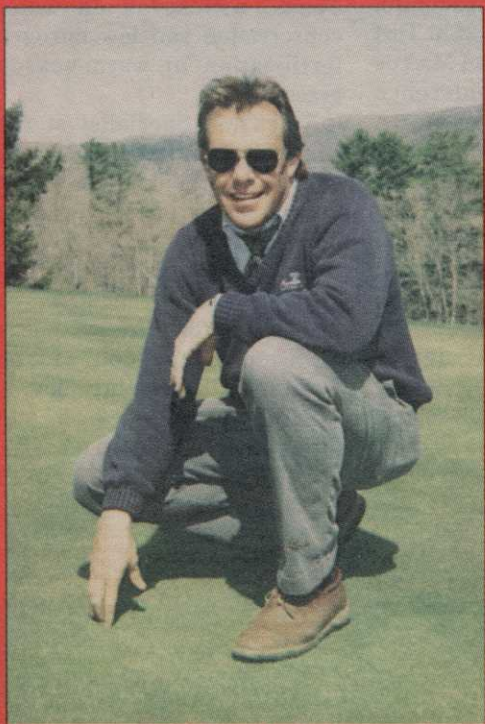


SUPER FOCUS

Jeff Carlson,
a man of
many hats —
and talents —
lands yet
another role
in the world
of golf



Jeff Carlson at Ocean Edge Golf Club

On call for any calling

By PETER BLAIS

Not many superintendents can say they haven't had to apply for a job in 22 years. Jeff Carlson can.

Not many superintendents can say they work at four different courses and have four different titles. Jeff Carlson can.

Hopefully, many superintendents can say they love their work. Jeff Carlson can.

"I consider myself really lucky to be doing what I like to do," the roving Massachusetts superintendent/executive said.

Carlson began his turf career in the summer of 1968, cutting grass at Brewster (Mass.) Golf Club while vacationing with his parents at their Cape Cod summer home.

He spent three summers on the grounds crew before accepting the assistant superintendent job in 1971.

"I was an English major [Drew University, Madison, N.J., 1971]. I didn't want to teach. And here was an opportunity to work outside. It was just what I wanted," Carlson recalled.

Four years later, he was promoted to head superintendent at the nine-hole layout. In 1980, he attended the University of Massachusetts' winter turf management school. That prepared him, to a minor degree, for what was to come.

The Concoran-Jennison Cos. bought Brewster GC and the surrounding 485 acres in 1983. Incorporating the land but not the routing of the old nine, the new management planned to expand the course to 18 holes and build 800 condos.

The design team of Geoffrey Cornish and Brian Silva were the architects. Carlson was offered a one-year contract as construction superintendent.

"It was the best learning experience I could have had," said the English major. "Brian was on the scene and he gave me a crash course in agronomy. We didn't have an irrigation system and I got to help put that in. I got to see the various subsoils and where the drainage tiles were. It was fun and a lot of hard work."

The course was renamed Ocean Edge Golf Club and re-opened in 1986. Carlson became director of maintenance, title No.1. In addition to accommodating 35,000 rounds a year, Ocean Edge hosted the next six New England PGA Championships. Its extensive practice facility helped draw *Golf Digest's* annual golf school.

Concoran-Jennison decided in 1990 to get into the management of resort and conference centers.

The company signed on to operate the Cranwell Conference Center and Golf Club in Lenox. The facility, located in the western mountains, included a 65-room hotel and 18-hole John Van Kleeck/Wayne Stiles-designed course.

The previous owners had started to fix up the long-neglected layout, but ran into financial difficulties. Carlson was named Director of Golf, title No. 2, and given the responsibility to oversee completion of all capital improvements, golf course maintenance, membership, golf programs, staffing, budgeting and marketing.

"It was good to start as a superintendent and then move into the playing side," Carlson said.

"As a superintendent, you see things just from the expense and not the revenue angle. Golfers are viewed as running down the course. Most superintendents would rather see fewer rounds. It's important to see how the revenue and expense sides need to work together."

Revenues tripled under Carlson's leadership. Lazy maintenance procedures had reduced the greens to small circles. New mowing practices following the contours of the original greens pads eventually returned the putting surfaces to their intricate shapes and larger sizes.

"It's really an undiscovered gem of New England golf," said Carlson, who took his greatest professional pride and enjoyment restoring the greens to Van Kleeck's and Stiles' original design.

Concoran-Jennison wasn't finished. In 1991, local banks asked the firm to take over Glen Ellen Golf Club, a family resort

in central Massachusetts that had fallen into serious disrepair.

Carlson became the 18-hole course's Director of Golf Maintenance, title No. 3. He embarked on a three-year capital improvement program by installing a new pump station and drainage system while renovating many greens and tees.

Lianne Larsen, one of New England's few female head superintendents, was put in charge of daily operations. The property includes 100 acres of land that will eventually allow the course to expand to 27 holes.

Title No. 4, construction superintendent, looms just ahead. Concoran-Jennison will start construction of Braeburn, an 18-hole course in Hope

Valley, R.I., this fall.

"The Mass Pike and 495 have become major parts of my life," Carlson said of the state's two main highways leading to his various outposts. "I've gotten to know the toll-takers very well. When we start construction this fall I'm going to live on those roads."

Does that bother him?

"No," Carlson replied. "I really like the diversity. At first I thought wearing so many hats might be frustrating. But it's really helped me understand the business better."

"My responsibilities just keep getting bigger. The key to making it all work is being able to delegate authority and hire good people."

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