team

In February, Olde Florida Golf Club members honored the senior leadership team of Darren Davis, CGCS and director of golf Tom Wildenhaus. Davis was recognized for having served as the 82nd president of GCSAA and Wildenhaus was acknowledged for having been named the 2021 PGA Golf Professional of the year.

The club says, “Both gentlemen have not only served the Olde Florida membership for close to 30 years, they have also served, promoted and assisted in the growth of the golf industry at a local, state and national level over the same length of time.”

On hand to participate in the event were GCSAA chief executive officer Rhett Evans and South Florida PGA executive director Geoff Lofstead. Several notable individuals sent congratulatory letters that were read to the over 100 attendees. Letters were received from PGA of America chief executive officer Seth Waugh, golf course architect Rees Jones and the legendary Jack Nicklaus.

Geoff Lofstead, Tom Wildenhaus, Darren Davis, CGCS and Rhett Evans at Olde Florida Golf Club



MD Plant Health Appoints Landis

MD Plant Health welcomes Erick Landis to its sales team. Adding Landis is a sign of the company's growth in Florida where since 2018, it has provided golf course superintendents with agronomic products and equipment.

Landis' background includes a variety of roles within the green industry. Growing up in north-eastern Pennsylvania, he began working at a nearby golf course as a teenager and then attended Penn State University, earning a bachelor's degree in turfgrass science. He has worked as an assistant superintendent at three different golf courses in the Naples area, in addition to gaining golf course construction experience.

He gained sports field experience during three years as grounds director for the Sporting KC professional soccer club in Kansas City, MO. Most recently, Landis was a sales associate at SiteOne Landscape Supply.

"I'm excited for the opportunity to supply golf courses in the Naples and Fort Myers communities with products I'm passionate about," Landis says. "Having spent most of my career here, I understand what superintendents need and how I can help them be successful."

"We've been eager to grow our sales team, and Erick is just the person we needed," MD Plant Health owner Rob Dillinger says. "He has an amazing attitude, work ethic, and industry experience."



Turfgrass Science Program Celebrates Centenary

One hundred years ago, scientists established a series of lawn plots in Gainesville with the help of a \$900-a-year grant from the USGA Green Section. This was the beginning of the University of Florida's turfgrass science program that today is so critical to the work of golf course superintendents and the overall health of the golf industry in the state. The university is celebrating the turfgrass science program centennial all year, culminating with a golf tournament and evening gala in conjunction with the North Central Florida Field Day in Citra on October 5.

One of the early initiatives to mark the centenary included the launch of a new website -turf.ifas.ufl.edu - for the turfgrass science program. UF/IFAS turf research is located in different regions to determine best varieties and practices for Florida's diverse conditions. There are climate trials at the West Florida Research and Education Center in Jay, a state-of-the-art facility at the UF Turfgrass Research Environtron on the Gainesville campus, the G.C. Horn Turfgrass Field Laboratory at the Plant Science Research and Education Unit in Citra, and nutrient and water management tests at the Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center in Davie.

The sites in Davie, Jay and Citra each host an annual field day and the UF/IFAS team plans to highlight the 100th anniversary at each event this year, wrapping up with a major celebration at the final event in Citra.

The turfgrass science program was born when Charles V. Piper, an American botanist and agriculturalist, forged a relationship with faculty from the University of Florida Agricultural Experiment Station (FAES) in Gainesville in 1922. Piper was a founding member of the American Society of Agronomy in 1907 and served later as its president. He was chairman of the USGA Green Section from 1920 until his death in 1926.

Welcome New Members

The Florida GCSA welcomes the following new and returning members to the association:

Brien Agler, Class A Director of agronomy, GL Services, Lenexa

Ryan Brown, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, Riverwood Golf Club, Port Charlotte

Rick Carriger, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, Skyview Golf and Country Club, Hernando

Seth Ford, Affiliate Preconstruction/project management, Clear Span Structures, Riviera Beach

Duncan Harris, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, North Palm Beach Country Club, Palm Beach

Evin Huovinen, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, Coral Creek Club, Englewood

Michael Kalman, Affiliate Chief operating officer, TDI Golf/XGD Systems

Thomas Kavookjian, Affiliate Vice-president, Green Nature, Stuart

Chris Keigharn, Student Loxahatchee Club, Port St. Lucie

David Knapton, Class A Golf course superintendent

Jonathan Mason, Class B Golf course superintendent, Champions Golf Club, Stuart

Jim Moller, Class A Golf course superintendent, Viera East Golf Club, Viera

James Moore, Class A Golf course superintendent, Jupiter Country Club, Jupiter

Glen Murry, Class A Director of Agronomy, Black Diamond Ranch, Lecanto

Wesley Parker, Class B Golf course superintendent, Troon, Lakeland

Andrew Rogers, Class A Assistant golf course superintendent, Emerald Dunes Club, West Palm Beach

David Rusho, Class B Golf course superintendent, The Club at Weston Hills, Hollywood

Martin Ryan, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, Concert Golf – Fountains, Lake Worth

Grant Tomecek, Student Spray technician, Chapel Hill Country Club, Chapel Hill

Ian Trott, Affiliate Helena, Wauchula

Taylor Turner-Weaver, Affiliate

Director of sales and marketing, Numerator Technologies, Sarasota

Brian Woods, Class C Assistant golf course superintendent, Naples



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Make the Most of Folks Equipped to Lead Out



Individuals that lead out do so to assist others in their attempt to reach the summit

If you have ever had the occasion to hear GCSAA chief executive officer, Rhett Evans, speak, you are probably aware that he is an avid mountain climber with many successful climbs. I am sure if Rhett reads this article, he will probably cringe at my word choice because I am unfamiliar with the vernacular of that sport. However, Rhett uses his experiences to provide motivation for members of the association as well as staff. Rhett has often shared the expression “leading out,” a term with which I have gained familiarity.

Leading out in terms of mountain climbing refers to those individuals that create the pathway for others to follow as they ascend the mountain. From Rhett’s description, it is an arduous task and can prove, under the harshest conditions, to be quite exhausting. You can probably see where I am headed with this. The individuals that lead out do so to assist others in their attempt to reach the summit.

Nationally and locally, we have many individuals that lead their associations for the betterment of the memberships they serve. You don’t have to look too hard to find numerous examples of individuals who “lead out.” Even in the example of Rhett’s mountain climbing activities, those that lead out still utilize trained guides to reach the goal of the summit. Likewise, those that lead the chapters benefit from services provided by guides that assist them in that effort.

Perhaps that guide comes in the form of a talented peer, or maybe even your state or national association representatives. I am not claiming to be a Sherpa, but with the services and programs provided by GCSAA, I have the resources to assist local chapters enhance their ability to serve their members. Those resources also prove beneficial for members to reach their individual career goals.

Services such as our GCSAA-led strategic planning and board

orientation sessions that I have written about previously, guide chapter leaders with the establishment of achievable goals and the development of a vision for the association. The process also helps create a greater understanding of how the individuals who comprise the board will interact and work together as a team.

Regarding career goals, the education we provide remains a pillar in the foundation of GCSAA service. As I wrote in the last submission for The Florida Green, the modernization of our certification program was a huge undertaking that was intended to make that program more robust and create efficiencies in the process. It remains a challenging proposition to earn the CGCS designation, which will ultimately serve those individuals who successfully complete the program well in their pursuit of advancement within the industry.

Similarly, Florida GCSA executive director Jennifer Bryan has a wealth of knowledge and services she is willing to provide for our chapters. I have heard her discuss the things that she can do for the chapters in Florida to also help the leaders of the local associations reach their goals. If you haven’t discussed with her the services that the Florida GCSA is willing to provide, I would recommend you reach out and discover the many ways she “leads out” for the state.

Jennifer and I are committed to assisting all the individuals who make a living in the golf industry achieve the goals they may have set for themselves. We may not have the need or fashion sense to wear the clothing of a Sherpa, but I guarantee we share the Sherpa’s desire to get you to your summit. I hope you will reach out to either or both of us whenever the need arises. I look forward to the opportunity to serve you on your quest to reach the top of your mountain. ■

- Ralph Dain is GCSAA’s regional representative in Florida



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