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JOEL JACKSON, *Contributing Editor*

New and improved Lake Omigosh GC

Warmer winter temperatures meant a nice bump in golf rounds and revenue up North at the end of 2012. But Mother Nature has a cruel way of saying, “Gotcha!” Just ask the folks in the Midwest and Northeast, as they had to dig out of blizzards that shut down highways and downed power lines as recently as last month.

Here at the Lake Omigosh Golf Club in Central Florida, trees are blooming. Also newsworthy is what the club is doing to grow the game and keep the club open and profitable. Two years ago the general manager, Alistair Caldwell, and club president Artemus Blodgett pushed through a Play It Forward initiative and got the funding to build an executive course set of tees for new golfers and senior members who have lost distance but not the desire to play.

Superintendent Duffy McDuffy and his crew did the work in-house, saving a lot of money, though the club did hire a golf course architect as a consultant to make sure shot values were preserved for the shorter layout.

One to two days a week are set aside to book tee times for Get Golf Ready playing lessons or junior golf outings. Those outings are only held after the kids and adults have gone through swing development and golf etiquette lessons.

This year, the club will be building a 6-hole course utilizing part of the practice range and some undeveloped property adjacent to the range. After a protracted and sometimes heated discussion among the members, the club finally realized the new generation of golfers wants easier and quicker golf options.

Call it the curse of the immediate gratification syndrome or time-crunched schedules. Whatever the reasons, the club realized it had to change some of its policies

and procedures if it was to survive.

That includes expanding the fitness center facilities and offering more casual dining options in the clubhouse.

To maintain the new turf areas and accommodate new activities after school and on weekends, McDuffy has instituted new flex schedules for his crew. They include variable start times and days off, including on weekends to alleviate babysitting needs.

Duffy also is fine-tuning his cultural practices to include more water conservation, experimenting with controlled but slight reductions in run times wherever possible on the course. Given that the short course has new turf acreage, saving those precious

gallons and run times is critical financially. On top of that, the Water Management District is promising to reduce its water permit allotments.

On the original 18 holes, Duffy and assistant Archie Clark are finding more out-of-play areas they'll propose to convert from maintained turf to naturalized areas. It's part of a trend in cost and input savings.

Thanks to previous “naturalizing projects” and the fact that Lake Omigosh has earned certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary status, the course now hosts the local Audubon Club's Annual Christmas Bird Count and a 5th grade class eco-tour from the nearby elementary school.

From the practice tee to the clubhouse to the maintenance shop, Lake Omigosh has taken a practical look at how it operates. Slowly but surely it's adapting to the new normal. While Duffy keeps an eye on the regulations governing water use and quality on the course, he also knows he needs to embrace changes in the game that are needed to keep the revenue stream healthy.

So long from Lake Omigosh, where the superintendent is dedicated, the crew is hard working and the members are about par for the course.

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