



Laurel Oak Country Club

Everybody Knows What's Going On

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

Laurel Oak Country Club is a 36-hole golf and residential complex carved out of former ranch lands in eastern Sarasota County. Located a few miles east of I-75 on Bee

Ridge Road, the gated Laurel Oak community nestled itself among the native oaks that dotted the landscape and planted a few more over the years.

The Radnor Corporation developed the property and commissioned the Gary Player Design Company to design both courses. The West Course was built in 1989 and the East Course was opened in 1995. With Laurel Oak approaching total build-out, the Radnor company is slowly phasing out and the Laurel Oak members are preparing to take over full ownership of the golf club.

They should know what they're getting. Mack Baugh, CGCS, man-

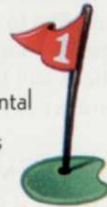
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Mack Baugh, CGCS

Originally from: Heth
Arkansas.

Family: Wife, Susan. Son, Rhett

Education: Arkansas State University 1964-66. U. S. Navy 1966-70. A.S. Golf Course Operations, Lake City Community College 1972.

Employment history: 1989 - present Laurel Oak Country Club; 1974 - 1989 Superintendent Longboat Key Golf Club, Sarasota, FL; 1973-74 Point. Alexis Golf & Racquet Club, Tarpon Springs, FL; 1973 - Magnolia Valley CC, New Port Richey, FL.

Professional affiliations: Suncoast GCSA - Founding member. First vice president and second president. Currently on the Board of Directors, Education Chairman. 1998 Suncoast Scramble Committee. FTGA - Served on the Board of Directors. Scholarship and Research Funding Cochairman in 1981. GCSAA - Member since 1973. Certified since 1979. FGCSA - Member since inception.

Honors/Awards: 1997 FGCSA President's Award.

People who have influenced your life and career: My father for his great work ethic. My mother for her kindness to people. The Navy and all my school teachers who taught me self discipline. My son who made me so very proud when he decided to get into the business. My peers, from whom I learn something almost daily. All of my "ex-assistants": Larry Edwards, Bruce Allison, Jerry Monley, Tom Norton, Jim Nyers, Jim Lamb, Al Steichen and most recently Keith Einwag, who just took the head superintendent's job at Lone Palm CC in Lakeland. Also my East and West Course superintendents, Ronnie Ford and newly promoted, Dwayne Carter.

How did you get into the business: Our postmaster in my hometown in Arkansas was an avid golfer. I watched him hit balls in our farm fields and fell in love with the game. My parents belonged to the Meadowbrook CC in West Memphis Arkansas. I went to work for Bonnie Harper the pro at the club and I knew I wanted to get into golf some way. I was not good enough to go on tour and I didn't want to be a club pro or teacher. So, after I got out of the Navy I went to Lake City Community College and it is all history from there on.

Goals: My immediate goal is to make the transition as the Golf/Landscape Manager of Laurel Oak as the members assume full ownership of the club. **Philosophy:** Treat people the way you would like to be treated. **Advice:** Care about your employees. To prospective superintendents, develop a thick skin to take criticism. On the other hand there will be times when you see work and dedication pay off when a members says, "Everything's great! Keep up the good work!"

Memorable moments: My parents' deaths. My son Rhett's graduation from Lake City in May 1997. Catching a 10-lb., 2-oz. largemouth bass on March 6, 1998.

Hobbies and interests: Golf. Bass fishing. Greyhound racing. We have a greyhound called CharlyMack Fast racing in Tampa and St. Petersburg. Watching people, the Tampa Bay Bucs, the Arkansas Razorbacks and sports in general.

ager of golf course and landscape operations for Laurel Oak, has probably the best communication program I've ever seen, from training newly hired employees to green committee orientation videos and maintenance facility tours for the members. As we find ourselves in the rapidly expanding information age, I found that Mack and his staff are way ahead in the business of keeping their owners and members informed about what's going on in their part of the operation.

Baugh's communication strategy tends to be proactive rather than reactive, and some of it is as subtle as the road signs that tell residents and visitors that Laurel Oak uses reclaimed irrigation water to conserve natural resources, or the reminder to be watchful of the many wildlife inhabitants that share the green spaces and roads with the human residents, or the sign that simply tells folks where the maintenance complex can be found.

If there is a member who doesn't know where Baugh's office is located, they simply have chosen not to visit. The maintenance facility hosted a series of open-house tours to show the members all the equipment necessary to maintain the two courses and the common landscape grounds. In addition, Baugh gets to show the environmentally friendly and effective covered degradation complex that had to be built back in 1988 to win the



The feathered and furry residents of Laurel Oak appreciate this reminder to vehicle operators. Photo by Joel Jackson.



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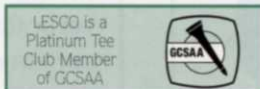
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A large native area highlights the 157-yard, par-3 7th hole on the West Course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

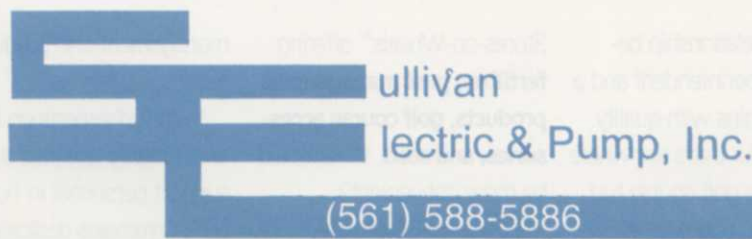
permits necessary for the project to get off the ground. The roofed-over, twin open concrete vaults filled with gravel and sand allow for the collection, filtration and microbial breakdown of all equipment and pest control rinse waters collected by sumps in the mix and load

and wash down sites.

Prior to the open house tours, Baugh and his staff filmed a video of the greens aerification process to show to the green committee.

“The video displayed in detail the various types of aerifiers and tines used in

aerification and what each one was used for and why,” Baugh said. “It also explained the important role of the equipment technicians in setting up the equipment and making crucial periodic adjustments. We even showed how different operators had their own styles and



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Laurel Oak CC

Location: Sarasota.

Ownership: In transition to member-owned.

Playing policy: Private.

36 holes: West Course - Par 72 at 6676 yards. Course Rating 72.3 Slope Rating 129. East Course - Par 72 at 6862 yards. Course Rating 73.2 Slope Rating 128.

Designed by: Gary Player Design Co. Constructed by: Wadsworth Golf Construction of the Southeast.

Opened: West Course, August 1989. East Course, April 1995.

Management: Bob Weber - general manager; Bob Intriери, PGA Master Professional - director of golf; Rudy Hanisch - club president; Don Rettinger - Green Committee chairman; Mack Baugh, Certified Golf Course Superintendent - golf and landscape operations manager.

Possible Future Renovations/Projects: Rebuild 1,500 linear feet of wooden bulkheads. Renovate fairways and roughs of the East Course to remove common bermudagrass infestation.

Acreage under maintenance: 250 acres.

Greens: 6 acres, average size: 6,000 sq. ft. Tifdwarf; cut: .125-.140 (summer) .160-.210 (winter); overseeding: none; green speed goals: 9.5-10.5 (East Course) 8.5-10.0 (West Course).

Tees: 12 acres Tifgreen 328 (West Course) Tifway 419 (East Course); cut: .500; overseeding: none

Fairways: 64 acres Tifway 419; cut: .500-.750; overseeding: none.

Roughs: 168 acres Tifway 419; cut: 1.0 (summer), 1.75 (winter); overseeding: none.

Waterways/Lakes/Ponds: 46 acres managed by Florida Environmental Consultants.

Irrigation: Source - Reclaimed water. Gator Pumping Modules pumping stations.

Staff: Total 49 including superintendent and landscape/common grounds crew; 2 superintendents: Ronnie Ford and Dwayne Carter; 4 mechanics; 2 pest control techs; 2 irrigation techs; administrative/clerical: Laurie Brown.

Special or unusual conditions: Blue-gray clay subsoil throughout the West Course. Ground can be as hard as concrete sometimes. East Course has common bermudagrass infestation on 13 holes. This year with the El Niño conditions, managing the thin bermuda turf was not fun.

Interesting or unusual features: Two people were found living in a homemade cave on the property during construction. Wetland area on the West Course was formerly the watering hole for cattle during the ranching days of the property

Maintenance equipment: Greens-Toro 1000 walkers year-round. Tees-Toro 3000s, 3100s & 3200s triplex mowers. Fairways: Toro 3000s, 3100s & 3200s triplex mowers on the East Course. Toro 6500 Lightweight 5-gang mowers on the West Course. Roughs: Toro 6500 5-gang mowers.

Mix/Load/Washdown practices: All rinsate is collected and contained in a pesticide degradation holding tank. This roofed-over facility is unique in the industry.

Stewardship - We have applied for the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Laurel Oak annually hosts a National Audubon Society Christmas bird count — 69 species have been identified. Within the confines of the Laurel Oak gated community there is a large, resident, white-tailed-deer population that cannot easily exit the property. Sometimes the deer graze a little too often on the residents' landscaping.

finesse with the equipment. Each step in the process was explained so the members could see the time, effort and coordination required from start to finish. They were really amazed at how complex the entire process was."

It was out of that video presentation that the maintenance tours were born so every member could have the opportunity to see what really goes on in maintaining a golf course.

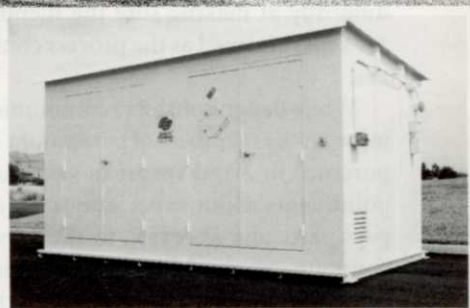
"After the green committee took the tour and started talking about all the things they learned, other members indicated they wanted to take the tour also," Baugh said. "Except for any recent members, we have hosted everybody that has had an interest. Of course that's great, because now they can give informed answers when people start asking questions in the clubhouse. They put out a lot of little fires for us before they get started."

Beyond those formal presentations and club newsletter announcements on upcoming projects on the course, Baugh and his superintendents make it a point



Just part of the large white-tailed deer herd residing in Laurel Oak. Photo by Mack Baugh.

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If we get word from someone — either staff or a member — that someone is unhappy about something, we look them up or call them as soon as possible to address their concern.

We don't want misinformation circulating, so we try to respond to them quickly.

This aquatic planting on No. 3 East provides cover for aquatic and terrestrial critters and it looks great too! Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

to talk to the members during their daily rounds. It may be just a casual greeting and conversation or it may be a deliberate search for a member who has voiced a concern or has a question about some-

thing on the courses. Baugh always returns resident and member phone calls promptly and follows up on questions they may have on landscape issues.

“If we get word from someone —

either staff or a member — that someone is unhappy about something, we look them up or call them as soon as possible to address their concern. We don't want misinformation circulating, so we try to respond to them quickly,” he noted.

One of Baugh's most important priorities right now is being the communication link between the developer and the members as the transition of ownership of the club takes place. Baugh works diligently at making sure the members are kept informed as the process continues.

While Baugh considers communicating with the members of paramount importance to avoid surprises and disappointments about expectations, he also pays particular attention to the lines of communication within the department. Like so many clubs in today's marketplace, the Laurel Oak staff has a large number of Hispanic workers. Using bilingual training videos, operator manuals and equipment decals, Baugh and his superintendents team up new hires with experienced operators for training.

“We put the new employee with a



Wood Storks, Great White Herons and White Ibis line up for breakfast. Photo by Mack Baugh.