

Golfdom is devoting this issue to the environment, which has become a driving force in our industry. It's forcing the GCSAA to reorganize the Government Relations,

Research and Environmental committees under a master plan for the mission on the new Environmental Institute For Golf.

But like politics, all environmental issues are ultimately local. Until individual citizens take action in their neighborhoods, progress remains a high-minded concept instead of meaningful reality.

One superintendent who is making a difference in my neck of the woods is John Kopack, superintendent at the Legacy Club at Alaquá Lakes in Longwood, Fla. Admittedly, Kopack had a head start in environmental awareness when the company who built the course, Taylor Woodrow Homes, opted to build the residential golf community as an Audubon Signature Sanctuary. But Kopack has done a lot more than just meet the required standards for certification.

The Fazio-designed course has all the Audubon-mandated bells and whistles to protect adjacent wetlands. The course irrigates 90 percent of the time with stormwater runoff with only supplemental well water during the driest times, and that well only pumps 30 gallons per minute to keep the irrigation lake functional. That fact, plus 150 acres of restored wetlands and abundant wildlife, empowers Kopack to invite regulators and environmental groups to tour his course regularly.

Some visits by the local water-management district are all business since they monitor water-use permits, but Kopack loves watching them arrive stiff and formal and leave smiling and saying things like, "I had no idea," after strutting turkeys and grazing deer cross their paths on the course. Kopack admits not everyone melts and becomes golf lovers at the sight of Bambi and friends, but he gets detractors out on the course, challenges their misperceptions, wins some converts and gives others pause in their condemnation of golf.

Kopack's pro-activism extends beyond hosting bird counts and tours for environmentalists to taking an active role in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for schools. The club

He's A Hero For All Seasons

BY JOEL JACKSON



JOHN KOPACK
BACKS HIS
ENVIRONMENTAL
TALK WITH ACTION
— SOMETHING
MORE
SUPERINTENDENTS
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adopted Heathrow Elementary as its partner school, and Kopack and his crew restored a wetland on school property, helped the kids install a butterfly garden using recycled materials and built bird feeders out of old bird houses.

Kopack is not only an ambassador of good environmental stewardship: He was a one-man junior golf program for two years at Hamilton Elementary to expose inner-city kids to the game of golf. He rounded up scores of old clubs, cut them down and regripped them to conduct golf clinics in the school's Career Club program. One highlight of his recruitment efforts was bringing the class to the course and arranging an impromptu appearance and mentoring session for the kids with Senior Touring Pro Jim Thorpe. A gaggle of young jaws dropped when Big Jim whacked a few down the range.

Johnny Kopack is a feisty, red-headed ex-Golden Glove boxer with a biting wit who can definitely liven up a dull party. He uses a punch-and-jab attack to wear down golf's bigger opponents: ignorance and intolerance. Year after year, regulator after regulator, bird watcher after bird watcher and kid after kid, Kopack is relentless and upbeat as he touts the benefits of a properly managed golf course.

We can plan and organize and raise research dollars. We can make PowerPoint presentations to the EPA and testify before Congress and county commissioners. But until you clean up your shop, host a Christmas bird count or lead a tour of school kids, it's just all talk.

John Kopack is not superman. He is everyman: the quintessential common man doing uncommon things. Sometimes we call those kinds of people heroes. I know I do.

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