

This definition from Florida: 'the working superintendent'

Caring for the course and repairing equipment is Joe Ondo's cup o' tea.

■ If you looked up the definition of "working superintendent" in the GCSAA dictionary, you'd see a photo of Joe Ondo of Winter Pines Golf Club in Winter Park, Fla.

"Different people have different definitions of 'working superintendent,'" says the 24-year veteran. "I like the physical part of it. I'm part of the crew, so there isn't anything I haven't done. If other people on the timecard see me doing a job, they don't complain when I ask them to do it. I like that hands-on type of feeling."

While some superintendents prefer to spend their time walking the course looking for glitches, or going on equipment-buying trips, or sitting behind the desk making out work schedules, Ondo is the opposite.

"I think it has a lot to do with the type of golf course it is," Ondo admits. "It works because of the size of crews and their job responsibilities. I have no set schedule; I'm very flexible. I'm in charge, but I don't have a specific job most times. I *do* have to take a lot of stuff home."

Ondo's duties are as varied as the weather in his native Pennsylvania. One day, he and Bob Keeth (the only people on-staff with applicator licenses) will be out spraying pesticides. The next, he will be in the repair shop using knowledge gleaned from those winters back up north that

were spent tearing down equipment.

Ondo picked up at least part of his philosophy from owner Ed McMillan, who was out helping lay concrete cart paths the day LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT visited. During the last eight years, Winter Pines workers have laid more than one mile of concrete cart paths—themselves.

"It's a nice situation here," says Ondo. "There's not a lot of pressure. You can afford to make a few mistakes and not worry about your job. Other places I've been, you're wondering if you're doing the job right or fast enough. We just expect a good day's work out of everybody."

That philosophy has resulted in little employee turnover. Five full-timers plus a 30-hour-a-week landscape specialist are under Ondo's supervision. Each of the core maintenance people has been on the course at least 10 years. "It's kind of unusual to have so many people stay on so long," says Ondo, who has worked at Winter Pines for 13 years himself.

One reason for the crew's longevity is Ondo's empathy, gained through years on work crews. "Mowing in the summer is hard because it's so hot, so guys switch off jobs. Mowing eight hours every day can be tough on a person," he says, revealing a sort of "I've-been-there" attitude.

Because Winter Pines is a public course (which also offers memberships) host to about 90,000 rounds per year, and because it's family-owned, time and money are at a premium.

"We don't get to do topdressing and things as often as we would like," Ondo



Joe Ondo: takes the good for granted.

says. "We don't aerify or rip anything up until it's absolutely necessary, usually in June. With the wetting agents and other new products on the market, we're able to get by."

"We do more spiking than aerifying. When we pull a plug, we get more weeds back. By spiking, we save money on herbicides."

New products are pre-tested so there aren't any costly mistakes.

"We'll try a product on half a practice green," Ondo says. "We've never taken a new product and put it on the golf course without trying it out first."

Because of the heat and heavy daytime traffic on the course, the crew members use lighted tractors to begin mowing at 6 a.m. Everything is done in reverse order, beginning at the last hole, so golfers only see the maintenance crew once per 18 holes.

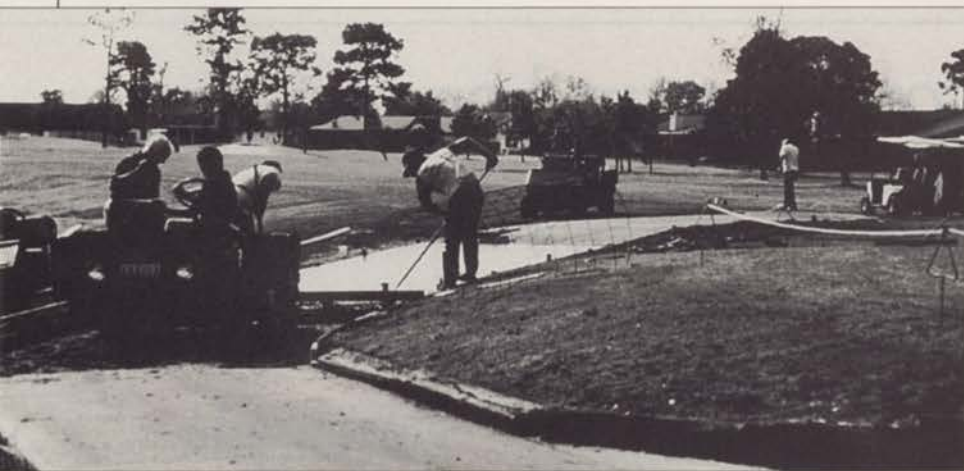
The course features Tifway 419 bermuda fairways. Its short par-3 fairways and all greens and tees are overseeded. "We try to do a little more overseeding every year," Ondo notes. The greens are modified USGA-style.

Tees are mowed three times per week; fairways three times per week in the summer, greens once a day. In addition, Winter Pines tries to rebuild one green a year, just to change its look.

The crews are involved in an extensive on-going tree planting program, adding an average of 10 to 20 pines and oaks every two months. Flowers around the clubhouse which provide its family-type atmosphere are replaced every three months. Ondo is trying to select more cold-hardy materials like pansies and petunias, in deference to Florida's recent milder winters.

Of all the lessons he's learned since he began working on golf courses at the tender age of 15, Ondo says he's got one key to success: "You take the good for granted and look at the bad things."

—Jerry Roche



Winter Pines owner Ed McMillan (extreme left) sets an example by helping a crew lay a concrete cart path.