

**T**he phrase “four-letter word” usually denotes a cuss word. But not in all cases. For instance, I recently heard a story about a nature cruise along Florida’s southwest coast. The tour guide launched into a presentation about threats to the local estuary — one of them being red tide, a toxic algae bloom. These outbreaks have been reported in Florida and elsewhere since the 1800s. But on this day, the tour guide said without pause that “90 percent of the red tide was caused by golf courses using fertilizer.” Period. End of story. “Golf” was definitely a bad four-letter word to her.

Upon reflection, there are many more beneficial four-letter words synonymous with what the game and industry brings to people and places around the world. Words like “earn,” “give,” “live,” “save,” “care,” “play,” “calm” and “cool” come to mind.

Golf is a \$76 billion industry in the United States and helps two million people earn a living. It also gives more charitable donations than any other sports-related industry. The biodiverse ecology and habitats on a golf course offer unique environmentally friendly green space.

When modern golf courses are designed with wildlife corridors, wetlands and lakes, buffer areas and native landscaping, locally threatened and endangered species like bald eagles, eastern bluebirds, fox squirrels and gopher tortoises have thrived and multiplied. Hence, words like “save” and “care” are demonstrated time and again on golf course properties. More and more older golf courses are being retro-fitted with more native areas and low-input management regimens.

For example, while playing in a local chapter research tournament on an urban golf course surrounded by residential and commercial development, I enjoyed a bald eagle soaring overhead in lazy figure-eight patterns; an osprey perched in a treetop eating a fish; three raccoons checking out our golf cars for snacks; downy and red-bellied woodpeckers seeking food in a snag; and, last but not least, 18 cormorants hunkered down in the sun along a

## ‘Golf’ Is Not a Four-Letter Word

BY JOEL JACKSON



GOLF CAN BE A  
PASSION, A PASTIME  
OR A PROFESSION.  
IT CAN BE A  
LIVELIHOOD OR A  
LEISURELY PURSUIT

lake bank while a great white heron waded by looking for a meal.

As for the words “live” and “play,” the slogan “Golf — The Game of a Lifetime” has been used to promote the game for some time now. As our society becomes so time-crunched and focused on instant gratification through our time-saving (or is it our time-wasting) devices and gadgets, we begrudge a few hours spent outdoors on the verdant swards of grass as a burden rather than a respite in our helter-skelter lives. You can learn to play golf as a junior and continue right up into your golden senior years. My parents didn’t take up the game until my dad retired at age 65, but they joined a small nine-hole club near Crescent City, Fla., where they played two to three times a week, made new friends and enjoyed an active social life for the next 20 years.

Golf can be a passion, a pastime or a profession. It can be a livelihood or a leisurely pursuit for millions. Golf can be a maddening habit or a thriving habitat. It can heat up competition or cool down the planet by sequestering millions of tons of carbon. Golf courses use one-half of one percent of the water pumped in the United States for irrigation, while at the same time they “save” resources by capturing, filtering, storing and recharging millions of gallons of rainfall and help prevent runoff and erosion.

Golf may be a lot of things, and mostly misunderstood, but one thing is for sure — golf is definitely not just a bad four-letter word.

We need to shout out the right word about golf for all, especially for misguided tour guides, to hear.

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