

Rick Kerins: Putting the environment first

By MARK LESLIE

HERMITAGE, Pa. — Rick Kerins had been “raising the bar” in the environmental friendliness of his maintenance program at Tam O’Shanter Golf Course here even before taking the reins as superintendent in 1983. Growing up on the course owned by parents Jack and Mary Lou Kerins, Rick “got a feel for the environment” early on.

That “feel” has translated into Kerins taking aggressive environmental steps that have earned him the national Environmental Steward Award from the Golf Course Superintendents Association in 1995, a Certificate of Appreciation from the Pennsylvania Game Commission in 1995, and the post of steward for Pennsylvania for Audubon International and its Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

His love for the environment, Kerins said, is “something that’s in you. I may take it to the extreme sometimes. I take to heart what I do. I want the course to be environmentally friendly.

“It’s not one thing you do. There are a lot of things you can do to make it more friendly.”

Here is a man who uses Garlic Barrier in his pond to repel mosqui-



Rick Kerins, right, keeps his course eco-friendly.

toes; who uses an all-natural fertilizer; who uses green lacewings and lady bugs to attack aphids, diateneaceous earth (groundup seashells) to control earthworms, and nematodes to control grubs.

Here is a man whose recycling program runs the gamut from grass clippings to cardboard and batteries; who is on a gradual program to incorporate the turf with more ryegrass which is easier to care for, both culturally and



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chemically; and who, when underground storage regulations began to take force, had a

local company build him an above-ground containment system that has now been duplicated many times over elsewhere.

“You wouldn’t be in the profession unless you enjoyed the challenges,” Kerins said.

Co-operating the course with his brother Ron, the golf pro, Kerins nevertheless was far ahead of the curve when he joined the Cooperative Sanctuary Program. It took him only one year to achieve full certification. “We were able to zip right through it because we had already met most of the criteria,” he said.

A professor who saw his Integrated Pest Management Program said it was the best he had ever come across.

“We’re hoping to be pesticide-free,” Kerins said. “I don’t know if that will be a total reality, but we want to have the very least possible. We respect the environment and don’t want to abuse it in any way. We live here.”

His real joy, Kerins said, lies in getting others involved in environmental programs — either at Tam

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Kerins eco-friendly

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O'Shanter or elsewhere.

With his wife Paula ("my right-hand person") at his side, Kerins has involved two students in Pennsylvania State University's Master Gardener Program, Boy Scouts and schoolchildren in the golf course property.

An Eagle Scout himself, Kerins approached area Scout Troop 16, and enlisted the Scouts to monitor bird boxes at Tam O'Shanter. The next year a young man pursued the monitoring as his Eagle Scout project and organized the Troop to build, place and maintain bird boxes.

"He's done it for a year now," Kerins reported. "This year we will have the Scouts work in hollows, make small brush piles for animals, and increase wildlife habitat.

"I was in Boy Scouts and other people gave me opportunities while I was growing up. I thought I could return the favor, but I just enjoy helping other people, too."

Two women are doing Master Gardener projects working on butterfly habitat at Tam O'Shanter. They are committed to spend 100 hours apiece at the course this year, and 50 hours a year afterwards.

And Kerins intends to build a trail for Scouts, schoolchildren and others who want to learn more about butterflies and nature in general.

"One of my main goals is to help others, but also to set an example," Kerins said. "I give a lot of talks to superintendent groups to promote the Audubon program. I'd like them to think a little differently about their cultural practices and what they put on their greens."

Education of the masses is being accomplished in another way at Tam O'Shanter as well.

At each tee, a sign emblazoned with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System symbol informs golfers about one of the projects on the course, or the history of the land, or the facility's recycling program.

On the 12th hole, the nearby maintenance shop has been well landscaped. The 1st-tee sign discusses Tam O'Shanter management's concern for the environment. Another talks about the irrigation system which uses less water but achieves uniform coverage.

Kerins sees "a definite swing toward more environmental awareness," he said. "I also see a lot of companies coming out with products that are less toxic."

Although he didn't attend college, Kerins has attained certified golf course superintendent status. "I have taken many, many short courses," he explained. "And growing up on a golf course, you naturally learn a lot."

Trained as an elementary school teacher, Paula's forte at Tam O'Shanter is organization and the business end of the operation. She is also participating in the butterfly garden.

Will their three children (Colleen, 9; Christen, 8; Joseph, 3) follow in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents at Tam O'Shanter?

"They are very involved and out there on the course every day," Kerins said. "It [future] will be up to the kids. We're grooming them to, first, get their education, and then sit back and decide what they want to do."

Whether they work in golf or not, the odds are that they will inherit their father's "feel for the environment."

Florida GCSA honors Grigg

NORTH NAPLES, Fla. — Gary T. Grigg, superintendent at Royal Poinciana Golf Club here and president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in 1995-96, has been presented the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association's (FGCSA) Distinguished Service Award for 1997.

Grigg, 56, accepted the award at Naples' Bay Colony Club during a general meeting of the Everglades Golf Course Superintendents Association

(EGCSA). In presenting it, Dale Kuehner, past president of FGCSA, cited Griggs' "outstanding achievements as a golf course superintendent" and as "one who has given his time unselfishly in promoting golf course management." He praised Grigg for his efforts encouraging the unification and further professionalism of all Florida superintendents.

Grigg is a member of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association, and has been certified by that organi-

zation as a Master Greenkeeper, one of only 14 greenkeepers in the world to be accorded such certification. He is also a certified golf course superintendent.

Grigg came to southwest Florida in 1992 to oversee construction of Naples National Golf Club. He joined Royal Poinciana in 1995 to oversee a \$7 million upgrade of the private club's two 18-hole courses.



Gary Grigg



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