

One of the best decisions the club made in 1996 was to partner with next door neighbor, the Jacksonville Naval Air Station (NAS) to take as much of their treated waste water as they could to irrigate the golf course.

include new satellite controllers to provide true single head control and inner/outer heads around the greens.

The next big decision the club made was to allow Neff to begin a long range tree- and shade-management program. Removing any tree from a golf course setting can face a lot of resistance, even at the expense of healthy turf and manageable putting surfaces. However, the members relented and allowed Neff to proceed. Dense shade and poor air circulation were Neff's primary concerns and began on the 12th hole, which was the worst. Neff said, "Essentially huge areas of the roughs and fairway were thin, weed-infested areas with black scaly algae patches. The trees formed a solid wall blocking out sunlight and air movement. Selectively and judiciously Neff coordinated the thinning out of the wood lines.

In many areas the trees were chipped on site and used to mulch the understory. In some cases the mulch was used to augment the maintenance trails that connected the holes. In the end, palmetto thickets no one had ever seen emerged and views of adjacent holes became possible, adding to the beauty of the course. And of course once trees were either removed or pruned, the sunlight and air circulation worked their magic and the turf regained its color, vigor and playability. Today, the course looks so



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A gray dawn breaks on the 503 yard, 4th hole. Footprints in the dew indicate golf course maintenance has already been here setting up the course. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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natural that everyone accepts that this is the way it always was.

Neff said that next on the agenda is an ambitious landscaping plan that will emphasize the use of native grasses and flowering native plants to enhance turf-to-woods transition areas and to provide appealing splashes of native color in high-visibility areas. The landscape plan will be one part of the goal to become a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary by attracting birds, butterflies to the blossoms and seeds of the native plants.

All this planning, coordination and implementation of change doesn't happen in a vacuum. Neff told me that General Manager Deborah Johnson's prime directive for department heads and staff is that everyone working together is a must. An atmosphere of give and take is fostered. Neff said, "We

are all grown ups. We get to air our concerns but at the end of the day," Neff said, "We support everyone at the club. For me, Head Professional Clint Avert is the key to helping me get our programs done with minimum inconvenience to our members."

To minimize golfer inconvenience the club provides Neff with enough closed days and coupled with slower play days and seasons, the major cultural practices are accomplished without disturbing the golfer's enjoyment of the game. Neff keeps the green committee regularly informed of all major maintenance projects from aerifications to tree work and pesticide and fertilizer treatments. By doing the work during slow times and closed days, the staff can get the work done efficiently without interference.

Neff said other factors which have

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General Manager Deborah Johnson's prime directive for department heads and staff is that everyone working together is a must. An atmosphere of give and take is fostered. Neff said, 'We are all grown-ups. We get to air our concerns but at the end of the day, we support everyone at the club.'

aided the efficiency and appearance of the course has been the reduction of maintained turf from 120 to 80 acres. By instituting a fairway topdressing program and aerifying twice per year and by keeping a close eye on the irrigation, Neff says playing conditions have improved on the mixed-grass fairways and the heavier soils near the river absorb the rains much better.

Neff continued, "The club also chose to stop overseeding the fairways and roughs. It was a decision based on a request from the USGA when the club hosted the Senior Amateur Tournament in 2001. They didn't want us to have to struggle with transition for their event so we didn't overseed that year. We liked the results so much we stuck with it. That move alone helped with the appearance and management of the course overall. Our location next to the river keeps us warmer and prevents most severe freezes."

The fairways, a combination of

Tifway 419, Tifway II and common bermudagrass, would seem to be a prime candidate for replacement with a monostand, but Neff begs to differ.

"The cost to attempt to create a 'pure' monostand just wouldn't be worth it. There are plenty of examples of folks who have spent a lot of dollars and still end up with contamination. What we have done is to learn how to manage what we have so that we minimize stressful situations that will cause one variety to go off-color or get thin and stand out. Using Primo (growth regulator) has been very helpful in keeping the grasses more consistent. Frankly the blend of grasses is more indicative of the old classic courses which Timuquana proudly represents."

One turf change that will take place in 2009 will be the grass on the putting surfaces. Neff said the jury is still out on switching to an ultradwarf variety or staying with one of the proven, more stable Tifdwarf varieties. If the club

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The sun shines on the 422-yard, second hole and in the spring the aquatic plants in the water hazard will bloom and add a splash of color to the scene. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

decides to go “ultra,” MiniVerde is the leading candidate. Neff has been running a side-by-side comparison with TifEagle and MiniVerde on the practice-area chipping/putting green. Neff said, “I have told our spray tech not to automatically clean up the green or give them any extra TLC. I want to see what happens to both grasses – how they handle stresses, etc.”

One source of stress Neff could do without is some nibbling nuisance from a local population of nutria. These semi-aquatic rodents are indigenous to South America and were imported into Louisiana in the 1930’s for the fur farming industry. It is not known if they were released into the wild intentionally or accidentally. They are herbivores and feed on wetland vegetation and have caused serious

damage to Louisiana’s coastal areas.

Neff said, “When I came here there were two nutria roaming the property, when we began the tree work, they migrated over to the Navy base. Now they are expanding some of their hangars to house all the planes being moved down here from a Maine air station that is closing. All the construction has flushed them back to our property. Unfortunately they are chewing up sections of our lake banks and playing havoc with our pond aerators.”

“We installed aerators in our ponds to increase the oxygen content to help the natural digestion of any excess nutrients from the decomposition of the organic debris on the bottom of the ponds and any extra nitrogen and phosphorus in the effluent water.

The cost to attempt to create a ‘pure’ monostand just wouldn’t be worth it. There are plenty of examples of folks who have spent a lot of dollars and still end up with contamination. What we have done is to learn how to manage what we have so that we minimize stressful situations. . .



Don Bryant, above, is the Assistant Superintendent at Timuquana and plays a key role in making the changes and improvements to the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

This lake on No. 6 is no longer murky thanks to the bubbling aerator, which increases oxygen levels to help digest nutrients in effluent irrigation water and in the silt on the lake bottoms. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Major improvements to the turf in the fairways and roughs began five years ago when the course began a master tree- and shade-management plan. The discovery of hidden palmetto thickets were also rewards from the project. Photo by Joel Jackson.



A master landscape plan will be part of the 2009 course renovation. Superintendent Chris Neff hopes the new native plant areas will be a colorful kickoff to his goal of becoming a certified Audubon Sanctuary. Photo by Joel Jackson.

FUN FACTS

Chris 'Hot Wings' Neff

Vehicle: 2004 Chevrolet Blazer

Last good movie I saw:

Walk the Line

I stay home to watch:

College Football – Go Gators!

The book I've been reading:

No books, lots of magazines

Favorite meal: Chicken wings – Hot! Hot! Hot!

Favorite performers: U2 and Counting Crows

Prized possessions: My family – my wife and our two dogs and two cats

Personal Heroes: Fred Klauk

I'm better than anyone when it comes to: Talking

If I could do it over: I would have done more traveling to this point in my life

The one thing I can't stand: is two things – Lying and tardiness

If I could change one thing about myself: I would be more patient

Words that best describe me: Cool, caring and funny

My dream foursome would be: Donald Ross, Jack Nicklaus, (but Chris that's only a threesome?)

I'm still waiting for my best fishing story and golf shot



Grace, the friendly Labrador Retriever, takes a break from being the head game warden and pine cone chaser at Timuquana. She even let me share her golf cart while touring the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

It seems the vibration of the aerators attracts the nutria and they nibble and gnaw the heck out of the air supply tubing. The aerators have done a great job clearing up the murky water, but it is a constant battle replacing the damaged tubes.”

But not all the wildlife at Timuquana is a nuisance. There is ample cover and habitat for a variety of small animals like raccoons, squirrels and (not so helpful) armadillos and fish in the ponds. There are birds of all shapes and sizes from the common small perching birds and songbirds to cormorants, sandhill cranes and bald eagles.

Making the leap from wildlife to association life and the profession, I asked Neff to comment on being a volunteer in the North Florida chapter and how the role of superintendents is changing.

“When I began at TPC Sawgrass in 1996, the demands of the job as an assistant didn't really allow me to volunteer. But after I was here at Timuquana for only ten days, Glen Klauk called me and encouraged me to become involved. By getting involved in association meetings and events, the number-one thing I got from it was to be able to talk with my peers on a whole range of issues and challenges. By volunteering to serve on the boards of the local and state I saw how leading superintendents conducted themselves, led meetings, presented ideas and handled situations. The bottom line is that I learned technical

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Ancient oaks and towering pines frame the par-3, 8th hole, reflecting the parkland look and feel of a classic Donald Ross design. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

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