

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

The following tribute is dedicated to the men and women who are the keepers of the green and guardians of the game of golf. Thank you, one and all.

I can recall the memory of thousands of sunrises and far too many sunsets. In the twilight of dawn I leave my tracks in the silvery beads of morning dew along with the white-tailed deer and wild turkey. I play hide and seek with the barred owl and the red-tailed hawk. I watch in fascination the diving osprey and soaring eagle.

I surprise sunning alligators and turtles as they splash into lakes. I remove any number of serpents from harm's way or from causing harm. I yield the pathways to the grey squirrel and brown rabbit making dashes for cover. I feel frustration at those misguided souls who still call me "polluter." They should come spend a day on my nature preserve.

I am a constant student of my craft as technology and equipment improve. Knowledge comes from my peers and from educators of all disciplines at national conferences, regional seminars and local chapter meetings. Continuing education is my salvation. My fellow superintendents are generous resources for problem solving.

My primary mission is to provide a well-conditioned golf course. To accomplish this, I must be a manager of resources. I am a leader, a planner, a coach and a team player. I am a jack of all trades, from agronomist to zoologist. I am the receiver of the proverbial buck — it always stops here.

Growing grass is only a small part of the job. I am counselor to those crew members needing guidance and disciplinarian to the unmotivated. I am friend and mentor to those who earn my respect. I strive to be fair, firm and consistent, but I am only human. I, too, will make some mistakes along the way.

I try to balance increasing expectations and demands with the reality of the operating budget. Doing more with less is my challenge. Televised golf is both a blessing and a curse. Perception is reality. I strive to please all golfers from scratch to 36 handicaps on the same day.

I am the expert problem solver unless my

A Poetic Tribute to the Profession

BY JOEL JACKSON



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practical experience and classroom knowledge differs from the opinion of the naysayers and purse holders. "What have you done for me lately?" echoes in my ears. Reasons and explanations are often dismissed as excuses. I often have as much job security as the next difference of opinion.

I court Mother Nature and often win her favor. Yet I have seen her wrath and seemingly capricious destruction beyond comprehension. I am held accountable for the conditions from her torrential rains and unrelenting drought. I am expected to somehow turn muck and clay into sandy loam. The timing of necessary cultural practices is often held hostage to special event calendars.

I bear red, scaly, cancerous patches on my skin from an ongoing love-hate relationship with the sun.

The dirt under my fingernails and the calluses on my hands have been earned in honest toil. I have dodged more lightning bolts and tasted more rain drops than I should admit. The long hours and lost weekends can exact a toll on family life. Marriages can become fragile and childhoods can be missed without a trace, when work becomes a selfish mistress.

The love of working outdoors is worth these challenges. I thrill to the grandeur of the changing seasons from spring buds to fall frost. I meet some of the most interesting people on earth in my work. I am driven by myself or others to deliver perfection in an imperfect world. No one seems to understand this paradox except those who walk in my shoes.

I am the superintendent.

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.