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Poa Annua Golf Classic Naples Beach Club & Hotel

by GEORGE and CHARLOTTE JONES
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Poa Annua Golf Classic, Naples Beach Hotel & Club.

*Michael Watkins, General Manager &
George Maxwell, Starter.*

Fabulous is the best way to describe the weekend of the 14th Annual Poa Annua Classic. Those who were able to be there, will have a warm spot in their hearts as they remember special events. Naples Beach Club and Hotel on the Gulf in Naples, Florida is always a most gracious host.

The schedule of events included an educational seminar, FGCSA board meeting, tournaments, and a *Back to the 50's* Banquet and Dance. The Kingston Trio was an added attraction when they appeared that weekend for a benefit concert at the hotel to help feed the hungry in the Naples area.

Golf carts were lined up ready to transport eager contenders to their starting point in the shotgun tournament at 8:00 A.M. on Monday, May 23rd. Golf Course Superintendents and Suppliers Representatives participated in the 14th Poa Annua Classic co-hosting with Naples

Beach Club & Hotel, the Everglades Chapter of the FGCSA and Sponsors.

Just before the tournament began we were introduced to Mr. Henry Watkins, President and owner of Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club. He knew we were doing an article for the Florida Green and gave us names of a few people to interview that could give interesting stories they experienced at the golf course and hotel. He was very gracious, then hurried off to get his golf cart. He was playing in the tournament also.

It looked like a ride at Disney World as we watched the golf carts all take off at the same time. An exciting awakening in the tranquil city of Naples.

While the tournament was in process, we went looking for the first person on our list from Mr. Watkins. His name was George Maxwell. George was in the starters booth. After we explained to George

why we were there, he told us Naples has been his home for 30 years. He has worked for Naples Beach Club for 25 of those years.



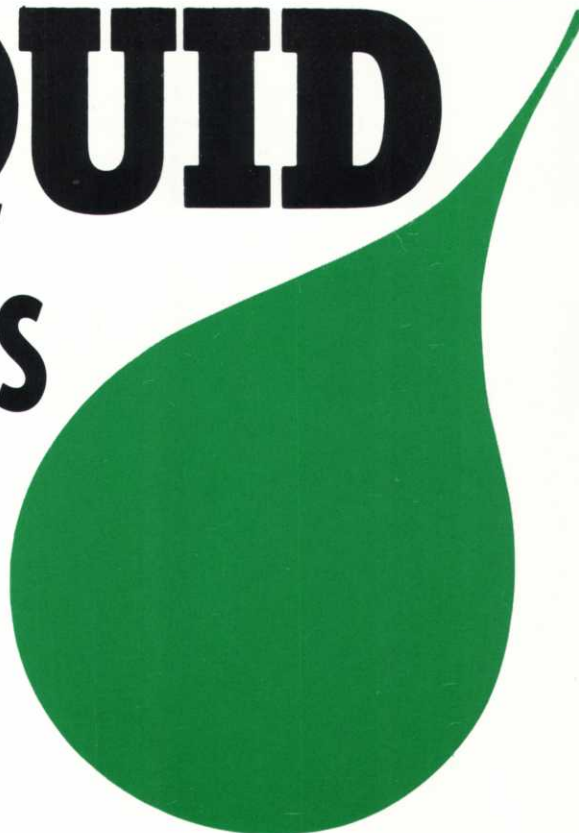
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Jim Duffy, Head Pro & Henry Watkins, President and Owner of Naples Beach Club & Hotel.

We asked George how old the golf course is?

George: It's about 50 years old. Built around 1937 or 1938. Originally 18 holes were built. There was not enough play to keep all 18 open, so they kept the back nine closed.

Florida Green: What was it like when you first came here?

George: This was the only golf course in the area for several years. Now there is 30 for 40 in the Naples area.

When I was 12 years old, I was a caddie here. The first owner I met at that time, was Larry McVail. he also owned the New York Yankees. I remember carrying his bag for nine holes and he told me about three baseball teams he had owned. At first I thought he was just exaggerating, but found out later he wasn't. Lived in the house over there (He pointed south across the road from the starters booth.) Soon after that the Watkins people took over.

The Club Pro, Jim Duffy, and I worked with Mr. Watkins Senior the founder. He has been gone now a few years. His son Henry Jr. took over as President and his grandson Michael is General Manager. They are a fine bunch of people. Its always been a family run organization.

F.G.: The golf course had some changes made a few years ago. What where those changes.?

George: It was completely renovated. Ron Garl the Golf Course Architect was in charge of it. He put

in new mounds, tees, traps, lakes and watering system. It was improved a thousand percent.

F.G.: Do you think it brought more play to the golf course?

George: There are days in winter we run five or six hundred golfers through. It's a popular golf course. The locals like it. It's not the toughest golf course to play. People enjoy playing here. It's a fun course.

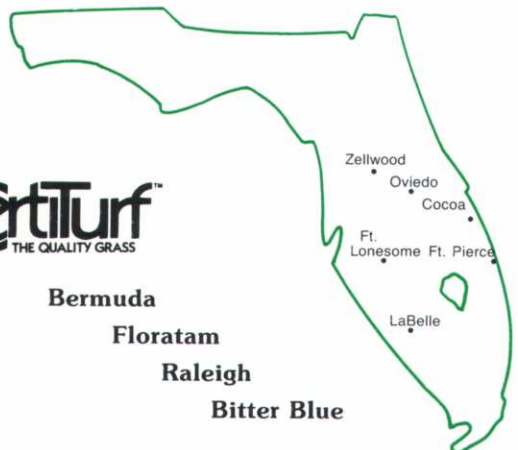
We thanked George for his time and headed for the Pro Shop to meet Jim Duffy the Golf Pro. To our surprise Ron Garl, the architect who did the renovation was there too.

While Jim was finishing taking care of business, we asked Ron if he would discuss the renovation. He kindly obliged:

Ron Garl: We started the renovation plans and program in 1978. We worked on one nine at a time. In October of '81 we had the entire project done. it was a complete remodeling job from start to finish.

F.G: What were some of the changes?

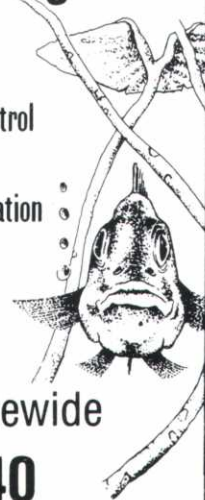
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Ron: Our goal was to improve the golf course, not change the turf. The task of remodeling was to keep the initial character plus add a little challenge to the golf course.

We put in a new automatic irrigation system with new pump stations and made three new lakes.

All the holes stayed in the same place. We changed traps, tees, bunkers and put in new grass. 419 Bermuda on the fairways and 328 Bermuda on the greens.

We are experimenting on the new second putting green with Classic Dwarf. So far we are very pleased with it.

F.G.: Was there anything special you did on the golf course during renovation?

Ron: Yes, instead of using railroad ties to build embankment walls for the greens, we used Rough-sawn timber. Pete Dye kind of brought in the new fad of doing walls with railroad ties. When we did these walls, as far as I know, they were the first walls

actually built that were structural and were built out of Rough-sawn timber.

F.G.: Will it last a long time?

Ron: This is real good wood and being pressure treated, should last a long time. It's still new in the field. Most of it is on the greens and gets watered regularly and rained on. We don't really know what the longevity is. Tim Kris with Fox Lake Construction, Inc. in Palm Harbor, Florida did a super job building these walls.

F.G.: Did anything unusual happen while the remodeling was going on?

Ron: When we were digging one of the lakes, we uncovered what used to be the dumping area 40 years ago. We dug up old whiskey bottles and all kinds of old stuff.

F.G.: In your renovation, you seem to have a strong feeling toward keeping the tradition of its era alive.



Girl, a stray dog wandered in the pro shop 13 years ago. Found a good home.

Ron: We felt it was important to keep the golf course in the tradition that it was initially designed. Not to just come in and make it a new modern golf course and do a lot of things that are in vogue now. We feel like the traditions are a real part of the game. Just because you remodel, it doesn't mean you give it a new taste or whole new feel. This golf course has its own character that needs to stay through the years so people can come back and say: 'This is what a golf course built in the 30's and 40's in Flor-

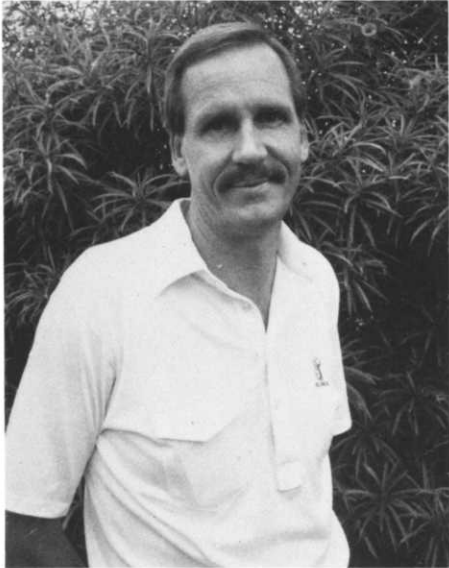
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Ron Garl, Architect.

ida was like. 'They don't all have to disappear and all look alike. I'm not sure that all the fancy stuff we are doing today is correct anyway. Maybe they are going to look back in 100 years and say: 'You know, those traditional courses were really a lot better golf courses.' I think the trend will actually go back that way.

Jim Duffy walked up to us as we ended the interview with Ron. We could sense a genuine friendship between these two professional people. Ron had to leave and we continued our talk with Jim. He has been the Pro at Naples Beach Club since 1958 and Head Pro since 1965.

Jim Duffy: During renovation Ron was here every week making sure everything was done right. With Ron, we just turned him loose; told him what we wanted. He did exactly what we thought and



Charlotte & George Jones, writers for *The Florida Green*.

hoped would turn out. He built the golf course to suit the type of play we have. He made a lot of subtle changes. For example the ninth green was a double tier, he left it a double tier. A couple of greens were left the same shape.

F.G.: Is the golf course harder to play now?

Jim: It was much easier before it was done than it is now. More difficult for the handicapper but not too difficult for the average player.

Most of our people here in the winter are retired and they don't want a back-breaker course. Here they have a competitive golf course, finish in a reasonable length of time, and still have a good time playing.

The golf course is more playable now. it's also easier for our superintendent Dick Naccarato to do his job.

When we remodeled the golf course we also remodeled the restaurant. it used to be called The Old 19th Hole. Now it's called the Brassie.

F.G.: You have been very successful with major tournaments!

Jim: There have been so many major Florida events played here. Florida Seniors Golf Association, Florida PGA, South Florida Open, Southern Golf Association, Florida Seniors Open, Florida State Womens Senior Golf Association, Poa Annuu Classic, two Pro Tournaments, and a lot of national organizations. We will average 60,000 plays this year.

F.G.: Being here on the Gulf you can have some storms rush in on you.

Jim: Last year, 1987, just before the Poa Annual Classic, we had a tornado touch down. We lost 45 trees and the fence around the tennis court came down.

F.G.: We heard about that and you had a lot of clean up help from some of the FGCSA members here for the tournament.

Jim: That's right, and the tournament went on as scheduled. The

weather can cause many problems. In the last five years we have lost nearly 400 trees, mostly Eucalyptus. You can't afford to lose trees on a golf course.

When our interview ended with Jim he excused himself to take care of customers. We talked to two young men that worked in the Pro Shop. They were Danny Bracy and Larry Gantzer. Both of them have been working at the club for eight years or more. Larry introduced us to Girl, a stray dog that wandered in 13 years ago and just decided to call the Pro Shop home. Everyone loves Girl.

Being there for the Poa Annuu and experiencing the hospitality shown by all the staff of Naples Beach Hotel and Club, made us feel lucky to be part of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association. This is one of the benefits of the profession. Along with an educational seminar, it's a way to relax, renew friendships, and get to know someone new in the business and give them words of encouragement. (We all need this now and then.)

The best thing about this event was seeing families together enjoying the pool, a swim in the Gulf, collecting shells, playing in the sand, or just relaxing together and having fun. Superintendents having unpredictable hours are not able to spend the time with their family they would like to. The whole family can come and enjoy this event together. If you didn't bring your family this year, do so next year. They will love you for it! It's a great mini vacation for all!

Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Course is unique in many ways. It's not just a hotel and golf course. it offers guest the most relaxed and tranquil atmosphere. A memorable vacation or week-end getaway. It's one of the only places you have golf on one side of the road and a beach on the other. Gulf or golf, take your pick! Guests can park their car and can walk to the beach or to the tees.

It was another super Poa Annuu. Special thanks to all of you that helped to make it so. We appreciate the accommodations and friendliness shown by the entire staff of Naples Beach Club and Hotel, Dick Naccarato, Golf Course Superintendent; Jim Duffy, Head Pro; Everglades, the Host Chapter, all our Sponsors and Volunteers. WHAT A FABULOUS WEEKEND! ■

A Step Back in Time

NAPLES BEACH HOTEL & GOLF CLUB

Imagine having the unique experience of being able to step back in time to 1880! A time when Florida had only been a state for 40 years! We could watch the exuberance, frustration and joy of General John Williams as he was building his three story hotel on the beach on the Gulf of Mexico. He called it the Naples Hotel.

The General's joy was short-lived. Soon after the Naples Hotel was built, he went into bankruptcy. You can imagine the hurt and defeat the General must have felt when he had to sell out to a newspaperman named Mr. Haldeman. (Mr. Haldeman was to become a City of Naples founding father.)

It wasn't easy for the hotel because the clientele were mostly of the gentlemen class that enjoyed hunting and fishing. They had to travel 40 miles by boat from Ft. Myers to get to the remote village.

Naples Hotel was sold twice again and as time passed it was inherited by three sisters. The sisters, not being interested in the hotel business, put it up for sale. Roads were built by then and travel was made easier by automobile.

The year was 1946 in our time travel, and this was when Mr. Henry Watkins, Sr. saw the hotel. He was a defense con-

tractor for the Army during World War II and owned a toy manufacturing business in Ohio. He wanted to sell out and move his family south into the sunshine.

Can you see the expression on Mr. Watkins' face when he found the hotel deed also included more than 20,00 acres when he inquired into its purchase. Three-fourths of the platted city of Naples! You can almost feel his determination in finding investors. When he did, a partnership was formed and the deal was made along with a new adventure for the Naples Hotel.

A few blocks north of the hotel was an abandoned 18-hole golf course. Mr. Watkins, Sr. leased it from its owners, the Joslin family of Jergens Lotion fame. The first nine holes were restored in 1946 for use by himself and his hotel guests. At that time it was the only golf course in that part of the state. Later the back nine was restored and in 1950 he and his partners bought the property outright.

Mr. Watkins then moved his offices from the old Naples Hotel into the existing two-story clubhouse.

The partnership disposed of its extensive real estate holdings in Naples and Mr. Watkins bought sole ownership of the hotel and golf course properties. He start-

ed adding to the hotel complex and by 1953 completed construction of a two-story 35-room structure. This marked the start of the Naples Beach Hotel and Golf Club.

Mr. Watkins operated both properties for a time, but eventually all operations were transferred several blocks up the street at the new location and the 100-year-old original Naples Hotel was demolished.

New sections of the Naples Beach Hotel have been added every couple of years until now the complex has six residential buildings including the five-story tower, two-story main wing, two-level patio wing, a five-floor penthouse, two-level cabana wing, and the nine-story Watkins wings.

Mr. Watkins Sr., active in the resort until 1978, passed away in 1981 at the age of 92. He would have been very proud of his family for now the role of president is handled in the same tradition by his son Henry Watkins Jr. A third-generation Watkins, his grandson Michael, serves as General Manager.

As we step back into the present, we watched a humble beginning of Naples Hotel grow into the "Grand Lady" she is today. The NAPLES BEACH HOTEL AND GOLF CLUB reigns in a class by itself. ■



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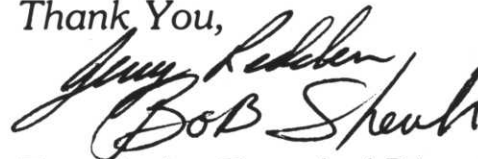
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Everglades Golf Course Supt's Assn.

On behalf of the membership of the Everglades chapter, allow me to extend a special thank you to all the supplier agencies that donated time and money to the poa annua this year. Without your help we couldn't host such a successful tournament each year!

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1988 POA ANNUA





CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations went to Palm Beach Chapter for bringing home the trophy! This was done through the team effort of Dick Blake, Glen Klauk, Ken Anderson and Robert Drake.

Central Fl. Chapter placed 2nd and 3rd place team was Everglades Chapter.

Low Gross superintendents were Roy MacDonald and Glen Klauk. Low Net superintendents were Scott Zakany and Dick Blake.

The Suppliers Division was won by Will Corder, Low Gross; Zakany and Dick Blake.

Everyone that entered the competition is a winner. What better way is there than to support our own profession!

Congratulations to all!