

# Enticed to Florida, Frutchey finds dream job at Black Diamond

By MARK LESLIE

**L**ECANTO, Fla. — Palm trees. Just palm trees. That's all it took to get Laurie Frutchey to pack her bags and move to Florida.

"I fell in love with them, and just decided to stay down here," said the young superintendent of world-class Black Diamond Golf Club here. The Pennsylvania-raised Frutchey was visiting Florida State University at the time of her first visit, expecting to study science education and play softball.

She studied science and education, all right. But the call on her life was to golf courses. During a summer job at Killlearn Country Club in Tallahassee, Frutchey discovered golf course maintenance and added to her list of "loves." Now it included palm trees and irrigation. When she graduated with her education degree to teach science in 1986, she landed a job as an irrigation technician at Golden Eagle Golf Club in Tallahassee.

"She was the hardest worker I had," said Terry Buchen, who hired her at Golden Eagle. "She set the example for



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everyone." Not long afterward, Frutchey had worked her way into one of the prime superintendent positions in the country — here at Black Diamond.

"I am very fortunate. I wouldn't trade places with anybody," Frutchey

said. "As long as there is a challenge, I guess I'll always stay here."

She has set her gaze definitively on pushing Black Diamond up the ladder to America's top-ranked position from its current *Golf Digest* ranking at 55th.

"It's a living, evolving environment out here," she said. "The course is only going to improve with age."

So it will be No. 1 in 50 years?

"It won't take that long," she declared.

Frutchey's loyalty to the Tom Fazio-designed Black Diamond began in 1987 when she moved here from Golden Eagle during construction for entrepreneur and developer Stan Olson. Starting in irrigation and spraying, she was promoted to foreman, then to assistant superintendent in 1992 and then head superintendent in 1994 with the passing of her mentor, Carl Jacob, and the



Laurie Frutchey gets down to business at one of Black Diamond's famous five quarry holes.

departure of Jim Lerner.

Jacob, she said, "saw something in me and gave me a chance."

What did she learn from him? "Everything."

Indeed, Frutchey's success results in part from all crew members learning all the jobs. "Our people don't do the same thing every day," she said. "We rotate so that everybody is trained on everything. We have people who are better at certain things, but we rotate them as much as possible."

This rotation, she said, has meant low turnover. "You're not stuck with the same job all the time. New people are not low men on the totem pole doing Flymo-ing every day. You won't keep people like that. You find good people and train them to do everything, and they seem to stick around more."

Indeed, Frutchey digs right in with her crew.

"I work with them and beside them," she said. "I'll Flymo. I'll weed-eat. I'll

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## Frutchey's irrigation background a plus

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get down there with the best of them."

And while dealing with personnel is the most difficult part of being a superintendent, she said: "I was lucky. I got a crew that I wouldn't trade anybody for. They're great."

"A lot of people don't get to see the results of their work. But when you're on a golf course, you do," Frutchey said about what she enjoys. "I like to see a project get done, from start to finish. I even enjoy mowing fairways, just so I can look back and see the result when I'm done."

Asked if the former irrigation tech employs her own irrigation tech, Frutchey said, laughing, "Yes, and he doesn't put anything over on me."

Maintenance jobs on this course aren't all for the faint-of-heart, though. Five famous holes winding up and down and over and into an 80-foot-deep rock quarry present challenges in edging, weed-eating and Flymo-ing, as well as more disease problems because of shade, heat and low air circulation.

Trimming the quarry walls, crew members sometimes go up and sometimes go down. "When they go down, they are tied to equipment like a utility truck," Frutchey said. "Certain people really enjoy doing that."

For Frutchey and her 26-man full-time crew, the workload is about to expand dramatically. Now boasting the acclaimed 18-hole course and the first nine of the Ranch Course, Black Diamond plans to add the second Ranch Course nine and a 10-hole executive track.

Fazio will design the new holes and Frutchey is taking the opportunity to employ her first love: irrigation design.

"Irrigation was what really attracted me to it [turfgrass maintenance]," she said. "It is the challenge of firing up a hole and seeing it work."

The toughest problem in maintaining turfgrass in this area, Frutchey said, is the weather. "And you can't do anything about it. You can work on something for three of four days, and 20 minutes of rain will destroy it all."

"Plus, central Florida is the lightning capital of the universe. Lightning storms spring out of nowhere."

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Black Diamond's construction, Frutchey said, has brought reclamation of "barren" land.

"Who else would have thought of taking that old abandoned lime rock quarry and making it into the No. 1 golf course?" she asked, referring to Olson. "It was a eyesore."

And now, with the new

construction upcoming, work will revolve around the "natural."

"Everybody is tending to go away from wall-to-wall irrigation and to go natural, like xeriscape," Frutchey said. "You have such a beautiful area here, why not enhance it? Why try to cover it? When you trim them up, palmettos are beautiful. Slash pines, too. You can't find anything more beautiful than the quarry walls — and that's all natural."

"It's exciting," she added. "It's taking nothing and making it into a golf course."

As for the original 18, Frutchey feels the pressure of maintaining Black Diamond's ranking as one of the nation's top courses. But, she said: "It's a good pressure. It's like a pride pressure. And the maintenance crew feels the same way. When you work for a place that is ranked this high, there is a lot of pride, and it tends to take away that pressure."

## GCSAA acts to ease reaffiliation

DEARBORN, Mich. — After determining that a majority of the chapters intend to reaffiliate with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America by the Dec. 31 deadline, the Chapter Relations Committee has suggested measures to facilitate the process.

The panel scrutinized a survey of individual chapter reaffiliation status. It recommended that Newline, the member newsletter, publish each chapter's reaffiliation status. The group also advised GCSAA staff to increase the frequency of chapter mailings in regard to reaffiliation status and to encourage chapters to submit signed affiliation agreements as soon as possible. The panel also recommended that international chapters meet the same requirements as their domestic counterparts.

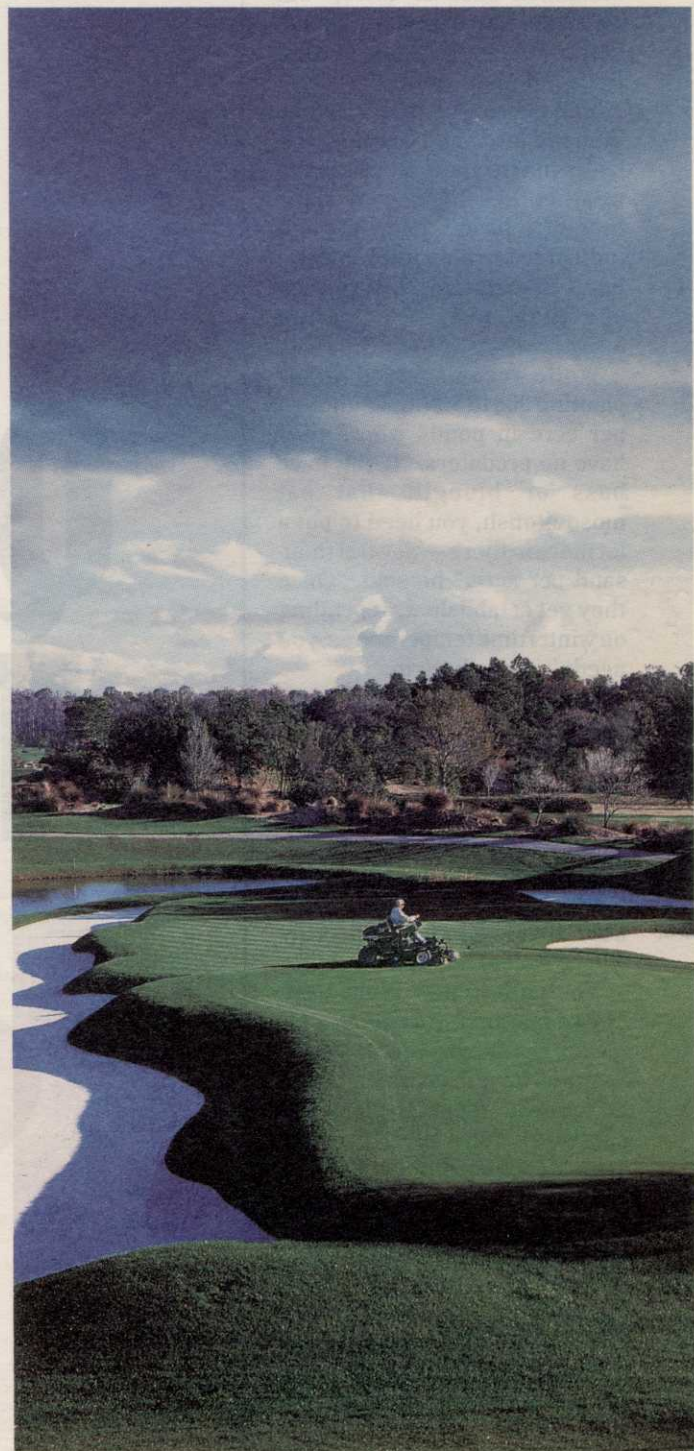


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