

Special Services

A program for the developmentally challenged is a win-win relationship.

BY TODD LOWE

Golf course employees come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. The staff at any particular course can be quite ethnically and culturally diverse, but diversity is an especially important issue at The Club Pelican Bay in Naples, Florida. Not only is there a blend of ages, sexes, and ethnicities, but there is a special group of developmentally challenged employees who provide a benefit to the club as well.

A unique relationship was established between the golf course maintenance departments at Pelican Bay and Sunrise of Collier County more than 15 years ago. Sunrise is an agency that assists developmentally or mentally challenged individuals, such as those with Down's Syndrome, and places them in various jobs. Most are employed part-time with county parks, supermarkets, and Good-



Geoffrey (J.T.) Ellis (left) has been a valuable employee for Bob Bittner, CGCS, for nearly 15 years.



J.T. (right) assists with golf course service activities each weekday morning.



In addition to performing daily tasks, J.T. inspires and motivates the golf course maintenance staff.

Sunrise of Collier County supervisor Mrs. Dorothy Tomford (middle) with two wash crew workers, Walter and Gwen.



will. Pelican Bay currently is the only golf club that participates in the work program. The Director of Golf Course Operations at Pelican Bay, Bob Bittner, CGCS, has supported this program from the beginning and appreciates the service provided by the organization. The members at Pelican Bay also feel it is a valuable program, and Mr. Bittner admits, "Sometimes the maintenance budget gets a little tight, but the members are committed to this program each year."

Much of the work program at Pelican Bay occurs at the maintenance facility, as a crew of two to three workers and a supervisor washes and details mowing equipment three days a week. This allows full-time golf course maintenance employees to perform other necessary tasks. The wash crew employees are paid by the golf club, while their supervisor is employed by Sunrise of Collier County. The supervisor also assists with transportation, makes certain each task is performed

correctly, and facilitates positive interaction among employees.

One of the employees from this program, Geoffrey Ellis (J.T.), assists the golf course service staff and helps set up the golf course from Monday through Friday. While J.T. does not set hole locations, he performs other duties like servicing ball washers and wiping off flag poles and benches. In addition to golf course service, J.T. helps with maintenance practices like cart path edging and debris disposal. J.T. has been a valuable employee for nearly 15 years and, in addition to performing daily tasks, he inspires and motivates the golf course maintenance staff.

It is truly a win-win situation for everyone. The golf club receives a valuable service, while the developmentally challenged workers are offered an opportunity to make a positive impact on society and to earn an income. Dorothy Tomford is the Sunrise employee who supervises the wash crew at Pelican Bay and assists them on

and off the work site. Mrs. Tomford remarks, "These individuals are happier at the end of the day, having a sense of accomplishment. The human interaction with the golf course staff also is valuable, as many of them would most likely remain at home without this program." In fact, one of the workers prefers the golf course and usually declines work at other businesses.

Golf courses offer more than just benefits to golfers and wildlife. They can assist in the growth of developmentally challenged individuals as well. While not every course can participate in such a program, there certainly is room for other golf courses to get involved and make a difference in their communities. Contact the Department of Children and Family to see if agencies like Sunrise of Collier County are available in your region.

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