



Interlachen Country Club

Sanctuary in the City

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

The Interlachen Country Club in Winter Park is an ideal example of the positive impact a golf course can have on the environment in an urban setting. Once a 300-acre swamp that spawned seasonal smoky muck fires in the city, the same site is now a Certified Audubon Sanctuary.

With muck deposits too deep to be developed for housing, the swamp was bypassed and surrounded by the urban growth of Winter Park. But summer thunderstorms, with their ever-present lightning, would invariably ignite a smoldering muck fire each year and the neighborhoods would have to endure the smoke and haze until it burned itself out. That all changed in 1983.

In 1983 a group of members from the Country Club of Orlando bought the land to establish another private



Stuart Leventhal, CGCS

Originally from: Natick, Mass. Moved to Florida at age 5. Family: wife, Roslyn; son, Harrison (11).

Education: B.A., criminal justice, University of Central Florida, 1979. courses in ornamental horticulture, Valencia Community College, 1985.

Employment history: 1972-79: Part-time and full-time crew member while in high school and college, Wedgefield GC, Orlando; 1980-82: superintendent, Dubsdread GC, City of Orlando; 1982-85: superintendent, Rolling Hills CC, Longwood; 1985-present: superintendent, Interlachen CC, Winter Park.

Professional affiliations and awards: FGCSA, GCSAA, FTGA. President of Central Florida Chapter 1991-93; Mid-Florida Turfgrass Conference Committee; Larry Kamphaus/Crowfoot Open Committee; Host of Annual Central Florida/FTGA Research Fund Raiser. "On my 15th anniversary at Interlachen, the club presented me with two framed pictures of the golf course, one signed by the members and the other signed by the staff. As the senior employee at the club, it was a very sincere and touching gesture, which I greatly appreciate."



Mentors: "Golf course architect **Lloyd Clifton** was a consultant for the city of Orlando when I was at Dubsdread. He connected all the dots for me and tied all my practical experiences in the field and all my theoretical education in the classroom together. **My dad** was the general manager at Wedgefield G.C. and let me work on the golf course which opened the way to a future career path. In my youth, it didn't register that being a golf course superintendent could be the rewarding career that it turned out to be. After graduation and the reality of a career in criminal justice and/or social work set in, I chose to capitalize on my experiences on the golf course. I'm sure glad I did."

Goals: "I have achieved two career goals so far. The first was to become a certified superintendent. The second was to make the Interlachen C.C. a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, which was accomplished this year thanks to the hard work of Katie Cox, our environmental technician, and the support of our members."

Advice and Philosophy: "Always be progressing with course conditions and personal growth. Be involved with your members and the other department heads at your club. Communicate, communicate, communicate."

Hobbies and interests: Golf, tennis and sailing.

club since the CC of Orlando was getting so crowded that enjoyment and access of golf and the other amenities was getting harder and harder.

Two years and 1.5 million yards of fill later, the Interlachen County Club opened its doors.

Interlachen literally means "among the lakes," and golf course architect Joe Lee generated the fill by digging lakes and ponds on nearly every hole on the course. The fine, silty sand from under the muck layer was used to cap the muck deposits and form the mounding for the greens, tees and fairways. It was not the best soil for drainage, but it was all he had to work with. Even that negative feature would have a positive aspect for the environment later on.

So the most dramatic and obvious impact that Interlachen's development had on the area was to end the annual muck fires. Future impacts would be more subtle, but nonetheless practical and positive for wildlife and the human beings who enjoyed the club. Credit for those improvements goes not only to the superintendent Stuart Leventhal and his staff, but also to the members of Interlachen for embracing and supporting those efforts.

Leventhal has been the superintendent of Interlachen since its doors opened. He arrived at the club after tours of duty at Orlando's Dubsdread Municipal Golf Course and the Rolling Hills Country Club in Longwood. Leventhal cut his teeth on the golf business by working at the Cape Orlando Golf Club in east Orange County where his father was the general manager. Cape Orlando, which later became the Wedgefield Golf Club, was home to many NASA folks who lived in Orange County and commuted to Titusville and Cape Kennedy.

From 1972 to 1979 Leventhal worked on the course as a part-time employee during his last two years of high school and then became a full-time crew member while he attended the University of Central Florida where he received his B. A. in criminal justice. Leventhal says of his days at Wedgefield, "At that time our profession was not as proactive as it

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The Interlachen Country Club

Location: Winter Park

Ownership: Member-owned private country club, 18 holes.

Yardage: 6,893 yards; par 72; course/slope rating: 73.4/138

Design: Joe Lee; constructed by Steve Nugent; opened November, 1975

Management: George Williams, club president; Robert Stanford, green chairman; Pete Albe, club manager; Jay Kennedy, head golf professional

Acreage: 110 acres under maintenance; total property is 270 acres.

Greens: Total 3 acres of Tifdwarf, average size 6,000 sq ft; HOC: 1/8" year round and 3/32" for special events; overseed: Penneagle bentgrass @ 2 lbs./1000 sq ft with Sabre Poa trivialis @ 9 lbs/1,000 sq ft; green speed goal: fast 9.0 daily with 10.5 for special events.

Tees: 2.5 acres of Tifway II; HOC: 3/8"-7/16"; overseeded: perennial rye @ 20 lbs/1000 sq ft; collar HOC: 1/4".

Fairways: 30 acres of Tifway II; HOC: 7/16"; not overseeded; roughs: 70 acres of Tifway II; HOC: 1-1/4"; not overseeded.

Bunkers: 67 bunkers with E. R. Jahna's 37J or 37F sand. Mechanically rake with Smithco bunker rake with leaf rake attachment. Hand rake bunker faces.

Water/Ponds: 12 ponds covering about 50 acres, maintained by Lake Masters; white amur carp in some lakes; aquatic plantings of arrowhead, pickerel weed, and canna lilies.

Irrigation system: Converting Toro Varitime hydraulic to Rain Bird Cirrus electric this year; source: effluent from the city of Winter Park; pump station: PSI

Staff: 16 full-time counting superintendent plus 2 part-time.

Leading staff: Tom Lantrip, assistant supt.; Ray Hooker, equipment manager; Jay McDonald, pest control technician; Doug Ballard, irrigation technician; Katie Cox, administrative assistant/environmental technician. Interlachen employs one OJT student intern from Lake City Community College each summer.

Major Renovations/Ongoing Projects: Rebuilt greens 5, 12, and 17 and regrassed all the greens in 1996; replacing Toro Varitime Irrigation system with Rain Bird Cirrus system in 2000; constant wood line clearing of exotic vegetation which overtakes the trees, like air potato vine, skunk vine and wild grape vine.

Special circumstances: The course was built over a large muck pocket in residential Winter Park. In some areas the muck is 70 feet deep. 1.5 million yards of fill was used to cap the muck. The fill generated from the lakes on site is a silty sand which does not percolate very well.

Communications: monthly crew safety and general information meetings; monthly green committee meetings; community outreach: Katie Cox has gone to local elementary school to help install a butterfly garden.

Environment/IPM: Fertilizer and nematicide applications only made based on soil and nematode samples. Nematicur used only once during establishment of rebuilt greens in 1996; Primo growth regulator used to reduce clippings and fuel and labor needed for cleanup; white amur carp used in lakes to reduce need for chemicals in lakes; 60% slow-release fertilizers used twice a year on fairways; use of natural areas, bird feeders, butterfly garden to enhance wildlife habitat.



Wildflowers greet you on the tee at #18. 443 yards away a large double green serves the 9th (left of the bunker) and 18th holes. The elegant and spacious clubhouse is in the background. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

is today. We had a golf pro/superintendent running the operation and he was more of a schedule maker rather than an agronomist or mentor.”

After graduation, and because of his practical experience, Leventhal was able to land the superintendent’s job at Orlando’s Dubsdread Golf Course. Dubsdread, along with the Mayfair Golf Club up in Longwood, used to be PGA Tour stops back in the 1940s and 50s with pictures of Sam Snead and Ben Hogan to document their history.

It was at Dubsdread that Leventhal’s education in turf management was put into focus by former golf course superintendent turned architect and consultant Lloyd Clifton.

“My ride-throughs on the course with Lloyd put all my practical experi-

ences in perspective. He answered the why and how we did things on the golf course. He was the mentor I needed in my early years in the business,” he recalls.

“I went back to school for continuing education in ornamental horticulture at Valencia Community College, not to earn a degree but to learn more about soils, plant pathology and weed and insect identification and control.”

After he left Dubsdread, Leventhal spent three years at the Rolling Hills Country Club in Longwood, where he continued his association with Clifton and learned how to work within the private club organizational structure that prepared him for the eventual position at Interlachen.

This year at the annual employee

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John Kopack, Central Florida GCSA president and the superintendent at The Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes in Longwood, is one of Leventhal's former employees.

Central Florida Chapter

History: In the early 1970s, the metropolitan Orlando area was not the booming golf destination that it is now. With the coming of Disney World and the subsequent growth and development, area superintendents from Orange, Seminole, Volusia, Brevard, Polk, Lake and Marion counties began to meet informally. Finally in 1974 the Central Florida GCSA was formed.

Founding members: Aris Catsum, Bill Cahill, John Cottage, Lew Dolan, Larry Kamphaus, Phil Morris, Roger Widrig and Adam Yurigan. Yurigan was the first president of the CFGCSA and went on to also help found the Treasure Coast Chapter in 1980.

Crowfoot Open: The Central Florida Chapter hosts the Crowfoot Open in August of each year. The event began in 1976 at the Poinciana GC in Kissimmee and moved to Suntree CC in Melbourne for a couple of years. Finally the event moved to Orlando and rotated among Walt Disney World, Bay Hill and Grand Cypress courses for over a decade. In 1998 the event was renamed the Larry Kamphaus Crowfoot Open to honor longtime Walt Disney World superintendent Larry Kamphaus who died in June of 1997. Kamphaus and his wife Vilma served as co-chairpersons for the event for 13 years. The event now alternates between Bay Hill and Grand Cypress each offering a challenging golf venue each year. Proceeds from the event are used to fund research donations to the FGCSA and FTGA.

Activities: The CFGCSA also contributes locally to the Orlando Sentinel Santa Christmas fund for needy children and two CFGCSA board members each year judge entries into the Orange County Schools Science Fair. The chapter awards a \$100 savings bond each to the students they judge to be best in the botany/horticulture and environmental science categories. The CFGCSA holds 10 monthly meetings or golf outings each year including the CFGCSA Golf Championship in June. Monthly meetings are suspended in February and August to avoid conflicts with the annual GCSAA and FTGA conferences and trade shows. This year the chapter produced its first Chapter Membership Directory.

Honors and Awards: Central Florida members have been active contributors to the growth and success of their chapter, the FGCSA and service on a national level. FGCSA past presidents and FGCSA Distinguished Service Award winners include Joe Ondo, CGCS and Joel Jackson, CGCS. Immediate Past President Geoff Coggan, CGCS is currently serving as FGCSA Secretary/Treasurer.

Officers for 2000: John Kopack, Alaqua Lakes GC, president; Scott Welder, CGCS, WDW Palm & Magnolia GC, vice president; Brett Harris, Lake Nona CC, external vice president; Brian Lentz, DeBary G&CC, secretary/treasurer/newsletter editor.

Membership: 140 Class A, B, & C members included in a total of 252 members.

meeting for the entire club staff, club President George Williams presented Leventhal with two large, framed pictures of the golf course to recognize him for his service to the club. One was signed by the members and the other by the staff. Leventhal is justifiably proud and honored by the gesture

"In our business, recognition is sometimes elusive and superintendents can be taken for granted. Criticism is part of the job. How we deal with it and move on is the key to success. I really appreciated this special honor the club bestowed on me. It shows that deep down they appreciate what we have accomplished."

Leventhal's accomplishments at Interlachen include consistently some of the very best greens in central Florida, bar none.

"We have several special events each year when we tweak the greens as you would for a professional tournament. We can't keep them that way every day, but we do all the extras for these tournaments. For the men's member-guest called The Tartan, the ladies' member-guest called The Argyle, the member-guest and the club championship, Leventhal prepares the greens to a speed of 10.5 plus. For everyday play, the speeds range around 9.0 on the stimpmeter.

There is a fifth special event near and dear to central Florida superintendents. For the past 12 years in January, Interlachen has hosted a joint Florida Turfgrass Association/Central Florida GCSA fund-raising tournament for the Florida Turfgrass Research Foundation. Held on a Monday each year, Interlachen generously donates the use of the club, greens fees and carts, and provides a sumptuous gourmet buffet lunch at cost. Area superintendents are encouraged to bring a club official to the education session, lunch and two-man scramble tournament. Taking a page from his special-event preparations, Leventhal sets up the course as he does for the other events.

Leventhal says he doesn't have a secret formula for keeping his greens in top shape. Try to convince his peers

April 2000 Wildlife Inventory

Interlachen C.C.

- Birds of Prey:** osprey, bald eagle, red-shouldered hawk, American kestrel, northern harrier hawk, red-tailed hawk, vultures, belted kingfisher, logger head shrike
- Waterfowl:** lesser scaup duck, wood duck, mallard, ruddy duck, grebes, cormorant, anhinga
- Wading birds:** great blue heron, little blue heron, green heron, tricolor heron, white ibis, cattle egret, great egret, snowy egret, moor hen
- Other birds:** purple martin, cardinal, blue jay, mockingbird, brown thrasher, boat-tailed grackle, red-winged blackbird, mourning dove, red-bellied woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, downy woodpecker, crow, yellow-rumped warbler, prairie warbler, chimney swift, gnat catcher, starling, towhee, chipping sparrow, house wren, killdeer
- Mammals:** bobcat, river otter, fox, raccoon, gray squirrel, marsh rabbit
- Reptiles:** turtles, frogs, toads, snakes and an occasional alligator

A lot of our members are very proactive for wildlife and the environment so they were all for us getting involved in the ASCP. For example, one of our members, Dr. Mitchell, is an avid bird watcher. He has documented 92 species of indigenous and migratory birds seen at Interlachen over the past 10 years.



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Fairway bunkers and a lake guard the dogleg on the 432 yard, par 4 second hole. It's the number one handicap hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

We have treated for nematodes only twice... once after we first opened in 1986 and ten years later... on one green after we regrassed it... We do an annual nematode sample and just haven't found the need to treat.

that he doesn't use some sort of magic as they play his course every year in the FTGA/Central Florida Research Tournament and drool at the consistency and roll of the greens.

"My main goal is to keep the greens from getting too soft and lush, which can mean slower greens. I don't like to use words like 'thin' or 'lean' because that might be taken as keeping them too much 'on the edge.' I am very comfortable with our regimen which is pretty standard, but monitored carefully."

"We do double-cut the greens three or four times a week with one of those days being Saturday which, of course, is a big golf day at the club. If time permits, we will double-cut with walk mowers, but if we have too many things going on, we will mow first with a triplex with groomer attachments and fin-

ish up with a second cut with a walk mower.

"We don't mow any clean-up rings with a triplex to avoid wear on the perimeters. We verticut every other week during the summer when the grass is growing aggressively."

Leventhal says he only aerifies twice per year in May and August and admits he wants to topdress more often but is currently applying light topdressings every three weeks in the warm months and maybe once a month in the cool season. He says the greens looked so good this past winter he skipped top dressing in November and December.

The key of course is inspecting the course and knowing firsthand what the turf is doing.

John Kopack, Central Florida GCSA president and the superintendent at The

Legacy Club at Alaqua Lakes in Longwood, is one of Leventhal's former employees.

"Good old Stu," said Kopack. "I never knew a superintendent could ride a golf course 400 times in one day!" Kopack, prone to exaggeration, does emphasize one of the reasons Interlachen's turf is in immaculate condition. Attention to detail. Leventhal strives for that elusive perfection that all superintendents hope for.

While Interlachen's greens draw rave reviews from members and peers, Leventhal has his share of challenges trying to manage turf on this former swamp. The fine, silty sand that was used to cap the muck makes for a poorly draining soil profile. Too much rain can result in soggy fairways that are hard to maintain when they get saturated.

Surface drain lines can relieve standing water in low pockets to an extent, but can't totally eliminate the problem.

Using Primo growth regulator is one tool Leventhal applies to keep the fairway turf tight and playable when mowers can't operate during prolonged rainy spells.

I mentioned earlier that these heavy soils were a curse, as we just discussed, but every cloud has a silver lining. Because of the heavy soil profile Interlachen is not plagued with nematode problems.

"We have treated for nematodes only twice," he says. "Once after we first opened in 1986 and ten years later we made one application on one green after we regrassed it and were having some thinning problems. We do an annual nematode sample and just haven't found the need to treat."

Annual nematode sampling and soil sampling for nutrient levels is just part of Leventhal's standard operating procedure and one of the reasons for his success. Leventhal says, "I use a lot of slow-release fertilizer blends with about

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The 12th hole is a tough 423 yard, par 4, S-shaped hole with lakes left and right. Remember this is Interlachen which means “among the lakes.” Photo by Daniel Zelazek

While we prefer a pretty clean lake-bank look to our water hazards, we have selectively planted canna lilies, arrowhead and pickerel weed as colorful accents and habitat. We also have some of the white amur grass carp in a couple of the lakes.

60 percent being slow-release nitrogen, and I also use a lot fertigation. I just feel I can manage the turf growth and playing surfaces better with the “spoon feeding” approach.

This careful and considerate approach to turf management led Leventhal to pursue membership and certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

“A lot of our members are very proactive for wildlife and the environment so they were all for us getting involved in the ASCP. For example, one of our members, Dr. Mitchell, is an avid bird watcher. He has documented 92 species of indigenous and migratory birds seen at Interlachen over the past 10 years.

“We have done the usual things like putting up bird feeders and nest boxes and converting out-of-play areas from

turf to native plantings of cordgrass and faxahatchee grass. While we prefer a pretty clean lake-bank look to our water hazards, we have selectively planted canna lilies, arrowhead and pickerel weed as colorful accents and habitat. We also have some of the white amur grass carp in a couple of the lakes.

“Perhaps our most ambitious project was to establish a butterfly garden beside the 11th tee. We cleared out some dense undergrowth and planted several different varieties of flowering plants and trees to attract the butterflies. We also installed a stony brook complete with a recirculating pump. We had several members help us with that project which was coordinated by our environmental technician, Katie Cox.

“Katie is an environmental science major at the University of Central