

SUPER FOCUS

BY PETER BLAIS

The Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association needed someone to write a course management column for the national newspaper *Golfweek*. It turned to Mark Jarrell.

The state Department of Environmental Regulation needed two courses where it could sink monitoring wells to test for ground water contamination. Jarrell volunteered his Palm Beach National Golf & Country Club.

Jarrell tackles Fla. issues head-on

The organizers of the Florida Golf Council needed a superintendent to serve on its environmental committee. Jarrell stepped forward.

The Florida GCSA needed a secretary/treasurer and the Florida Turfgrass Association a director. Again, Jarrell answered the call.

"I'm concerned about what's happening in the golf industry. If I can help steer things in the right direction, that's great," explained Jarrell of his involvement in so many extracurricular activities in addition to his workload at his Lake Worth, Fla. course.

Perhaps best known nationally for his work at *Golfweek*, Jarrell

said he enjoys the opportunity to flex his literary muscle, even though "I was basically drafted" for the job four years ago by then-Florida GCSA President Tom Burrows.

"I guess they couldn't find another literate person foolish enough to do it," Jarrell joked. "Writing gives me the chance to educate the public about the problems superintendents face. It amazes me to find out just how uninformed golfers and the public are about what we do."

And what they don't do, namely, pollute the environment.

"Golf is a much-maligned industry. The public perception is really much worse than any of the potential risks," said Jarrell, the 1988 winner of the FGCSA's Annual Distinguished Service Award.

Jarrell firmly believes golf courses benefit the environment. He considers himself an environmentalist and has little use for "so-called" environmentalists who demand zero risk, a group he and others have called "toxic terrorists."

Unfortunately, those are the people who get the press and often drive the decisions made in Washington, Jarrell said.

"People at the EPA have told me their agency is really a political rather than a scientific organization," he said. "Many decisions are made on the basis of what people want instead of what can be scientifically proven. And many people are misinformed."

Which is why Jarrell is so happy with the efforts of the Florida Golf Council to lobby the Florida statehouse on behalf of the state's \$5.5-billion golf industry and why he agreed to join the group's environmental committee.

"I'm encouraged by what's happening with the Florida Golf Council," he said. "Superintendents have been the leaders in dealing with regulatory problems for years. It's just beginning to hit home with developers, architects and owners that we all have to deal with this together."

Jarrell speaks from almost 20 years experience in the golf business. After graduating in 1973 from the University of Florida with a bachelor's degree in ornamental horticulture, he stepped across campus to become head superintendent at the university's Donald Ross-designed golf course, the former Gainesville Golf & Country



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Club.

"I was too poor to move out of town," he quipped.

Two years later, he took over Sugar Mill Country Club in New Smyrna Beach near Daytona, a Joe Lee-designed course. He stayed four years before Buffalo (N.Y.) businessman Joe Rich, of Rich Foods and Rich Stadium fame, hired him in 1979 to run Palm Beach National.

Opened in 1962, the Palm Beach County course, especially the drainage system, desperately needed renovation when Jarrell first arrived.

"I bet we laid six miles of drainage tiles those first three years," he said.

Jarrell and Lee have since combined to renovate the entire front nine and two holes on the back. The remainder will be refurbished over the next couple of years with the goal of making Palm Beach National one of the premier courses in the county, Jarrell said.

Jarrell describes his facility as a "typically flat South Florida course." Untypically, it is covered with a handful of different Bermudagrass varieties.

"The biggest challenge here is the variety of soil and grass types," Jarrell said. "It makes it difficult to have any kind of uniform turf management program. You have to treat every area differently."

The same can be said of the people on Jarrell's staff. He treats each as an individual, setting standards by his own example and encouraging staff members to "simply do the best job they can."

"They chose this career because they like what it means. It's great being on the golf course early in the morning, seeing the sun rise, having the whole course to yourself.

Florida summit

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This was the overriding message during the Florida Golf Council's inaugural Golf Summit, Oct. 11-13 in Orlando.

It was an important enough message for Gov. Bob Martinez to take a break from his re-election campaign to speak to more than 150 attendees, telling them: "This is an industry we want to see grow."

It was important enough for the governor to sign a proclamation during the summit declaring Nov. 20 "Florida Golf Day."

It was important enough for golf's icon, Arnold Palmer, to attend and declare: "You in this room, and those involved in building golf

courses, have the responsibility to spread the word about golf. We must provide education about golf, and the good things that a golf course does for the environment.

"I believe in the Florida Golf Council. It's not just in Florida that golf is important ... it's in the nation and the world."

Florida Secretary of Commerce Bill Sutton emphasized the importance of golf to Florida: "We are a sporting state, and golf is one of the foremost industries in Florida. There are more acres of fairways than coastline land in Florida."

And PGA of America's Jim Awtry said, "If we don't take action as a group to let Florida know what golf

"I like being a manager, being utilized for my brain, but still being involved with the outdoors. Here you can see the results of what you do. It's not like writing, where you may never hear a word about a column after you write it. On the course, you can see every day whether you're doing a good job or not."

The Department of Environmental Regulations would likely argue that Jarrell is doing a very good job based on initial reports from its ground water monitoring wells at Palm Beach National. All 37 pesticides tested were below detection limits.

"That's a 30-year-old course showing no ground water contamination," Jarrell said. "I'm thrilled to death. We sunk wells at what I thought would be worst-case and best-case sites. There was no difference."

The DER and U.S. Geologic Survey Service are planning a joint study comparing ground water quality at courses using effluent and those using conventional water sources. A survey is still being developed to determine which courses might be most affected, said Jarrell. No test courses have been selected.

Jarrell declined to speculate what the tests will eventually show, although he is "optimistic" the results will further bolster golf's claim of being a friend to the environment.

A three-letter winner in baseball, basketball and cross-country at New Smyrna Beach High School, Jarrell is a father of three — Robert, 19, Steve, 17 and daughter Jamie, 6.

As for his own future, "I'd like to stay here as long as Mr. Rich will have me," Jarrell said. "I can't imagine a more interesting job, especially with the new projects we've been doing every year."

represents to this state, then it will be relegated to just a game."

PGA Tour Commissioner Deane Beman said the focus of the summit — governmental regulation — is a key to the continued success of golf in the state.

"There must be open communication between elected officials, golf course architects and developers," Beman said. "This is essential to the future of golf in Florida."

When two days of talks were complete, a roundtable highlighted future plans, including:

- Gathering pertinent data on golf courses and their environmental impact.

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