

## SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

Bill Anderson has overseen many changes at Carmel Country Club, including the renovation of both of its courses. Photo: Carmel Country Club



# DEEP ROOTS

After 34 years at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., **BILL ANDERSON** hasn't found a good reason to leave.

**T**hese days, the chances of a golf course superintendent spending his entire career at one facility are about the same as a hole-in-one on a par 4. But at this point in his career, it looks like Bill Anderson might do exactly that. Anderson is the director of greens and grounds at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C.

In the mid-'60s at age 14, Anderson was caddying a Point O'Woods Country Club in Benton Harbor, Mich. After caddying for several years, he got a job at Point O'Woods working on the maintenance crew for Norm Kramer, who was an up-and-coming future president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. It was then that Anderson became interested in the golf course maintenance business. Anderson says Kramer was a great mentor who taught the crew a lot. Anderson worked on the crew through high school and college. In 1973, after receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in turfgrass science from Michigan State University, Anderson needed a job.

Down in Charlotte, Carmel was looking for an assistant golf course superintendent, so Anderson interviewed and was hired. Two years later, he was promoted to golf course superintendent, and he's been there ever since. Anderson says experience was the key to his quick promotion.

"I had more experience than most guys my age because I had been working at a golf course for so long

and had a couple of years to prove myself," he says. "So the people knew me, but I didn't know how long a rope I had. It could have been a 30-day rope."

Anderson says his 34-year career at Carmel is partly happenstance and partly luck. He says Carmel, which is considered one of the top 10 country clubs in the country, and his career grew on a parallel level throughout the years. During those years, Anderson says he never came that close to leaving the club even though there were other opportunities he could have pursued. And being at the same club for so many years hasn't bored Anderson or made him unhappy.

"It might be my nature," he says. "I've had more than my share of projects and big things happen. We've renovated both golf courses once, and we're getting ready to renovate the first one we renovated again. There's lots of stuff to do."

Not only is Anderson content at Carmel, he's also always enjoyed being involved with the Carolinas GCSA and the GCSAA.

"We have a local organization called the North-South Turfgrass Association," he says. "That's where I started. I moved up through the Carolinas GCSA onto the board of directors and eventually became president in 1992. I like being involved and meeting all the people inside and outside the business. It keeps you engaged."

Anderson has seen many changes during his lengthy career. The biggest one that amazes him every day is standards.

"What used to be good standards are now sub-standard," he says. "The bar has been raised. Some of it is superintendents pushing and pushing, saying, 'I can do more, and I can do it faster.' Some of it is

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equipment allowing us to do it.”

Another significant change Anderson has seen is the increasing number of big budgets that exist now.

But changes didn't occur solely with golf facilities. Golfers have changed too, especially their expectations.

“It has slowly evolved, and you don't even realize when it's happening,” he says. “Their expectations are a little bit more, and someone keeps ramping it up. Now it's to the point where a 10-percent increase in quality costs a 50-percent increase in money. It appears to me that you can't make any big leaps now because of all that attention to detail – all that walk mowing or double mowing, for example.”

Maintenance equipment has improved and helps meet those high expectations, and there's more equipment available for superintendents.

“I hope some of us that have been in the business for awhile appreciate the manufacturers and their equipment,” he says. “No

doubt our jobs are easier. We are asked to do more, but it's certainly easier to get there than it's ever been.”

Even though the job is easier, there still are challenges facing Anderson, and managing and meeting member expectations is his biggest. He sits in committee meetings and has discussions with members to control their expectations.

“I try to control that demand,” he says. “You have to do it on the front end. For example, springs are difficult, and golf courses aren't going to look as good in the spring. You have to take the time to explain that some days you'll have to run trucks on the course to apply fertilizer.”

Like many other country clubs, expectations at Carmel vary because of different cliques and groups. Controlling those expectations is an ongoing fight, Anderson says. Superintendents have to do it every day and week.

“They say dogs have to be fed, so every day you have to feed that dog,” he says. “You have to interact with them, talk to them, explain for the 12th time that it's March and it hasn't been 80 degrees. Some people might get frustrated having to do it over and over again, but it's what we get paid to do.”

Anderson cites two groups at Carmel who have different expectations. One group is called the inner club in which other area clubs get together with their best golfers and play three or four days in a row, and their expectations include fast greens; tight, dry fairways; and perfectly raked bunkers. Another group is more social. It doesn't golf as competitively

as the inner club and isn't as concerned about green speeds.

Some challenges superintendents face are universal. Others are more regional. In the Carolinas, a big challenge for those with bentgrass greens is getting through the summer.

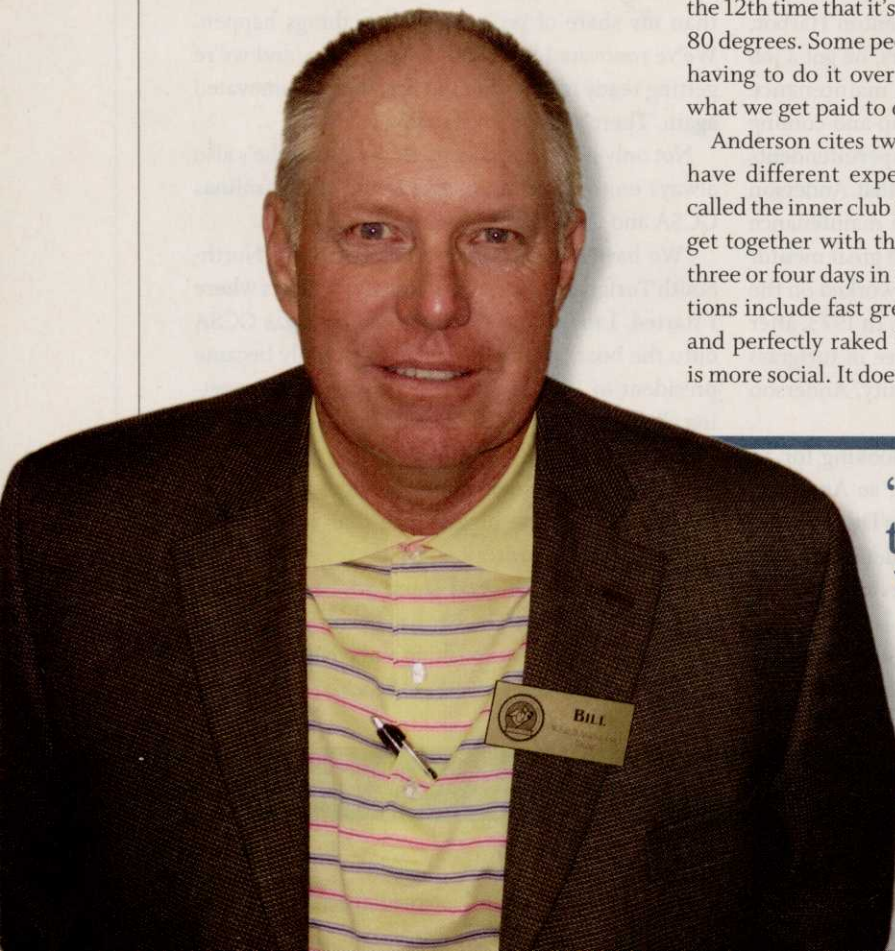
“That's kind of how we're judged,” Anderson says.

One trend often discussed in the transition zone is courses replacing bentgrass greens with ultradwarf Bermudagrass greens because the ultradwarfs have improved. Anderson says there's much more bentgrass in North Carolina down to Charlotte, and Myrtle Beach is still probably more bentgrass than Bermudagrass. However, there's more interest in Bermudagrass.

“That question keeps coming up,” he says. “I don't know if that's going to be answered right away. The basic concern is if we have a cold winter. We don't want to put all of our eggs into this new basket and then be disappointed. I don't know what the best choice is, but it has certainly been debated at every golf course.”

An overriding theme throughout the country is golf course superintendents becoming better stewards of the environment and using fewer inputs on the golf course, whether it be pressure from environmental groups or within the profession itself. Anderson says superintendents, in general, want to be good stewards.

“We try to use as little as we can, but sometimes we don't have a choice,” he says. “We try to use pesticides and fertilizers as safely



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and as carefully as we can. There's also a lot of money at facilities invested to take care of pesticide residuals, packaging, sprayer cleaning and that whole side."

Despite sound financial and agronomic reasons for not applying too many pesticides, fertilizer and water, superintendents still are faced with the negative perception of using too many of those inputs.

"That's something we're going to have to overcome," he says. "But that perception isn't the reality. Superintendents by nature think if they can save in one area they can improve in another. We're judged on how we spend those dollars, so if we're just wasting them, we don't get the things we want. We don't get anything by wasting these resources. It's in our best interest not to waste them. That has been the case more often than not."

On a broader scale, Anderson thinks the biggest problems facing the golf course management industry is the number of golfers.

"We have a lower number of wealthy golfers," he says. "We have to keep recognizing the ... need for more golfers. Everybody has to do

their little part, but it's not easy because customers necessarily aren't spending much."

Throughout a long career, one learns a lot. And one certainly can learn from mistakes. Anderson says one sticks out in his mind.

"I was asked to put together a presentation and was supposed to take some pictures and show some creek banks that needed restoration," he says. "I went into this meeting unprepared, and I embarrassed myself. Everything turned out OK, and the incident didn't really hurt me, but from that day on I said, 'I'm never going to do that again.' I understood the point that I needed to be prepared when interacting with other people, groups and committees."

The most valuable thing Anderson has learned throughout his career is to hire and surround oneself with good people and everything will be easier.

"If it's not right, then you have to fix it, but if it's right, you have to appreciate it and have good people," he says. "Preparation is key. Our mistakes don't go away very fast. It's not like you start over. You have to work with those mistakes a long time. You have to have good

turf. There's no one else that can cover for you because they don't know."

Throughout the years, Anderson has worked with many assistants and seen some commonalities among them. He says when they first start, they worry about the agronomic aspect of the job and are concerned they don't know everything they need to know about every fertilizer or fungicide.

"But after they've been there for a while, they realize that's the easy part," he says. "It's the management of the people, the golfers and the members that take the time to develop the skills that really get them set for the next job."

After 34 years in the business, it's natural for one to think about life after a job and retirement. At 57, Anderson has thought about retirement, but hasn't set any time frame and doesn't anticipate doing so any time soon.

"I anticipate I'll stay right where I'm at," he says. "We have plenty of projects. I enjoy where I work and the people I work with. I'll just keep going because I have a little more time to do some things." **GCI**

Like many country clubs throughout the country, expectations at Carmel vary because of different groups. Managing those is an ongoing battle, Anderson says. Photo: Carmel Country Club

