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GCSAA BOOTH #1908



GCN Big Builder of the year Allan MacCurrach (left) and his sister.

MacCurrach grabs Big Builder award

By PETER BLAIS

YARMOUTH, Maine — MacCurrach Golf Construction Inc. of Jacksonville, Fla., is a name *Golf Course News*' readers are getting used to seeing at or near the top of the Builder of the Year leader board.

The winner of *GCN*'s 1999 Big Builder of the Year Award (four or more courses) took the Small Builder of the Year honor in 1996 and finished second in the Big Builder balloting a year ago. MacCurrach received a score of 78.88 on an 80-point scale in evaluations of the firm's construction projects by architects, developers and superintendents.

Others finishing high in the Big Builder balloting included Barbaron, Golf Works, GolfVisions, RyanGolf, Landscapes Unlimited, Ranger Golf, SAJO Construction, Shapemasters, RBI Golf, Quality Grassing & Services and Niebur Golf.

MacCurrach completed seven projects in 1999. They included three new courses: the Pete Dye-designed course at PGA at the Reserve in Port St. Lucie, Fla.; Mel Graham-designed World Tour Golf Links in Myrtle Beach, S.C.; and Tom Fazio-designed Barefoot Landing in Longs, S.C. MacCurrach also completed four major renovations: a \$2-million project at The Club at Seabrook Island's (S.C.) Crooked Oaks layout; a \$1.3-million redo at Amelia Island Plantation's (Fla.) Oyster Bay track; an \$800,000 upgrade at Delaware Country Club in Muncie, Ind.; and a \$300,000 project at the TPC at Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.

Among the rave reviews of those affiliated with these projects were the following comments:

- "Allan [MacCurrach] and his crew are the epitome of what a professional contractor should be." — Joel Ratciff, superintendent at Word Tour Golf Links.
- "They've done an excellent job for us every time." — Scot Sherman, a senior associate designer with Bobby Weed, architect at Amelia Island's Oyster Bay.
- "The best I have ever worked with." — Tim Liddy, architect at Delaware Country Club.
- "Completed the course in eight months on budget. Great company and individuals." — Bob Fromm, superintendent at PGA at the Reserve.
- "I would not have anyone else doing

our construction." — Ron Hill, superintendent at Amelia Island Plantation.

MacCurrach is particularly excited about the Dye course at the PGA at the Reserve. "It is the newest cut of the abstract Pete Dye," MacCurrach said of the layout, which he predicts will receive numerous accolades in the various "best new course" lists. "That's going to be big."

Founder Allan MacCurrach III is the son of Allan MacCurrach Jr., a former head agronomist with the PGA Tour. The younger MacCurrach grew up working on the grounds crew of the TPC at Sawgrass. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts' two-year turfgrass program, he helped build courses with Dye and architect Bob Cupp, as well as builder Jim Holmes of Greensboro, Ga., before striking out on his own in 1987.

MacCurrach will receive his award at the Golf Course Builders Association of America annual banquet during February's Golf Course Superintendents Association of America International Conference and Show in New Orleans.

"People get up at that banquet and always thank their employees," MacCurrach said. "And that's fine. But if we were playing in the Super Bowl, we'd have the best lineman, best receiver, best quarterback... I could end up in a rectangular box with six feet of top dressing on top of me and this company would not miss a beat."

"I've got a core group of guys who have brought a lot of success for me: General Manager Brian Almony and project superintendents Chris Papanto, Doug Seldon, Jeff Tourangeau, Tom Weber and Chris Kleinsmith. Many of them are the same guys who were with me when we won the Small Builder award. Every superintendent who works for this company has come from the ditch. Most of them came to us as college interns or laborers and now they are running \$5-million jobs."

The transition from "small" to "big" builder can be a rocky one, but has been relatively smooth for MacCurrach. MacCurrach peaked at 145 employees in 1999. A dozen years ago it was just MacCurrach.

"We absolutely pride ourselves in not

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fit in," the low-budget superintendent would say.

The limited-budget initiative is a way to overcome that perception of cliques. It is sort of a chapter outreach program.

As chapter members and local distributors you know the limited-budget facilities in your areas. Identify the superintendents at

those courses. Then make a telephone call, or better yet, a personal visit. You do that and you break the barrier of the clique. You invite them to the meetings and maybe waive the chapter dues for a year, if that's what it takes to get them to come to the meetings. GCSAA is giving its chapters a free membership to award to a course that is identified through this limited-budget initiative. We

waive the dues and hopefully the chapter does the same.

You make the new superintendent feel at home. You remember how you felt when you went to that first meeting? You didn't know anybody. You had no idea who you were going to play golf with. So, instead of playing in your regular foursomes, you put this new person in your group. You follow this up by offering advice if they

mention a problem they are having at their course. Maybe you stop by their club for a visit. And let them know GCSAA will follow up with any information it has that may help them.

Hopefully they'll see that the local chapter is helping them and consider attending the national conference and show.

It goes back to this affordable, accessible golf the whole indus-

try is stressing. The growth of the game won't occur solely at the \$175 green-fee facilities. Somewhere there has to be a place where women, kids, minorities and Generation X-ers can go, learn the game and not pay an arm and a leg for it. Limited-budget facilities are where this can happen. I'll bet 90 percent of superintendents can trace their roots back to facilities like these, either playing or working. If the game and out industry is going to grow, it's going to happen largely at these limited-budget courses. ▶

MacCurrach

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overloading the capacity of the company," MacCurrach said. "I tell our clients and architects we are a good five-job company. If we have guys on five different sites, we're good. If we have guys on six different sites, we're not so good, we're okay. If we get stretched to where we are finishing one and starting one, and we get some overlap where we have guys at seven different locations, we're not a good company."

"Growth-wise, we've been extremely controlled. My nightmare would be to get a telephone call from an owner someday saying, 'We're not getting enough production from this.' I just never get those calls."

"We don't bid a lot of work. If we show up at a bid meeting, it's because we want the job. I don't throw in a bunch of complimentary bids. Our batting average on bids is pretty good because we don't bid a lot of jobs. We have a lot of negotiated work coming our way. Some of these architects are starting to lean toward us on some of their nicer jobs. That's a blessing."

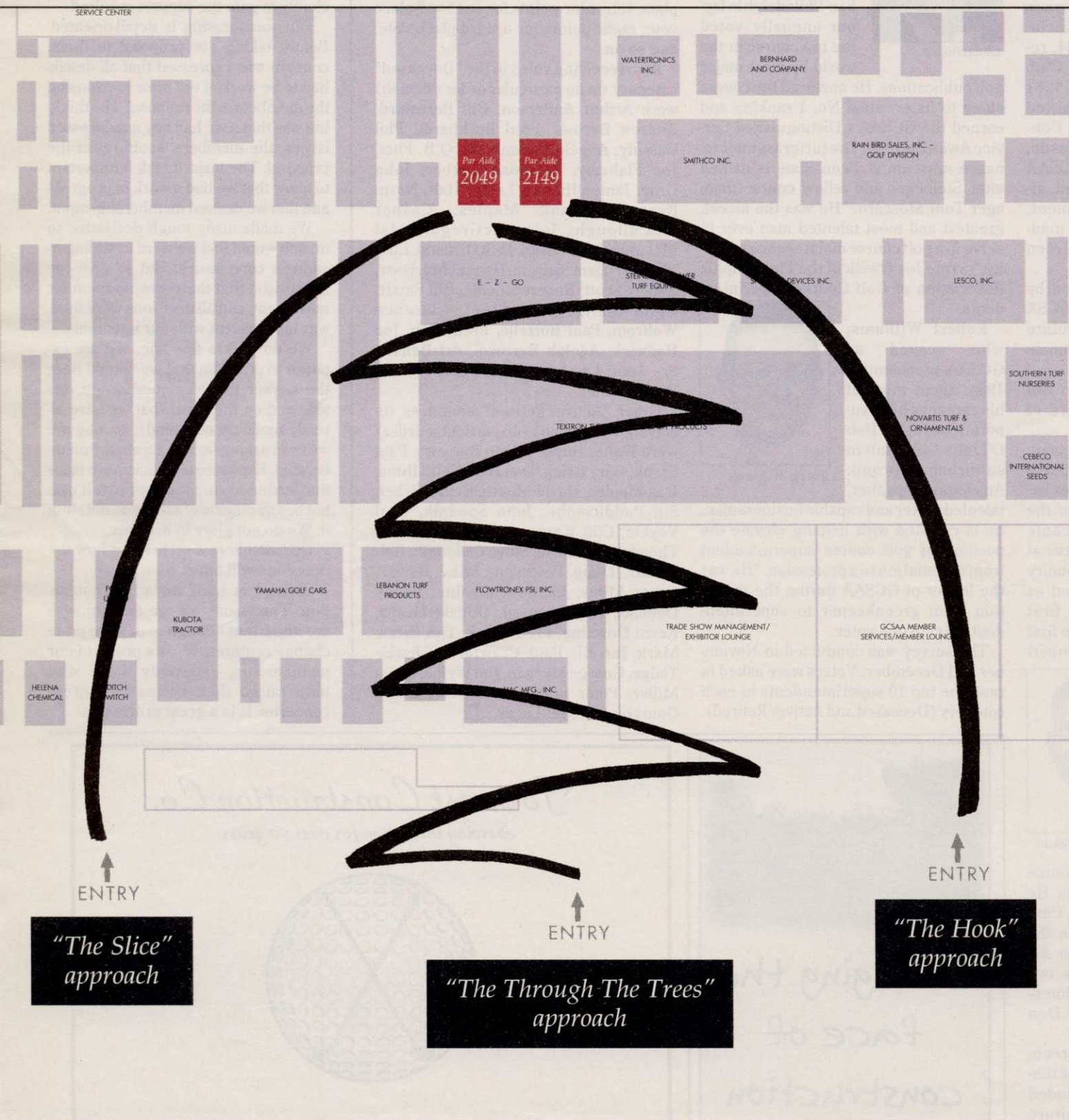
MacCurrach has never set goals in terms of total revenues or employees. At the end of each year, he said, he meets with his accountant and is always amazed at how much money the firm has made.

"We've always focused on the journey and not the destination," he said. "We don't have a five-year or 10-year plan around here... If I lose a bunch of people, I'll take on less work. Our capacity of personnel drives the volume of work we do. We'll never overextend the capacity of this company." ▶

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"We're at a comfortable size for us right now," Miller said. "We can run up to 90 employees and as many as four full-time jobs. We don't want to get much bigger. That way we can retain hands-on control. When the architect's on site, I want to be there, too." ▶



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