

the native areas to blend in with the course. A silver lining behind the clouds was the fact that several contractors were already on site doing the improvement to the course. After a little regrouping, they helped with the clean-up and restoration of the course and the surrounds, and are now back on task to complete the planned work.

Large-scale projects like irrigation renovation and fairway drainage require a lot of attention and coordination, but the bread-and-butter and focal point of any course is the greens. Having good sound programs and practices in place is one of the keys to success and the TifEagle at Lake Nona is no exception.

"The TifEagle is a great grass," Harris says. "But like some others. I don't think it is for every course. You do have to have the manpower and resources to maintain it properly. It takes constant attention to bring out the best playing conditions and monitor for any stresses. We have a couple of greens that pop up with fairy ring once in a while, so we have to keep an eye out for them."

Typical of the factors that affect ultradwarf greens, nutrition and cultivation are two areas that need to be monitored closely to avoid excessive thatch formation. Harris does this with some tools and products I hadn't heard of before. Superintendents learn over time that many inputs and stresses are site-specific based on soil, water quality, air circulation, shade and the club's resources to meet expectations. So these practices are things that work for Lake Nona, given the resources the club can apply to its unique situation. So take the following with a grain of salt but also with some healthy curiosity.

NUTRITION

"We are potash freaks. During the summer we are applying 0-0-30 or Sul-Po-Mag every two weeks. Our nitrogen levels run only 6-7 lbs. of nitrogen per year. On the greens we use lots of foliar applications in the summer months. Generally these are low in nitrogen and higher in calcium and magnesium. During the season we may



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Assistant superintendents Jay Shipley, left, and Murray Russell are veteran members of the Lake Nona Golf Course maintenance staff.

apply an organic granular blend called The Sanctuary (12-2-12 or 8-0-6). We

will add phosphorous when we overseed to stimulate root growth. On our wetter

holes we often skip an application knowing that the nutrients will last longer. We use Tom Burrows as an agronomic consultant. Lately we have been making applications of 4-2-27 and Sul-Po-Mag. Once again low on nitrogen and high in potassium.”

Harris also has four fertigation tanks which he uses for:

- pHairway/urea acid injection to combat the high pH well water;
- applying regular fertigation blends like 16-0-5, 11-0-4 and sometimes 29-0-0;
- wetting agents;
- and “Dealer’s Choice”, which he uses for specialty liquid products like a phosphorous application.

Harris reserves the acid injection material only for the greens and must coordinate irrigation zone run times to charge the system just as the greens cycle is coming on. “It’s too expensive right now to do the whole course, so we target the greens which are under the most stress.”

Water

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Superintendent Facts

Brett Harris



Roots: Born in El Paso, Tex., but raised in Pittsburgh. "Go Steelers!"

Family: Wife, Charlotte; son Wyatt, 10; daughter, Libby, 8.

Education: General Studies, University of South Carolina

Employment history: 1994 – present, Lake Nona, superintendent; 1991-1994 Lake Nona,

assistant superintendent; 1990 Grand Cypress, irrigation tech; 1988-89 Innisbrook, Landscape Dept.; 1986-1988 Hilton Head, SC, own landscape business; 1981-86 Hilton Head, landscape supervisor for Spencer Green Goods; Early 1980's Hilton Head (high school summers) worked on crews at Palmetto Dunes and Harbor Town.

Professional affiliations and awards:

Member of GCSAA, FTGA and Central Florida GCSA. Served on the board and as external vice president of the CFGCSA, secretary/treasurer since 2002.

How did you get into the business? As a teenager I worked on golf courses in Pittsburgh and Hilton Head after we moved in 1980

Mentors: Gary Snyder, CGCS, Haig Point GC, golf course construction and renovation; Tom Alex, Grand Cypress Resort, planning and managing a large operation; Ken Glover, Orchid Island GC, tournament preparations. Tom Burrows, stick to the basics of soil science.

Goals and accomplishments: John Kopack

and I have a pact to become certified superintendents. My goal is to see all the changes and improvements at Lake Nona completed. Some of that has been accomplished, and that is rewarding.

Work philosophy: Work smarter not harder. Treat your people well and your suppliers too. Train and cross-train the crew, delegate and have high expectations. Educate, explain the whys and wherefores and keep restrictions to a minimum.

Advice: Keep the job in perspective. Take care of your family. Protect your employer's investment. Use resources wisely. Learn from the good and bad traits of those you have worked for. Collect data and information because you can't improvise everything. Don't be afraid to ask questions of your mentors, peers, suppliers — especially those older than you. You can't know it all

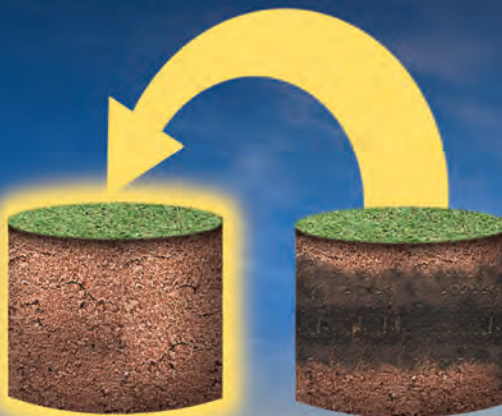
Hobbies/Interests: The Uncle Freddy Band, guitar construction and repair, gunsmithing, competitive pistol and rifle shooting.

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Fun Facts

1. **Vehicle:** Chevy 2500 HD
2. **Last good movie I saw:** The Big Lebowski
3. **I stay home to watch:** "24" and Monday Night Football
4. **The book I've been reading:** "The Principles of Correct Practice for Guitar"
5. **Favorite meal:** Chicken Paprikash
6. **Favorite performers:** Dream Theater, Foo Fighters and Al Dimeola
7. **Prized possession:** 1987 Martin D-60 Guitar
8. **Personal Heroes:** Our armed forces
9. **Nobody knows that I:** Service and repair guitars
10. **I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:** Defusing a crisis
11. **I'd give anything to meet:** Bill Cowher
13. **My fantasy:** To be the Pittsburgh Steelers' offensive coordinator. I just know I can do better.
14. **The one thing I can't stand:** Incompetent servers
15. **If I could change one thing about myself:** Have a little more patience.
16. **My most irrational act:** Attempting to

snowboard.

17. **My most humbling experience:** The birth of my children.

18. **The words that best describe me:** Analytical. Decisive. Impatient.



Harris with his traveling electric guitar. Photo by Joel Jackson.

CULTIVATION

Cultivation of ultradwarf putting surfaces is just as important as getting the nutrition levels right. Harris employs a line of equipment from the True Surface Company called the "Thatch-away System." One particular favorite implement, nicknamed the "Poa Buster" by northern superintendents, is a verticutter-like tool. The main difference is that the blades are oriented at an angle instead of being vertical.

"You don't see lines after a pass," Harris says, "but you have a half basket of material at the end of the run. We mow behind it and it is really slick. With regular verticutting, the greens often turned yellow before they recovered.

"We also run brushes on the greens beginning in March and all through the growing season. On the fairways and tees we use a tractor-mounted, rotating power broom which really strips out the organic matter. In May as early

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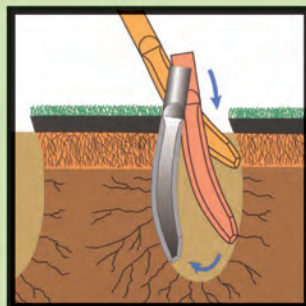
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The par-4, 434-yard 7th hole sports a two-tiered fairway. The second green can be seen to the right. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

as possible, we deep-drill the greens and all summer we run a Thatch-away scarifier, with the blades 1 inch apart instead of the usual 1/2 inch. We do that once a month all summer. Weather permitting, the tees, fairways and roughs are aerified and power-brushed twice during the summer. We missed one cycle last year, thanks to the three hurricanes. We top dress the greens monthly in the summer and every two weeks in season using bagged green sand.”

PEST CONTROL

As far as pest control challenges on the greens and around the course, Harris hasn’t been saddled with many problems.

“We use Pro Star for the fairy ring on a couple of holes. The only place we really had a tough time with nematodes was a few years back on a 180-yard stretch in front of the 10th green. It is a very sandy area and the turf could not take a fairway-height cut. We raised the area to rough height and began top dressing the area with a compost made of yard waste. After a while, the nematode counts went down and we lowered

the area back to fairway height.

As far as mole crickets go, we treat approximately 30 acres each year with Chipco Choice. We have had good-enough, long-term control that we alternate fairways and roughs every other year. If we have any hot spots I haven’t found anything better than an over-the-top spray with an Orthene and Penetrol mix. I have found by watering it in right after application makes it very effective. We go after grubs with Merit every other year.

“Actually the sandhill cranes seem to do more damage than the grubs. If the cranes get too aggressive, we found that 10 lbs. of Milorganite or our organic-meal fertilizer applied in the area tends to discourage them.”

What is encouraging for Harris is the progress the course has made under the management of the Tavistock Group since it took over almost ten years ago. Harris said, “We have renovated the greens, the irrigation system, the drainage infrastructure and the maintenance facility is on schedule for improvements. The course has evolved over time along with the residential development

of the property. Our mission is to see that they coexist as an enjoyable seamless experience so that we meet or exceed the high expectations of our members.”



View from the par-3, 196-yard fourth hole. The fifth green can be seen to left and the third hole is in the far back-ground. Photo by Joel Jackson.



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Recruiting Bilingual Employees

By John R. Piersol

Many golf course superintendents and landscape company managers are seeking English/Spanish speaking employees. Many colleges are working hard to diversify their student bodies to include more minorities, especially in their turf and horticulture programs. The solution for both industry and education might be right in front of us, and we do not realize it: the children of Hispanic employees.

Golf courses and landscape companies in Florida and throughout the United States commonly hire Spanish-speaking employees. Many of these workers are U.S. citizens or are working to become citizens, and they have their families here. The parents may speak mostly Spanish and be struggling to learn English, but their children are in the public school system, and they quickly learn English.

The parents are usually not candidates to attend college, but their children are prime candidates. The parents may not consider horticulture-based college programs for their children, because they are not fully aware of all the offerings in the U.S. postsecondary system.

Plus, the parents may not want their children doing anything like what they do because, like all parents, they want a good life for their children, and the parents may think that being a laborer is all that the horticulture industries has to offer their children. The parents may not realize that there are excellent two-year and four-year college programs that can educate their children for lucrative management careers.

Golf course superintendents and landscape managers could survey their Hispanic employees to learn more about the employees' families; number of children, ages, interests, etc.; in fact, many managers ask about their employees' families as a function of good personnel management. Employees like to know that the employer cares about them and their family, and most Hispanics are very family oriented.

If the children are in ninth grade or above, maybe the manager could offer to have

them "shadow" with him for a day. Maybe it could be a "bring your children to work" day with an employee barbeque, etc. Managers could introduce the children to all that goes on at a golf course or landscape operation giving them an understanding of what their father does and the full range of opportunities that exist in the golf/landscape industries.

This introduction to the golf/landscape industries could lead to the employees' children asking for part-time work when they are of age. If they like the field, and the employer would like to see them stay in the industry with them or elsewhere, the employer could mention colleges to attend and perhaps, offer some scholarship help. Imagine how good this would make the parents feel! The employer helping their children get educated to get a good job.

College programs would also win. At Lake City Community College there are five horticulture/turf oriented programs: Golf Course Operation (3 years), Landscape Technology (2 years), Turf Equipment Management (1 year), Irrigation Management (1 year), and Pest Control Operations (1 year). All programs need good bilingual students to meet the strong industry demand.

Community colleges are inexpensive. A whole year of any program at LCCC for tuition, books, and lab fees is only about \$3,000. There is extremely strong demand in Florida and nationally for graduates from all the above programs, and career salary potential can be \$50,000 to \$100,000 or more.

Sometimes the answer is right in front of us. This could be the case with the demand for turf equipment technicians, irrigation specialists, pest control technicians, landscape managers, assistant golf course superintendents, especially graduates who are English/Spanish bilingual. Help yourself, the industry, colleges, and your employees' family by recruiting from within your crew. Lake City Community College and other colleges would be pleased to have these students, and providing scholarships could provide a significant benefit to the employees.

For any information on the golf, landscape, turf equipment, irrigation, pest control, or forestry programs at Lake City Community College, please contact me.

Editor's Note: *The author is chairman of the Division of Golf/Landscape/Forestry at Lake City Community College.*

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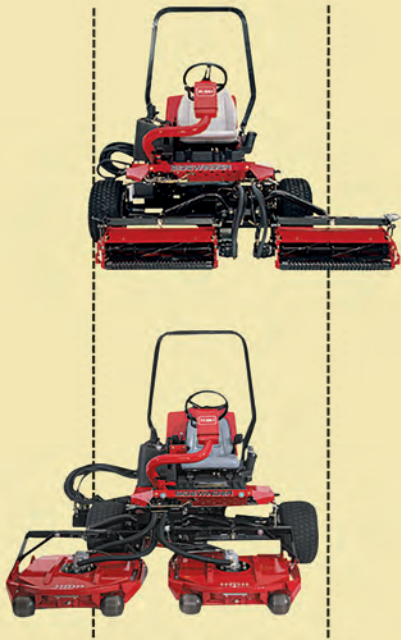
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