

TOP Assistants

Josh Kelley loves the challenges that a new day brings

Editor's note: If you'd like to nominate someone for the Top Assistants feature, please send an e-mail to Larry Aylward at laylward@questex.com.

Grande Pines Golf Club Certified Superintendent Chris Flynn calls Josh Kelley "the best assistant I've ever had."

That's quite the compliment for Kelley, a graduate of Illinois State University, whom Flynn hired more than two years ago to work at the Orlando course.

"Josh is highly regarded both here at our resort, and with our company, Marriott Golf," Flynn says. "One of his biggest achievements thus far was that he single-handedly earned Grande Pines the distinction of being a Certified Audubon Sanctuary last year. This required a tremendous effort to which he was successful."

Flynn says Kelley, who has a degree in turfgrass management, is "well beyond his years and is on his way to becoming a superintendent here in the near future."

Kelley says when he worked as a groundskeeper at Panther Creek Country Club in Springfield, Ill., he became "hooked" on the profession. He then switched degrees and schools to study turfgrass management.

Golfdom caught up with Kelley to talk about the profession he loves.

■ **What's your favorite part of the job?**

Knowing that every day is going to bring new challenges and opportunities. No matter how well the course looks or plays, there are always improvements to be made. Managing and maintaining

a golf course requires a lot of problem solving, planning and prioritizing, all things I enjoy.

■ **Who has been the biggest influence on your career and why?**

The work ethic that my father and grandfather instilled in me allowed me to progress quickly in my career. That, accompanied with being able to spend time with top-notch superintendents throughout my career, has definitely made me the superintendent that I am today. Chris Flynn has especially influenced me. After hiring me, he immediately empowered me to make decisions, allowed me to question him and took the time to listen to my suggestions, which allowed me to learn and grow.

■ **What's your favorite product or piece of equipment and why?**

The Toro Flex 21 greens mower. Grande Pines Golf Club has some severe undulations in our greens, which have always caused some problems with scalping in certain areas. This past fall we leased all new Toro Flex 21 greens mowers. The use of these mowers has almost completely eliminated the scalping.

■ **If you could change something about the industry right now, what would you change?**

The perception that all golf courses should be "TV perfect." We have Tifeagle and Tifsport bermudagrass, which does not go dormant in central Florida unless we have a severe cold snap. So we only overseed our tees and greens. We get some complaints for not being as aesthetically pleasing as some of the wall-to-wall overseeded courses in the



area, but lower-handicapped players tend to like our course better because of the faster and firmer conditions we can provide from not overseeding.

■ **How would you describe yourself in one word?**
Reliable.

■ **What is your favorite hobby and why?**

Photography. When I started college, I majored in graphic design with a minor in photography. Following my sophomore year, I switched schools and majors but I've always kept a camera nearby.

■ **What's your favorite vacation spot?**

I don't know that I have a favorite spot. This past year I was fortunate enough to visit Oregon, Colorado and the Bahamas. All were great in their own ways.

■ **What's your favorite golf course besides your own?**

TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Ill. I worked there in 2005. It's a great piece of property. The course is carved out of the forest along the Rock River and has various elevations. This is in great contrast to the plains and cornfields typically associated with Illinois.

It's your last day on Earth. What do you do?

Sleep in. Get all of my friends and family together and play a round of golf. Then have a nice barbeque. ■

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