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YMCA Par 3: Home of First Tee of Lakeland

On a 22-acre, L-shaped plot of land next to the Publix Supermarkets corporate headquarters and distribution center in Lakeland sits the YMCA Par 3 golf course. The address on George Jenkins Boulevard reveals a great deal about the origins of the course, as it was established many years ago by the founder of Publix, “Mr. George” himself.

Originally built as a recreational amenity for the Publix employees, it was eventually phased out and the Lakeland YMCA leased the property and brought the 9-hole course back to life in 2005 with the help of golf course architect

Steve Smyers. Together they have turned it into a community asset which provides a year-round recreational outlet for families, senior and junior golfers and those just wanting to practice their game.

Superintendent Mike Giddens said so much attention has been placed on the 1st Tee mission that they often have to remind the locals that it is a full-service facility to be used by one and all. During my visit early one morning I saw seniors playing the course and hitting balls on the range, adults taking lessons and a couple of home-schooled middle-schoolers knocking the ball stiff

on the 124-yard 4th hole. Giddens says that families come out in the evenings to take advantage of the three lighted holes (7, 8 and 9), and the lighted practice putting and chipping greens, and driving range.

In a time when the golf industry is looking for creative ways to get more people involved in the game, this friendly, accessible, modestly-priced and multi-faceted facility is a great model of what works. It’s certainly a place to grow the game in a non-threatening environment for beginners and also a place where casual golfers and seniors looking for a social and

In a time when the golf industry is looking for creative ways to get more people involved in the game, this friendly, accessible, modestly-priced and multi-faceted facility is a great model of what works.



SUPERINTENDENT FACTS



MIKE GIDDENS

Photo by Joel Jackson.

Originally from Perry, FL

Family: Wife, Jill. Son, Cameron (10). Daughter, Taylor (7)

Education: B.S. in Sports Management and Recreational Turf Management, Florida Southern College 2004,

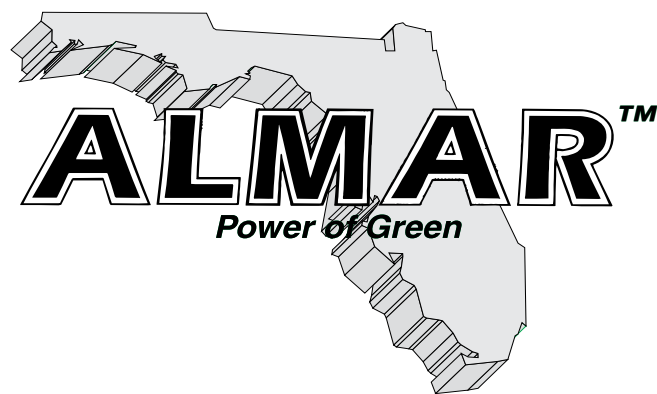
Employment: August 2004 – Present, Superintendent YMCA Par 3; 2001-2004 Lone Palm Golf Club, Lakeland.

Professional Affiliations & Offices Held: Current vice president of the Ridge GCSA. Member of GCSAA since 2005.

Goals/Accomplishments: Growing in our golf course in 2004 as the only staff person in the midst of those 3 hurricanes that all criss-crossed in nearby Lake Wales. Looking back, I can say I did it. Additional goals: Attaining my CGCS and pursuing my masters degree.

Hobbies & Interests: Anything sports- or outdoors-related. Spending time doing family outings to the beach or theme parks. I'm a huge Seminole and Dolphin fan. Also very involved with our church.

*Early morning view of the 4th hole at 124 yards.
Photo by Joel Jackson.*



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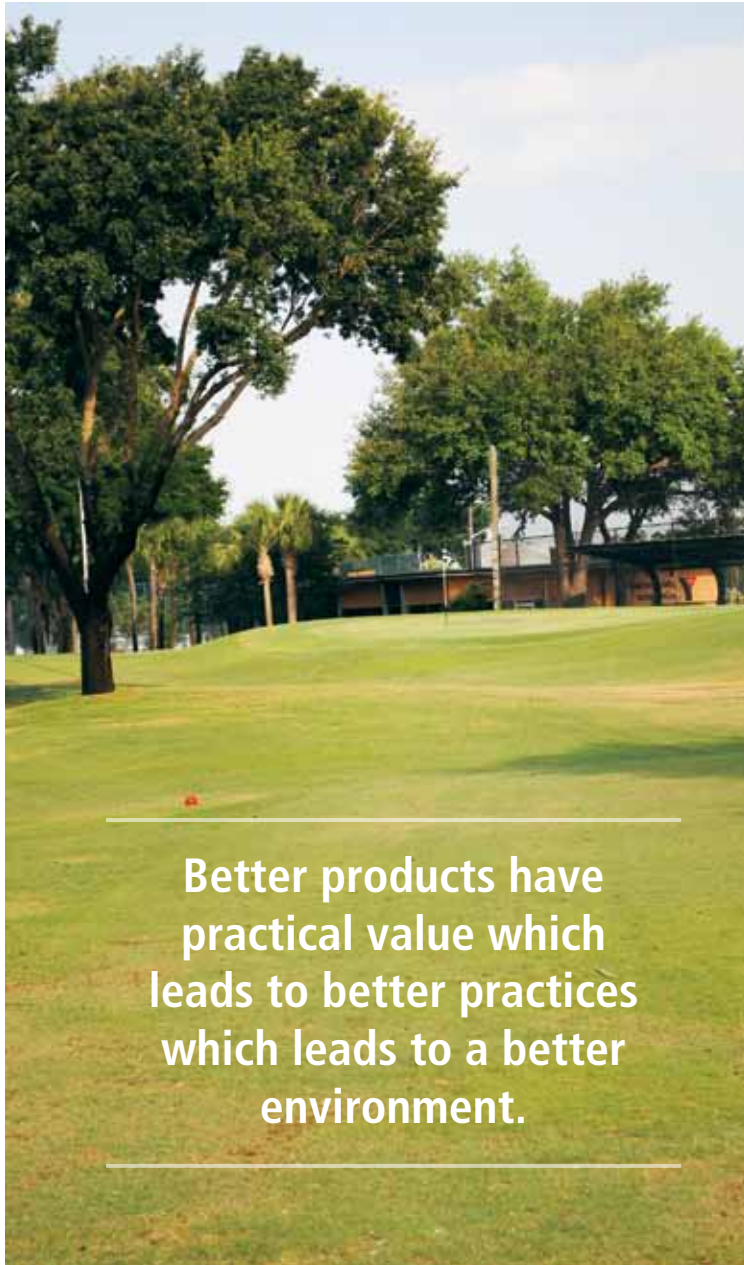
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View from the 9th tee. Photo by Joel Jackson.

recreational outlet can keep playing the game without a lot of pressure.

Giddens is ideally positioned for the coming changes in the golf industry. He — and those of his generation — is more computer savvy and enthusiastically embrace the electronic and digital revolution in communication.

The trick is making sure that the younger superintendents also embrace the live interactive social networking and don't rely on emails and tweets to substitute for personal relationships in the business.

Giddens is already on a track to do that as he is the vice president of the Ridge GCSA this year and helped run this year's Jack Harrell, Sr. Memorial Invitational. Giddens says, "Our chapter's young superintendents sense the urgency and need to step up. We have relied on the veterans like Bobby Ellis, Alan Puckett, Tom Barnett and others to carry the load. Now it's our turn to pick up the pace. We understand we need to be in the forefront of our industry to help manage the issues facing us. We need to be active and not sit and wait to have our management programs dictated to us."

I asked Giddens if he felt younger superintendents were more likely to be influenced by the "Green Movement." He responded, "Not necessarily. We have seen the development of "green things" in our industry like new technology and products with less impact incorporated into programs like IPM and BMPs. Better products have practical value which leads to better practices which leads to a better environment.

"Information gathering, action and participation are a balancing act for sure for all superintendents. With better communication we increase the chances for member participation and retention. I personally feel a responsibility for providing information to our members. We are working on a new website. Our challenge is taking the Ridge GCSA to the next level."

Giddens' main job is taking the YMCA Par 3 to



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YMCA PAR 3



YMCA Par 3 Maintenance Team: (l-r) Scott Behl, Robin Dannison, Matt Dean and Mike Giddens. Photo by Joel Jackson

Location: Lakeland

Ownership: YMCA of West Central Florida

Playing policy: Public

Course: 9 holes, 961 yards, Par 27

Avg. rounds: 20,000/year

Opened: May 2005. Course designed by Steve Smyers. Constructed by John G. Walton Construction Co.

Management Team: Director of Golf Gerald Richardson; Course & Facilities Director Mike Giddens

Ongoing projects: Adding synthetic turf tee strip to driving range tee, adding drainage on various holes, leveling tees 1-9, considering adding another practice green, re-doing existing practice green and adding a nursery green.

Acreage under maintenance: 15

Total acreage: 18

Greens: 1.0 acres. Jones Dwarf Bermudagrass. HOC 0.150 summer, 0.165 winter; Overseeding: ryegrass blend 30 lb./1000 SF.

Green speed goals: Smooth 8.

Tees: 2.0 acres. Celebration. HOC 0.5.

Overseeding: ryegrass 400 lb/A
Fairways (10 acres) and Roughs (2 acres). Turf: Celebration. HOC 1.0. No overseeding.

Bunkers: 10. Hand-raked. Sand type: E.R. Jahna 37-J bunker sand.

Native areas: We have a variety of native trees and grasses planted around the course. Several years ago we received a grant for an Upland Project and we

planted slash pines, wax myrtles, sabal palms and saw palmettos.

Lakes/Ponds: 3 covering 2 acres. Treated by outside contractor.

Irrigation: Source: Well. Flowtronex pump station. Controls: Toro Network LTC Plus. 133 heads. No fertigation. Water Conservation: Under SWFWMD guidelines. Use wetting agents. Converting full circle and fixed part circle heads to adjustable heads.

Staff including superintendent: 4. Two full time and two part time. Also utilize an average of 3 county inmates or community service laborers.

Key staff: Assistant Matt Dean, Equipment Tech Robin Dannison, Equipment Operator Scott Behl.

At top: The 7th hole is in the lighted 3-hole section of the course (#'s 7, 8 and 9). The covered practice area with hitting nets can be seen to the left. Photo by Joel Jackson.

the next level. The program has gotten a nice boost every year from the Barkley, Bean and Bryant fundraising event, which helps generate press and donations to the facility. This year the event expanded to Barkley, Bean, Bryant and Friends as other athletes with local ties join. Giddens says that besides this event they host the Bryant Family Thanksgiving Celebration each November. Rather than fund raising, Brad Bryant and his family use the occasion to give back to their community with free golf clinics, turkeys and presents for the folks in need.

While seeking to improve the chapter's communication infrastructure, Giddens says there is no real generation gap between young and veteran members. The Ridge is famous for its laid-back demeanor, but the members have been very serious when it comes to supporting local charities, programs, and each other.

Giddens is thankful for the generosity

of his peers who lend him equipment and occasionally other materials, products and even labor to help him stretch his tight budget.

With a little help from his friends and his three-man department and some community-service labor, Giddens

Our challenge is taking the Ridge GCSA to the next level.

tries to accomplish at least three core and two solid-tine aerifications on the greens, tees and other high traffic areas.

There isn't a lot of room to do creative traffic control on the course, so the hole-punching equipment is appreciated. Giddens says they verticut the greens once per month in the growing season and the tees three times in the warmer months.

His nutrient program consists of half-granular and half-foliar at about 10 pounds of N on the greens, 8 pounds on

the tees and 4-5 pounds on the fairways. Topdressing is done at light rates twice a month during the growing season.

The pest-control program is strictly curative with moderate thresholds for mole crickets, ants and worms. Damage is scouted and monitored and spot-treated when needed. Giddens reports fungicide treatments are rarely required except occasionally on some greens.

Wear on the driving range and course tees are his biggest challenge.

"The range averages 10,000 balls a day and being a 9-hole course each tee gets used twice in an 18-hole round. Some golfers play two balls at a time, so a potential of four divots per player per tee per round. Our greens are on the small side so they can take a beating too, but especially our practice greens and holes 7, 8 and 9 which are lighted at night. Regular topdressing and fertilizing is essential for their conditioning."



View from behind the 8th green also showing one of the practice greens. Photo by Joel Jackson.

GIDDENS FUN FACTS



Mike Giddens, Brad Bryant, Andy Bean and Charles Barkley at the 2011 Barkly, Bean, Bryant and Friends Pro-Am at the YMCA Par 3 in February. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Vehicle: 1994 Nissan Pickup

I stay home to watch: Noles and Fins Football

Last good movie I saw: Secretariat

What I've been reading: Trade publications.

Favorite meal: Pizza, it's awesome any time, any way.

Prized possessions: My health and my family.

Favorite performers: I like a lot of different performers.

Nobody knows that I: Am half Korean and can make sushi.

I'm better than anyone else when it comes to:
Stretching a penny.

If I could do it over: Wouldn't have student loan debt.

The one thing I can't stand: People who constantly complain but don't offer any solutions.

My fantasy: Have a place in the mountains and on the beach.

I'd give anything to meet: Jesus Christ. One day I will.

Words that best describe me: Honest, hard working and humble

If I could change anything about myself: I'd be a more avid reader.

My most irrational act: Buying things with money I didn't have (credit cards.) Not anymore.

My most humbling experience:
Being a parent of two kids.

Words that best describe me: Patience and perseverance

My dream foursome: Dan Marino, Bobby Bowden, Charles Barkley and me.

My best fish story: Catching a cobia on light spinning tackle when I was young. Took 30 minutes to land. It was awesome, but man it wore me out!

My most amazing golf shot: Still waiting for that one.



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COVER STORY

Giddens began his career at the YMCA course during the renovation back in 2004 and grew it in during that infamous hurricane season that saw the paths of Charlie, Frances and Jeanne criss-cross a few miles away in Lake Wales. It was a stern test for a new superintendent, but Giddens credits Mike Caudill at Lone Palm Golf Club for showing him the ropes in the real world to complement his turf classes at Florida Southern College. Giddens also credits Ridge icon Alan Puckett for being a sounding board and providing insights into the business and association work.

“Outside of the industry,” he said, “I have to say my wife was the most positive influence in my life. We were just married and she put up with me during those crazy first years of me working and going to school. She encouraged me and helped push me through that hectic time in our life.”

EDITOR'S NOTE: My interview with Giddens revealed that young superintendents out there have a lot to offer our industry and our associations. I encourage them to step up and volunteer. And I encourage the veterans to likewise take time to reach across any generation gaps that might exist and invite them to get involved in your chapters. They are our future.

Each hole is named after one of the nine core values of the First Tee Program (Courtesy, Honesty, Integrity, Respect, Judgment, Sportsmanship, Responsibility, Perseverance and Confidence). Photo by Joel Jackson.



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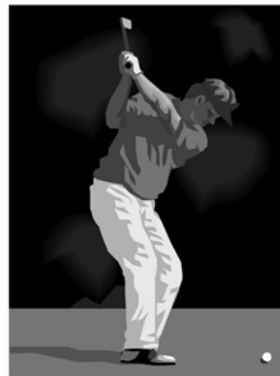


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Conditioning Your Management Skills

By Pat Jones

I gave Dr. Ken Middaugh, one of the Wake Forest University business experts who help teach the annual Syngenta Business Institute, a very simple request: Name five things every superintendent can do to improve his or her management skills now. Here is his very sophisticated answer to that simple request:

1. Build or strengthen your team.

Your team is more than just your direct reports. You should think about all the folks with whom you interact every day to get your job done. In other words, your team is the group you collaborate with to do the job and that needs to be broadly defined. What you do impacts what the golf professional does and both of you impact what the GM does.

Next, think about how you're going to lead that team. One of the adages in management literature has to do with "Theory X managers vs. Theory Y managers." Theory X managers are people who believe that employees are nails and they're the hammer. They treat their team as unmotivated cogs in the machine and believe constant control is necessary.

Theory Y managers believe that most employees are self-motivated and want to do well. The challenge for them is to state clear outcomes, direct and guide.

Despite what you might think, Y-managed teams universally outperform those run by X-types.

People do not respond well over a long time to constant control and micromanaging. That's hard for some superintendents because they're frontline managers and their first instinct might be to tell employees what to do. Sometimes you have to instruct them – as with a safety issue or a regulated issue or an employee who is untrained or misguided – but mostly you should avoid it. Also, the management vs. labor issue – Expect respect... but build a team to get to know people.

Familiarity does not breed contempt. It builds knowledge and relationships that help you get the most from employees. Plus you're willing to do more and perform better for someone you like and respect, rather than someone you just fear. Break down the barrier. You don't need to have them over to your house, but get to know them; know about their families, likes and dislikes, etc. All of that strengthens your team.

2. Motivate your team.

What's a simple or low-cost approach? Recognition. When someone does something good – not even extraordinary – make sure they know you're pleased. Doing it publicly is even better. A little praise goes a long way to ease a tense, difficult environment without a lot of other rewards available.

In Pizza Hut's story, getting into delivery in the 1970s – way behind Dominoes and others – delivery people were obviously mostly younger males. Pizza Hut committed to a "30 minutes or less or free" policy, which caused these young guys to act unsafely. That was costly in terms of reputation and insurance. They offered drivers \$25 savings bonds for a certain number of hours of incident-free driving, which helped, but the program plateaued. So they bumped it to \$50 for a little more.

They plateaued again, and rose again. Still didn't get the performance and now paying a lot to get the bump.

But then "Top Gun" came out.

One franchise owner started giving out "Top Driver" hats. Problems plummeted because everyone wanted that damned hat! If you can do something similar on the golf course, you may get some really significant results. One key: there has to be a defined, transparent metric and not just "I like him best." One of my favorite comments – a guy said years ago, people don't do extraordinary things for money, but it sure improves their hearing.

Even small rewards, when valued, can generate big results.



Pat Jones, Editorial Director of Golf Industry Magazine gave a "State of the Golf Industry" presentation to the Palm Beach GCSA at their May 2011 meeting. Photo by Steve Wright.