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# FIDDLESTICKS COUNTRY CLUB

*Lou and Janet Conzelmann*

## TEAMING UP ON THE LONG MEAN AND THE WEE FRIENDLY

*by Sandra P. Carmouche*

Husband-wife teams are not very common in the golf course operations business, but at Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers, Dale "Lou" Conzelmann and his wife, Janet, have pooled their respective fields of knowledge into a combination that most golf clubs would envy.

Originally interested in becoming a golf pro (he'd been playing golf since he was ten), Lou worked as an assistant pro at several golf clubs, including Palm Aire in Pompano Beach. But after taking a job with a club where he worked both in the pro shop and on the golf course, he decided that he preferred turf management.

He then enrolled in the turf grass management program at Michigan State University and became a golf course superintendent. Janet was a registered nurse when she decided to go back to school. She also attended Michigan State, received a degree in horticulture, and was working toward her masters in plant pathology when the couple moved to Nebraska

"I was looking for someplace I wanted to live," said Lou.

"At the clubs up north, I worked on a ten month contract. When it got slow in the winter, I'd climb the walls."

When the opportunity to work for the Banyon Group at Fiddlesticks arose in May of 1985, Lou took it. "I love it here. This is a great place to live and I think the golf business in Florida is where it's really booming."

Conveniently located in South Fort Myers off Daniels Road near I-75, Fiddlesticks Country Club was developed around a Scottish theme. The three story clubhouse resembles a Scottish castle and incorporates plaid carpet, rich, oak paneling, and a fantastic view from the dining room and bar of the 9th and 18th island greens.

Two championship golf courses, the Long Mean and the Wee Friendly, were designed by golf course architect Ron Garl as part of the 710 acre golf community. One of the most celebrated residents of the community is Bobby Nichols, who represents Fiddlesticks on the

*(cont. on page 45)*



(cont. from page 44)

Senior Pro Tour. And every March, Calvin Peete hosts a pro-am tournament for charity, which is sponsored by Coca Cola.

The Long Mean is ranked 13th this year in Golf Week Magazine's "Florida's 50 Best", which is the highest rating among golf courses in southwest Florida.

One of the dominant features on the Long Mean is the waste areas. "It's a unique look for the golf course and I feel it's important to have them look almost manicured, without having a lot of unwanted growth," Lou says.

The naturally sandy areas contain native plants which include love, fountain, and pampas grasses and sea oats. Lou is hoping to achieve a more clump-type appearance and, toward that end, the waste areas have been thinned out and Janet has bought seed for clump grasses which will be grown in the green house before planting.

But the notion that these waste areas are low maintenance is erroneous. "Because of their proximity to the fairway, they come into play frequently and you can't just let things grow wild. We spend about 60 man hours per week maintaining them."

While Lou is involved with maintaining the golf courses, Janet is managing the landscaping at Fiddlesticks.

"I design a few areas that need to be redone," Jan says, "but basically the landscaping requires maintenance. I plant about 30,000 annuals in the fall and about half that many in the summer."

(cont. on page 46)

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Janet Conzelmann at the entrance to Fiddlesticks.



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*(cont. from page 45)*

Not only is Janet responsible for the landscaping at Fiddlesticks, which includes entrance ways, medians, clubhouse and grounds, sales office, golf course, tennis and pool facilities, she also helps out with the landscaping at the Vintage Country Club, another golf community being developed by the Banyon Group.

When things don't move quickly enough for her at work, she gets involved in outside projects. For instance, when the Riverside school for the handicapped decided to renovate its outdoor recreational facilities, Janet volunteered her services for landscape planning, cost estimation, and advisement.

Having studied and worked in a northern climate, the move to a southern climate would appear to require a major adjustment where plants are concerned. But Janet dispels this idea. "A lot of the things that are grown outdoors here are grown indoors up north."

Likewise, the transition for Lou has been easy. "The cool season grasses are extremely susceptible to fungi disease. Anthracnos, brown patch, fusarium complex, dollar spot, the whole gamut; you had to be on a preventative spray program every two weeks. Here, the bermudagrass grows so fast that it outgrows the disease. But bermudagrass uses more nitrogen and fertilizer and is much more susceptible to insect infestation. Things like mole crickets weren't a problem up north because they couldn't survive the winter."

By far the biggest change for Lou was the difference in seasonal output. "Up north, you had three or four

*(cont. on page 47)*



L to R: Lou Conzelmann, Assistant Kevin Scott and Assistant Terry Wood, #5 Green Long Mean.

(cont. from page 46)

months when you weren't mowing grass. That time was spent repairing equipment. Down here you're going at it twelve months a year and the pace is faster. This is the fastest growing grass I've ever seen. In fact, I tell people if they stand still very long, it'll grow right over their feet."

Lou spends most of his time in the office at the maintenance complex. "At the clubs where I worked previously, I used to get out on a mower, I'd do anything just to see what was going on. But with ordering, billing, and all the paperwork that needs to be done, I haven't had the time to do that here. If I leave for an hour, I have 43 phone messages waiting for me when I get back."

"I have two great assistants," Lou adds. "Terry Wood is in charge of the Long Mean and Kevin Scott has the Wee Friendly. They've done an excellent job."

Lou splits his employees so that Wood and Scott each run their own crew. "But I'm on very good terms with all the employees. I try to satisfy their needs and wants and I don't come in here acting like I'm the big boss, yelling and screaming. I try to treat my employees the way I'd like to be treated."

In order to establish a good working relationship with the members of Fiddlesticks, Lou feels it is important to play golf with them. "It's the best way to make them aware of my programs and ideas, and I get to know them and find out what they want. That way, when we get together for a board meeting or a greens committee meeting, I don't have to go in there cold."

"The Banyon Group also has a Director of Golf Operations, Charlie Knowles. When the membership has a suggestion that require major effort, he makes the decision. but since this is a first-class operation, if the suggestion is worthwhile then we follow through with it."

But the question remains, how do two people who live together, work together?

They both laugh when asked this question.

"We enjoy working together," says Lou. "I don't consider myself to be her boss. She's very efficient and knowledgeable and she doesn't need to be told what to do or when to do it."

"Our working relationship was established before anything else," Janet adds. "We have the same interests and share employee problems. He has good taste in landscaping, which helps me. Lou is easy to get along with. He's a fair person, patient and intelligent. And we compliment each other. He's the relaxed person while I'm more busy."

It's understandable how Fiddlesticks is maintained in superior condition. The professional team of Conzelmann and Conzelmann make it so. ■

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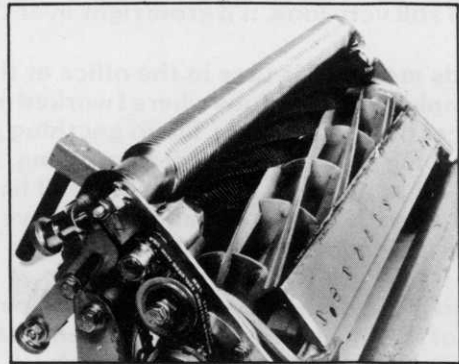
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## DeBRA Introduces "Turf Groomer" Attachment



HOLLYWOOD — DeBRA, North America's largest commercial turf distributor, is introducing a newly patented greens conditioner attachment by Jacobsen that will revolutionize Florida greens maintenance.

The Turf Groomer, an attachment to any of Jacobsen's Green Kings riding greens mower, has resulted in healthier greens and a truer, faster putting surface without lowering the mower's cutting height.

Designed to meet Florida's special greens care needs, the Turf Groomer's design features a front slotted roller with a beveled shape that "puckers" the green surface vegetation, lifting up horizontally-growing stolons. These runners are then sliced by a series of 261 tempered steel knives mounted spirally on a powered knife roller. Each knife actually rotates through a groove of the front slotted roller, slicing the lifted runners so that they can be clipped by the closely-following horizontal reel.

The Turf Groomer's removal of thatch makes the green stand straight, resulting in strong vertical grass supports for the ball and creating a truer, faster putting surface.

DeBRA, whose family-run firm has four Florida outlets, said those utilizing the Turf Groomer attachment have experienced an immediate increase in green speed up to 10 percent or more after just two mowings. He also pointed out that regular use of the Turf Groomer would increase green speed by as much as 25 percent without lowering the mower cutting height. The turf groomer attachment can be dialed on and off on a daily basis as required.

The grooming is extremely efficient as play can resume immediately after using the Turf Groomer, DeBRA explained.

DeBRA is one of two Jacobsen turf product distributors in Florida, and the exclusive distributor throughout South Florida.

DeBRA, which sells and services turf maintenance equipment for individual homeowners, commercial landscapers, golf course superintendents and governmental agencies, is located in Hollywood, Tampa, Ft. Myers and Stuart.





# GOLF TURF NEWS

## Value of Golf Turf to Florida

By T.E. Freeman, C.H. Peacock and B.J. Augustin

According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), Florida leads the nation in the number of new golf courses constructed. Since 1980, the number of new courses opened has ranged between 25 and 30 annually. During the same period, ongoing golf projects, when combining openings, planning, construction, and prospects, have numbered 75 to 80 annually. These numbers are approximately double those of Florida's nearest rival, California. This in itself is indicative of the value of the golfing industry in the state, but just how valuable is it? This issue of GOLF TURF NEWS addresses this question. Such information may be of value in defending the existence of golf courses.

The NGF reported there were 751 golf courses in Florida on January 1, 1983. Their types and numbers were:

Eighteen hole regulation courses	488
Nine hole regulation courses	91
Eighteen hole executive courses	82
Nine hole executive courses	29
Eighteen hole par three courses	10
Nine hole par three courses	41
<b>Total courses</b>	<b>751</b>

A survey conducted by the Everglades Chapter of the Florida Golf Course Superintendent's Association in 1983 showed the following profile for eighteen hole regulation and executive courses:

REGULATION GOLF COURSES	
Acreage	145 acres per course
Maintenance cost	\$306,000 per course annually
Employees	10 per course
Rounds of golf	45,000 per course annually
EXECUTIVE GOLF COURSES	
Acreage	54 acres per course
Maintenance cost	\$156,000 per course annually
Employees	5 per course
Rounds of golf	45,000 per course annually

Although no statistics are available, nine hole courses probably operated about one-half the level and occupy about one-half the land as their 18 hole counterparts. Par three courses are probably about two-thirds the equivalent of an executive course. All host approximately the

same number of rounds (45,000 annually). Thus the estimated totals for all golf courses in the state are as follows:

Total acreage	83,667
Total maintenance cost	\$176,927,000 annually
Total number of employees	5,934
Total rounds of golf	33,795,000 annually

These are impressive figures, but they represent only the tip of the golf-value iceberg. For example, golf course maintenance represents only about one-half the cost of operating the total golf facility i. e. clubhouse, locker rooms, pro shop, restaurants, lounges, etc. The 751 courses in Florida are included in 642 different facilities.

Thus, approximately \$156,000,000 additionally are generated for a grand total of \$332,927,000 to operate and maintain the "golf factories" in Florida. The number of employees must also be adjusted upwards to a total of approximately 10,000 for the 642 facilities. Data on how many other persons make all or a portion of their living by supplying goods and services to golf facilities are not available, but conservatively, they probably number in the thousands.

(cont. on page 50)

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(cont. from page 49)

Land values of golf course vary due to location, but generally courses are situated on some of the most desirable land in given location. The area around them is usually highly developed as either homes, condominiums or resorts. As such, the course itself and surrounding area are most often considered high price real estate and carried on the tax rolls as such. Using a very conservative \$3000 per acre assessment value for golf courses, the total comes to \$251,001,000 for tax purposes. This figure would have to be adjusted downward to account for the fact the approximately ten percent (74 out of 751) of the golf courses in the state are publicly owned and not subject to property taxes. However, this adjustment is more than offset by the additional taxes generated by the value of the total golf facility. Simply stated the taxpayers of Florida benefit greatly from the property taxes paid by privately-owned golf facilities.

The golfing public is the ultimate consumer of the services provided by the golfing facilities. The 1983 NGF golfer profile survey showed that the median expenditure for golfers in the Southeastern United States was \$1280 annually. This cost included green fees and/or dues, equipment, cart rental, clothing and shoes, but not transportation, or meals and beverage consumed while on golf outings. The 1983 edition of FLORIDA STATISTICAL ABSTRACTS (FSA), published by the University of Florida, showed the resident population of Florida to be 10.4 million, 17.3 percent of which played golf. Therefore, based on these figures, there were approximately 1.8 million resident golfers who, assuming median expenditures, spent 2.3 billion dollars a year on golf. In addition to the resident golfer, Florida hosts several million non-resident ones. According to FSA, 39.3 million tourists came to Florida in 1982 and 11.3 percent played golf while here. But, of more significance, 6.2 to 8.7 percent,

depending on the mode of transportation, came specifically to play golf in the sunshine state, i. e., a golfing vacation. How much money did these golfing tourists spend? No precise figures are available, but, according to FSA, the 39.3 million tourists spent 21.5 billion dollars. Assuming the golfing tourists spent their prorata share, and using the lower 6.2 percent figure, this comes to over 1.3 billion dollars spent by tourists on golfing vacations in Florida.

The foregoing gives some idea of the economic impact of golf on Florida's economy. The statistics used are well documented and our interpretation of them is conservative. However, it should be noted they are for the years 1982-83. Because of the lack of documentation, we have not speculated on the impact of golf on the construction and real estate industries. However, in Florida, "golf-front" views with waterfront are the most desirable property for residential and investment purposes.

One final note, in the Southeastern United States, NGF found that over 60 percent of the golfers are either retired, students or homemakers. The less than 40 percent that are employed have a median income of \$33,000. This profile is hardly that of the "idle rich" that many ill-informed individuals perceive golfers to be.

IFAS has responded to the needs of this large industry through its research and extension efforts. Research programs have identified and focused on many areas including new cultivar evaluation, water quality and quantity, and pesticide use evaluation. Extension programs have ranged from state-wide efforts to local chapter meeting seminars. As the industry continues to grow, one of the roles of IFAS will be to maintain a dialogue to identify current needs and assess ongoing projects that directly relate to the golf turf industry. ■

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