



BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

**D**eer Creek Golf Club opened in 1971, and in the early 1980's played host to the PGA Mazda Classic. Current owner George Valassis made a decision in 1993 to upgrade the golf course using the design skills of longtime friend and old high school classmate, Arthur Hills.

Nearby canal excavation work provided Hills with additional soil to use in creating elevation changes seldom found on courses in western Broward County.

Initially the project was to be limited to a renovation of the greens and tees. After several discussions with the architect, Mr. Valassis seized the opportunity to modernize the drainage system and create a unique design to replace the old layout.

The excitement and anticipation of the project received a crushing blow when the



*Native Florida specimen trees are complemented with the artistic mounding on the eighteenth green.*

young superintendent, Andy Clark, was killed in a plane crash just days before the construction was to start.

Deer Creek turned to another young superintendent to help make the dream of a new Deer Creek become a reality.

Robert Klitz had been a part of Inverrary Country Club history for 11 years. Bob served his first three years

under superintendent Brad Kocher and his assistant, David Demmery. Bob was promoted to assistant superintendent under David Oliver and remained in that capacity for three and one half years. Then, five and one half years ago, Bob was named superintendent of the 54-hole complex.

"In this business, 11 years in one place

is rare," Bob explained. "The goals and expectations of people and places change. I left Inverrary on good terms. It was just time for me to make a change. The only regret I have is the tragic circumstances which afforded me the opportunity to come to Deer Creek.

"I was very impressed with the commitment of Mr. Valassis to build and

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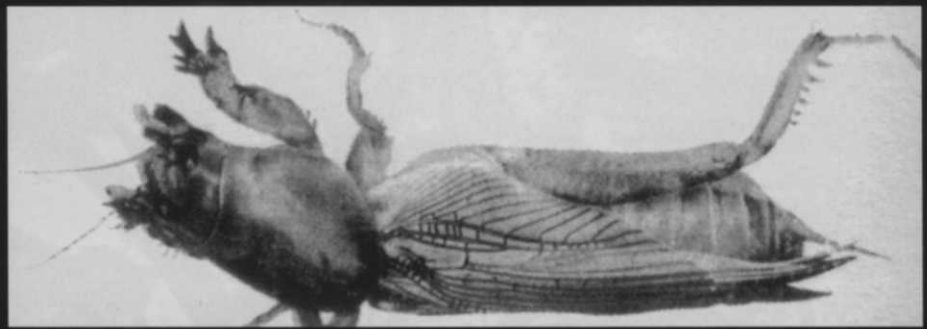
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*Primary influence was placed on utilizing native trees in the remodeling of the golf course.*

**“There is a look and a level of excellence that we are trying to achieve and maintain. Right now we are cutting the greens at 11/64ths, which is yielding speeds of between eight and nine consistently.”**

operate a first class club. I think the thing that really sold me on this position was the sincerity and reputation of Dean Horn, president of Franklin Golf Properties.

“Dean came up through the ranks here at Deer Creek, and he has always been demanding in his expectations, and that’s the way I like to run my operation.

“I came on board in August of ’93 and had the challenge of getting the course ready for a Nov. 1 opening. I can’t say enough about the job that Alan MacCurrach of MacCurrach Golf Construction did in holding the project together during the difficult times before I arrived. I brought three people with me from Inverrary.

“We joined a veteran staff that has service ranging from three to nine years. They are all doing a great job.”

At the present time, the club is using a 1 & 10 tee start at 7:30 a.m. to accommodate the heavy play from December through April. They calculated that the

double-tee start permits at least 20-30 more players per day.

“We hand-mow the greens with five walking mowers daily so the 7:30 start is manageable. We also blow off all the cart paths and wipe down all the tee signs and ball washers daily.

“There is a look and a level of excellence that we are trying to achieve and maintain. Right now we are cutting the greens at 11/64ths, which is yielding speeds of between eight and nine consistently.

“Heights of cut and green speeds can be a very controversial topic. Low heights of cut are not necessarily the only way to produce acceptable or desirable green speeds.

“Grooved or solid rollers can make a difference as well as verticutting, vertigrooming, top dressing and speed rolling programs. So, comparing only heights of cut becomes pretty academic.

“Our goal is to maintain ‘fast’ greens to satisfy our clientele. We’re being a little



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conservative as we nurse these new greens through their first winter, but it will pay dividends down the road. It will be interesting to see how we do as we progress into our first full growing season this summer.”

Every course has its own set of unique management challenges. Bob's biggest concern right now on the young turf is wear from traffic.

“My assistant and I are kept pretty busy right now doing some creative traffic control. Fifty percent of the problem comes from the play and the other 50 percent is self-inflicted by our own equipment's routine travel patterns.”

Deer Creek shares a typical soil profile with many south Florida courses - a few feet of muck on top of limestone bedrock.

The new design helps to drain the course better, but presents another consideration when using pesticides.

“I have always been a proponent of the theory that ‘less is better’ when it comes to using chemicals. Because water tables are kept high by Broward County to suppress saltwater intrusion through the canal systems, I am very careful about what, when, and where we apply products.

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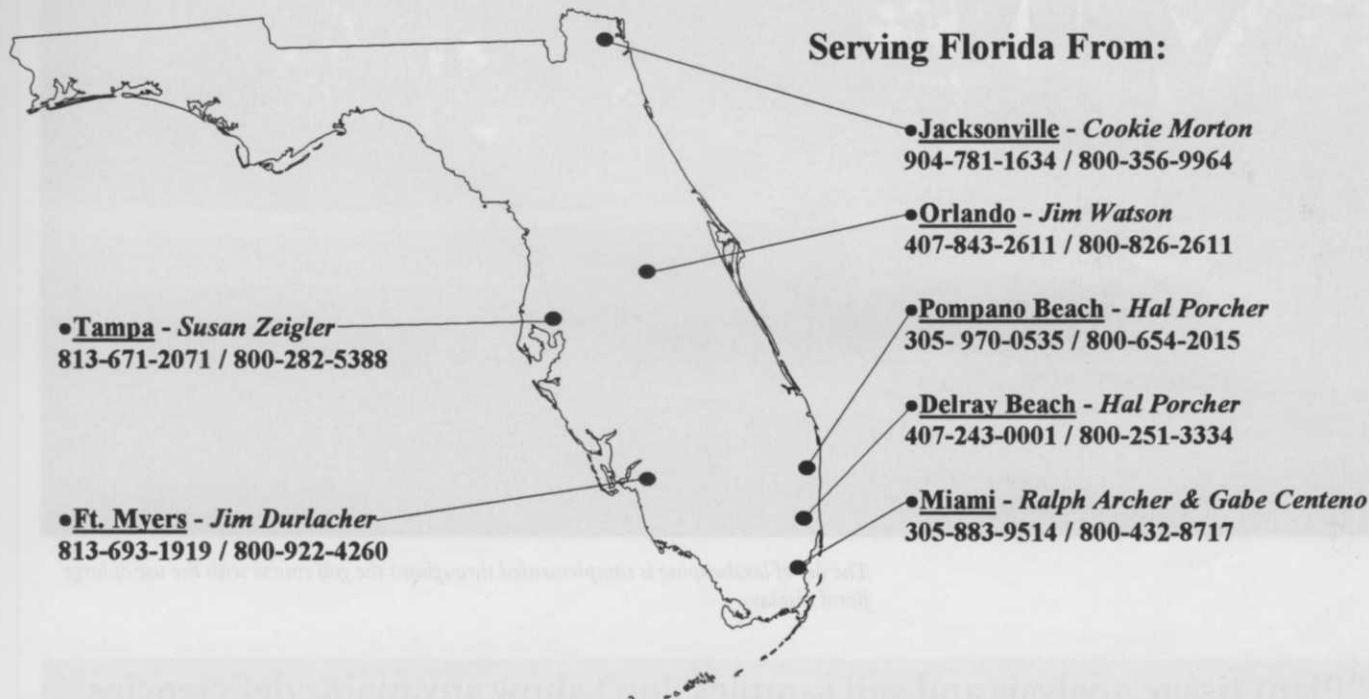
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**“Plant tissue analysis and soil samples don’t show any major deficiencies compared to surrounding areas. These areas did yield some high nematode counts. However, because of our excellent fairway drainage, I avoid using any nematocides on the fairways.”**

“All boom spraying is done either by me or my assistant. I do train a couple of other responsible people to apply products with back sprayers to treat severe weedy areas.

“A conscientious operator can do a good job of keeping problem areas under control. It can be a little labor intensive, but we use less chemicals which is cost effective and more environmentally responsible.”

In keeping with Bob’s desire to use the minimum amount of chemicals on the golf course, he has been pleased with the results of one of the new biological mole cricket control products called Proact. Proact is a liquid suspension containing a patented nematode, *Steinernema scapterisci*. The nematode can survive

for up to 13 weeks even without finding a host mole cricket. When the nematode does infect a mole cricket, death occurs usually within 24 to 48 hours.

“I was involved in some of the research and development of the product when I was at Inverrary,” Bob explained. “We were able to clean up some chronic areas that usually had to be sodded each year to repair the damage.

“Oddly enough, they could only find one or two infected mole crickets in their traps after the application. We have applied the product here to about 30 acres. We made applications on the tee tops, around the greens and bunkers, and we striped some of the problem fairways.

“There are a couple of isolated areas on the course that have not responded to

grow - in as well as we would have liked. The turf in these areas seems to thin out and get chlorotic very easily. They appear to be areas that were cut lower than original grade during the re-contouring of the holes.

“Plant tissue analysis and soil samples don’t show any major deficiencies compared to surrounding areas. These areas did yield some high nematode counts. However, because of our excellent fairway drainage, I avoid using any nematocides on the fairways.

“We should be able to outgrow that type of damage with our cutting heights and fertility levels. It is still a mystery we are trying to solve.”

“Whenever you make a job or career change, you face a lot of new challenges.



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## Suggestions to improve golf course superintendent's image at the local level

*Editor's Note:* At a recent South Florida chapter meeting, Bob was asked to play devil's advocate to Tom Mascaro's presentation about what GCSAA does for the superintendent. Bob came up with six suggestions about what superintendents can do for their image at the local level.

BY BOB KLITZ, CGCS

1. Offer area high schools and vocational schools your services to provide information regarding job opportunities in the golf course management industry. This information can be provided through job fairs, career days, or other school sponsored activities.

2. Area community groups are frequently looking for guest speakers for luncheons, meetings and various functions. Check newspapers or local Chamber of Commerce for listings of groups that do meet on a regular basis. Offer your time to speak about the golf industry, home lawn and landscape care, or other environmental issues.

3. Handle your interactions with golfers, members, clubhouse staff, management, and employees with a professional attitude and manner.

4. Establish an interactive relationship with someone in the media. Sportswriters, television reporters, local newspaper editors or columnists, environmental writers for area papers all would be worthwhile contacts to provide with interesting and helpful information..

5. Continue to operate your maintenance facility in a clean, organized, safe, and environmentally beneficial manner.

6. Continue to provide your employees with the latest safety equipment and training available. Be sure they realize how to operate and use all of their equipment in a professional manner. Remember that their actions are a direct reflection of their training.

These suggestions come from a superintendent who is very busy nurturing the new turf at Deer Creek. But he is also working on long range projects for the complete modernization of the golf course which includes grading and repaving of the maintenance compound. There are also plans for new storage bins, equipment wash down area, pesticide fill station, and a separate pesticide storage area. Bob Klitz and Deer Creek - a man and a golf course both facing the challenges and adapting to the changes of their new beginnings.

Working with Dean, Mr. Valassis, and a good crew has made the change easier, but I also have to thank my fellow superintendents for their help.

"Since we have been open, I have hosted three groups of different superintendents to come and play Deer Creek. Without exception, I have come away from those outings with tips and suggestions that have helped make a difference in the course.

"Some are very dramatic like the tip from Bill McKee, who noticed scalping of the tops of the new mounds.

"Bill told me that Dick Gray had solved the same problem on his course by replacing the grooved rollers on his slope - and rough - mowers with solid rollers. I tried it, and that equipment change raised the height of cut just enough to eliminate the scalping.

"Other ideas may have had a smaller