

## MY BRAIN ON TIM

**W**arning: Spending two hours with Tim Hiers can make your head explode. A few weeks ago, I was in south Florida to speak on “career management in the new normal” to a great group of assistant superintendents from the Everglades GCSA. I had some extra time in my schedule, so I called my old friend Tim Hiers, CGCS, the legendary Naples-area super, and he graciously agreed to show me around The Old Collier Golf Club.

Now, unless you’ve been under a rock for three decades, you probably know Tim is not just a leader in environmental golf course management, he’s been driving the pace car.

Moments after arriving at the club, I was in the passenger seat of his vehicle flying around the course, attempting (poorly) to take notes on my iPad as we bolted from spot to spot to see examples of what his team has done.

Tim spewed statistics and metrics like an over-caffeinated Harvard business prof. In all the years I’ve known him, I’ve never once heard Tim say anything without backing it up with a seemingly unassailable fact. I’m fairly sure he has a photographic memory.

Due to Tim’s rapid-fire delivery and the fact we were going about 30 mph, my notes from our whirlwind excursion around Old Collier are a mess. He briefed me about Platinum paspalum, the tough-as-nails turf he helped Dr. Ronnie Duncan develop to cope with the poor water quality he deals with daily. His brackish water is so awful (“Second worst in the world behind a course in Dubai that irrigates with desalinized sea water.”) that Toro Irrigation used what they learned at Old Collier to redesign some of their products.

He showed me the many wildlife corridors they’ve created around the course that are home to dozens of species...some endangered or threatened. We stopped numerous times to check out planted areas with vegetation from around the world, some of it personally selected and planted by our mutual friend Jan Beljan, the former Fazio golf course designer who doubles as a passionate landscaping guru.

In preparation for the rainy season, the course was closed and ripped up completely by aerification. We stopped to watch the process,

including the demo of a potential new piece of equipment that would reduce the manpower required. Tim, as always, had done the math and knew that if the huge new vacuum performed as advertised it would pay for itself in 3.2 years (give or take a week).

The average Old Collier member is probably not that interested in the amazing things Tim has done to make the facility greener and leaner. However, his owners – the revered Collier family – are quite interested. They’re committed to sustainability in everything their vast company does. It’s simply part of the culture for them so Tim, who has arguably been the Old Tom Morris of sustainability in golf, is a perfect fit.

But what does “sustainability” even mean?

For Tim, it comes down to one simple thing...can it be replicated elsewhere? He ticks off dozens of small things he does to ensure all the little stuff has a big impact on the course. Each of them could work at nearly any other course.

But, off the course in his office is where his eyes seem to shimmer most brightly when he talks about everything he’s done to conserve energy –

install low-power lighting, find just the right ice machines and A/C units, reuse materials. Get this: his average electric bill for his entire maintenance facility is less than \$600 per month. He’s so focused on energy savings he has Florida Power & Light on speed dial. Hell, they probably have him on speed dial to find out how he does it.

That’s when it dawned on me. As I sorted through what he’d crammed in my cranium in 128 minutes, I realized my friend – a man consistently recognized as the Pied Piper of “greener golf” – isn’t motivated by some lofty sense of environmentalism. He is – and I mean this in the nicest way possible – cheap.

He hates waste. He loathes using resources unnecessarily. He despises the unnecessary or the extra. He is – to put it simply – frugal.

Frugality gets a bad rap. It sort of sounds old fashioned or Amish. Yet, it’s one of our finest virtues. And, for a successful golf course superintendent, it’s a core value. Think about it. Be like Tim. Be frugal...and prosper. **GCI**



**Pat Jones**  
Editorial director and publisher

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