



The 526-yard fifth hole plays along one of the three large waste areas on the course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

with regular soil sampling and custom fertilizer applications. Another big issue is the irrigation

water source. The primary source is surface water pumped from the seven interconnected

lakes on the property. This source is supplemented by reclaimed water from the county and the



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Superintendent Facts



Alan Puckett. Photo by Joel Jackson

Alan Puckett

Originally from: Lakeland

Family: Parents Edith and Ron Puckett; two sisters and three nephews

Education: A.S. in Golf Course Operations from Lake City Community College, 1981.

Employment history: 2000-present The Club at Eaglebrooke, superintendent; 1990-2000 Lake Region Yacht & Country Club, superintendent; 1985-90 Grenlefe G.C., assistant superintendent; 1983-85 Walden Lakes G.C., assistant superintendent; 1981-83 World of Palm Aire,

Professional affiliations and awards: Member of GCSAA, FGCSA, FTGA and Ridge GCSA. Served as president of the Ridge GCSA and the Florida Turfgrass Association and on the FGCSA board of directors, Polk County Water Policy Board.

How did you get into the business? My dad worked as a tennis pro at a golf club and I got a job in the cart barn so I could see him more often. Fell in love with the golf business.

Mentors: Dr. G. C. Horn – learned a lot of turf

management riding around Grenlefe with him. Mike McGloulin, David Barnes, Mark Jarrell, and Joel Jackson.

Goals and accomplishments: I've become a fairly successful golf course superintendent and that's all I wanted to be. My best accomplishments are finding out that home is where the heart and satisfaction are. I take care of Little League fields, the church soccer field, help with the Lakeland First Tee project, work with the Lakeland Boys and Girls Club, serve on the Ridge GCSA board and sit on the Community Development District for Eaglebrooke.

Work philosophy: A professional is supposed to be dedicated, work hard and be loyal. Give it your all each day, but when you go home, leave it all at work, and have a life of your own. Your work is not who you are. Work is what you do to pay the bills.

Memorable moments: Being president of the FTGA and the Ridge Chapter. Being part of the Lakeland First Tee project.

Hobbies/Interests: Fishing, golf, stock car racing, community involvement.

course currently has one well as an emergency source if the reclaimed water can't meet the needs of the course. In the beginning the county loved having Eaglebrooke as a logical distribution and disposal site on the south side of town. With the growth of the use of effluent as a residential landscape irrigation source, it has become a finite resource and a couple of courses including Eaglebrooke have been hit with user fees that others don't have to pay.

This is not the first time that inconsistency has crept into the use of effluent water in the golf industry. Around the state, utilities make unilateral and often uninformed decisions about water quantities and rates for golf courses and don't seem to balance the fact that while courses need the water, the counties also need the disposal site, which planners and policymakers should value more highly.

But Puckett is not complaining, in fact he and the owners work closely with the county water regulators and the homes in the development have electronic metering to monitor residential irrigation use. The county has even recommended that Eaglebrooke install a second back-up well to make sure an emergency source is available if needed.

But the bottom line is producing a pleasing golf course, and Puckett takes the old school approach of watching the plant and giving it what it needs. The greens are TifDwarf and his tees, fairways and roughs are GN-1 bermudagrass.

"You hear lots of comments about GN-1, good and bad," Puckett said, "but in my travels I have found the performance tends to be site specific. It performs very well here on our finer soils, but I know on some of the sandier courses, it can seem to struggle. I guess the extra moisture and nutrient retention has an effect."

Puckett fertilizes the GN-1 four times a year, generally with a 15-5-15 blend based on soil samples, but the spring and fall applications also contain a pre-emergent herbicide to control weeds. The fairways are also slit injected annually with Chipco Choice to control mole crickets. Any other pest-control treatments are applied only when and where they are needed. Gone are the days of wall-to-wall spraying.

On the day that I visited Eaglebrooke, the course was on the last day of a three-day closing to aerify and topdress greens. Puckett uses an outside contractor, Aerification Plus to punch the greens three times a year.

"Of course we could buy and maintain the equipment," he said, "but there is so much to do when we're closed it benefits us to have Russ (Varney) and his gang come in and punch holes and pick up the cores. It is one of those curious things that members don't always get. They think we are just punching holes and spreading sand when we are closed, so lately I have been posting a list of the 24 jobs we do when we are closed, so they know there's more to it than aerifying.

"Of course people don't like us to disturb the greens, but our golf pro and our better golfers understand that the sand will help the ball roll smoother and that is the message we put out."

Besides the course closing, Puckett is working with Ron Garl and Highland Golf in the redesign of the 17th hole, a double dogleg, par 5 that needed some tweaking to make it a better-driving hole. They're also adding a large runoff retention area. The reconstructed tee complex and the widened fairway portion had been sprigged and sodded in key areas to prevent erosion with the rainy season just weeks away.

"The old layout was a narrow chute off the tee," Puckett said, "and the fairway

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A large stormwater retention area is part of the redesign of the 17th hole. The tee tops and fairways have been sprigged and erosion-prone areas are being sodded. Photo by Joel Jackson.

bunker was so close you often had to lay up, not always a good strategy move on a par 5. As it

was, the fairway bunker was penalizing the average golfers. Now the long hitters have more of a

risk-vs.-reward shot and it is a better golf hole.” As we headed back to Puckett’s office

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A scenic view from the 15th green with No. 12 in the background. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Fun Facts



The top dog, Roscoe, and his sidekick Alan.
Photo by Joel Jackson

Also known as Slim Shady, Alan Puckett, has a carefree sense of humor and a big heart

Car: Ford F-150

The last good movie I saw: The Legend of Bagger Vance

I stay home to watch: NASCAR, golf, old movies, the Discovery Channel

The book I've been reading: What's a book?

Favorite meal: Shark and shrimp on the grill with a little Crown

Favorite performers: Jimmy Buffet and Tom Hanks

Prized possessions: Family and friends

Personal Heroes: Mom and Dad

Nobody knows that I: Really care about what I do

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to: Coming up with a plan

I'd give anything to meet: Angelina Jolie

My fantasy is: To win the lottery and then really get into trouble

The one thing I can't stand: Two-faced people

If I could change one thing about myself: I don't know, I'm pretty cool now!

My most irrational act: Being politically correct

My most humbling experience: Working with kids who make the best of what they have

The words that best describe me: I have a need to help others

I noted the numerous osprey nests on the nearby utility poles which prompted him to mention that Eaglebrooke had documented 182 species of animals on the property, 68 of which are birds.

One animal has a special place at Eaglebrooke: "shop dog" Roscoe P. Coltrane, a black Labrador retriever who was abandoned near the course when he was less than a year old. Roscoe has since become a fixture at the shop, in Puckett's cart when he rides the course, or on the clubhouse veranda where he often spoiled by the staff with delicacies from the kitchen.

Roscoe is the shared responsibility of the whole crew and he goes home each night with a different person. I can vouch that in return Roscoe protects the home turf: he gave me rather curt greeting at the shop until Puckett vouched for me. Roscoe then graciously gave up his seat in Puckett's cart and rode in the back while we toured the course.

Perhaps it was that sense of comfort that pervaded my visit to Eaglebrooke, where Puckett has come back to his boyhood community to work and live. No less intense than ever as a professional in his work day approach to his responsibilities, but excited and energized to be part of the community with his work with the Boys and Girls Club, and a seat on the



A different view of the par-4, 431-yard 15th hole indicating why it is the number-two handicap hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

Community Development District Board or working with the Ridge GCSA on the Lakeland

First Tee project which has been a great project pulling all segments of the community together

in a common cause.

Puckett concluded the visit with these

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The second half of the double-dogleg, 514-yard, 17th hole. The first half of the hole is being redesigned to enhance the playability and strategy of the tee shot. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

remarks, "They say you can't go home again. Well maybe you can go home with a different view. I reached a lot of my career goals at an early age, but

working with some of these kids is amazing. We take for granted what we have sometimes and it is awesome watching these kids make do with what

they have. I am the richest person in the world because of my family and friends."
Welcome home Alan.

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Ultradwarf Management

Believe it or not, we are rapidly completing a decade of ultradwarf turf management. And no sooner are some superintendents getting comfortable in the new routines and requirements for this variety than seashore paspalum breaks onto the scene. While these newer grasses earn their spots in the sun, there



Rick Tatum

are still multitudes of courses growing the former standard, TifDwarf.

With the choices available now, it is hard to call any of those three varieties a “standard” for the industry. Golf course superintendents who are fighting greens with mutation and/or contamination spots must decide whether to remain a TifDwarf user

or to change to one of the new varieties. The key word is “change,” and it *will* be change, so be prepared to deal with and live with the requirements of these newer grasses.

Our topic is ultradwarf management for this section, but you can also take a look at some of the pros and cons of using paspalum in the Industry News section. Meanwhile, read what three of your peers have learned about these grasses. I interviewed Rick Tatum from the Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples, and Ken Glover at the Windsor Club in Vero Beach and Tim Cann of Harbour Ridge in Palm City. They have some interesting perspectives on what it takes to manage ultradwarfs.

Mr. Ultradwarf – Rick Tatum

I was looking for some victims, I mean volunteers, to do interviews for this article and Rick Tatum graciously gave up his barstool at the Naples Beach Hotel Tiki Bar to share his ultradwarf experiences. It turns out that Tatum has scored the proverbial “hat trick” having grown-in and managed three varieties: FloraDwarf, Champion and TifEagle.

He has nine years’ experience with ultradwarfs so his opinions and observations regarding their management have some credibility. Join me on the wild ride that is Tatum’s take on ultradwarf management. It began when I asked the seemingly simple question, “What variety do you manage?”

Tatum began, “Well, I’ve done three. I started with FloraDwarf at the Forest Country Club,

then I grew-in two courses at Shadow Wood planted in Champion, and currently I’m managing 54 holes of TifEagle on the Grey Oaks Palm, Pine and Estuary courses.”

“I think Champion has the best playing surface of all the ultradwarfs and oddly enough it closely resembles FloraDwarf in appearance. We had a green at The Forest that was 50-50 FloraDwarf and Champion and no one, not even the experts, could tell with the naked eye. But the problem with Champion in the summer here is that it is a 24/7 job — almost like growing bentgrass in South Florida.

“What is true about all of them is that if you make one mistake in over-fertilizing them, you may find yourself scalping greens. Then you’re dead. GR1000’s are great mowers but if the grass is too fluffy, they will dig in and scalp. On our TifEagle greens, we apply granular fertilizer (15-0-15) only after aerification in May or June to help the turf recover and we only aerify once, but we use a slightly different technique. We punch in two directions with a Toro 643 and 5/8” tines. We go 12 to 6 on the first pass and we make our second pass in the 11:30 to 5:30 direction. What I have found out is that by altering the direction by this small amount, the second pass misses most of the first holes and we end up removing more thatch material which is, after all, the

whole point to aerifying. By changing directions 90 degrees (9 to 3) or 45 degrees (10 to 4) to the first pass, you end up hitting a lot of the same holes and defeat the goal of maximum thatch removal.

“Along with the granular fertilizer we usually apply an insecticide since the worms seem to like to use the freshly punched holes to make their burrows. Full recovery usually takes two to two-and-a-half weeks. And the timing is critical as well. We go as early as we can in the growing season because when the stormy, late-summer weather picks up, the cloudy days make for slow recovery from any stress on the turf.

“If you lose control of your clippings yield, which is one of my signals, you’re done. It can affect thatch production and greens speed. I also use tissue sampling as a barometer to make sure my nutrient levels stay in line. I have learned to correlate the sample values with the appearance and performance of the grass. We tend to keep them leaner in the summer (4.0) so they don’t thatch up so fast and in the winter we monitor them at (4.7) while 4-6 is the recommendation overall ideal. We feed them with 2-5 gallons of Gary’s Green depending on tissue-sample numbers and may add some soluble N as needed. I learned this regimen on the Champion and it has worked well for me on the TifEagle.”



TifEagle ultradwarf on No. 18 green at Loblolly Pines G. C. in Hobe Sound.