





PICTURE PERFECT

With camera in hand, a California superintendent documents his environmental masterpiece that helped earn him the No. 1 spot in the Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards contest.

Howard Richman

Crystal Springs GC in Burlingame, Calif., is a jewel when it comes to the environment. Even Major League Baseball legend Willie Mays has played Crystal Springs, a gem of the Bay Area. Photos courtesy of Michael Pagano © 2012 Pagano Grafix

The first time that Tim Powers, CGCS, gave his mother, Pamela, a tour of Crystal Springs Golf Course, she got an eyeful.

"Eighteen deer on the 18th fairway," Tim Powers says about that day several years ago. "I told her that I got to look at something like that every day. I've gotten to watch the deer grow up. It's great. That's why I always have a camera with me. You never know what you will see."

Those who judge what Powers has accomplished at Crystal Springs GC—a public course located in Burlingame, Calif., 15 miles south of San Francisco—certainly like what he has done with the place.

Powers, a 24-year member of GCSAA, was chosen the national public and overall contest winner in the GCSAA/*Golf Digest* 2011 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards, presented in partnership with Syngenta and Rain Bird.

"It (the award) backs up and supports all the things we have done here over the years," says Powers, who was a chapter winner in this competition a year ago. "We're in a very special environment, and we want to keep it special."

What has occurred at Crystal Springs is nothing short of a miracle, according to Don Naumann, founder and president of Sierra Pacific Turf Supply.

"What he has done with nothing is unbelievable," Naumann says. "He's maintained it like a high-end facility without all the dollars. Tim has utilized everything that's on the golf course. He does everything with the environment in mind."

Powers, though, would never brag about what he has accomplished at Crystal Springs, which sits within a 32,000-acre wildlife refuge and on a ridge above three reservoirs that contain the drinking water (more than 14 billion gallons) for Bay Area residents.

In fact, he may not tell you at all.

"I haven't told anyone," Powers says, and this conversation was more than 24 hours after he was informed about the honor.

It was no surprise then to learn from somebody other than Powers that he also was selected to work on the grounds crew at the upcoming Masters tournament at Augusta (Ga.) National Golf Club.



Tim Powers, CGCS, who oversees Crystal Springs, is the overall contest winner in the GCSAA/*Golf Digest* 2011 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards.



Deer are a very common sight at Crystal Springs. "I've gotten to watch the deer grow up," Powers says. "It's great. That's why I always have a camera with me. You never know what you will see."



Top: Crystal Springs sits within a 32,000-acre wildlife refuge and is on a ridge above three reservoirs that contain the drinking water for Bay Area residents.

Bottom: Birdhouses may be an inviting site for some of the rare species that pay a visit to Crystal Springs. The red-naped sapsucker is more common in places such as the Rocky Mountains, but that bird has been spotted at Crystal Springs.

"It will be a great experience," Powers says. "It will help me do my job better." Between the ELGA honor and the Masters invitation, it has been quite an exciting time for Powers. Those who know him say it is well deserved.

"On top of everything else, Tim is a great guy," says Peter J. Galea, CGCS at Pajaro Valley Golf Club in Royal Oaks, Calif. "I'm happy for him. Ecstatic."

Home sweet home

That trailer home located between the ninth green and No. 10 fairway at Crystal Springs GC symbolizes Powers' passion for the outdoors.

The single-wide trailer is his home.

"Nothing special," Powers says, "but it fits my purpose."

The best part about it, he says, is it puts Powers close to nature. That's all he has ever wanted since he was a Boy Scout growing up on Long Island and in Connecticut.

"I love working outside," says Powers, who played pond hockey as a youth and continues to be involved in that sport as an off-ice official with the San Jose Sharks of the National Hockey League. "At night when I'm in the trailer, I'll hear things squeaking and crawling. I'll hear coyotes and wonder what they have."

The path that led Powers to where he is today began when he was an 18-year-old college freshman working on the maintenance crew at Shorehaven GC in Norwalk, Conn. It was a new experience for him.

"I had never been on a course before except to sleigh ride," Powers says.

The journey for Powers included inspiration from Bob Phipps, the superintendent at Shorehaven.

"He was very passionate and knowledgeable," says Powers, who earned a bachelor's degree in forest management at the University of Maine and a certificate in turf management at the University of Massachusetts. "He would ride around the course, taking notes, seeing what we could improve, how we could make things look better. I found out by doing that you always could pick up something."

Powers landed his first superintendent position in 1989 at Pound Ridge, a nine-hole course on the state line between Connecticut and New York. Later, he would spend four years working for a company that built golf courses in Myrtle Beach, S.C. In Nov. 2001, Powers got the job at Crystal Springs. He packed up his belongings and drove cross-country, including a stop at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan.

It didn't take long for Powers to realize he had encountered something special



Powers and his crew encounter fog numerous mornings at Crystal Springs, located 15 miles south of San Francisco.

upon arriving on the West Coast.

"I had a crew, some of them like me who'd never been on a golf course, that did terrific work," he says. "We have been able to put out great playing conditions even with restrictions."

Daily doings

Powers has created a wonderland — with guidelines.

Crystal Springs, which has been played by Baseball Hall of Fame icon Willie Mays, operates under an IPM-CHAMP program (Integrated Pest Management-Chemical Application Management Plan). The idea is to make the course as chemical-free as possible by restricting the use of herbicides, fungicides, insecticides and fertilizers.

For example, Powers and his staff are not allowed to treat for disease until they scout three spots of disease on nine greens (scouting is done by greens mower operators and cup changers).

"I don't even spray pesticides once a month, and only when I need to," says Powers, whose main fertilizer is AlgaeGreen, which is a seaweed extract product that he believes improves root density, root depth and plant stress tolerance.

Annual use of nitrogen has been reduced from 6,000 pounds to 600, he says. Water management is key at Crystal Springs, partly because soil quality is far from great. Powers must constantly apply wetting agents. A new irrigation system that was completed more than 10 years ago has dramatically helped; Powers needs to irrigate only 75 acres instead of the 90 that were irrigated previously. The irrigation system has helped reduce costs for fuel, fertilizer, pesticides, water, electricity and labor.

And, since the major source of drinking water for the region is near the golf course, all measures are taken to protect it.

"Anything that would go through the golf course would be filtered before it got down there," Powers says. "No nitrates and phosphorus leave the property, and that's a good thing."

An aspect of the operation that makes Powers extremely proud is conservation. The golf course recycles everything possible, including grass clippings, which are scattered throughout the fairways and rough to increase organic material. In fact, Crystal Springs is involved in a study about transforming clippings into energy.

Even golf course members support the process. Some of them have given their Christmas trees to be chipped or dumped into the pond to create fish habitat.

"We have members who will take along a 55-gallon bucket of sand and fill divots along the way during their round," Powers said. "We have members who really have bought into this."

What members may like best, according to Powers, are the two Clivus Multrum composting bathrooms. They are operated by solar power, use minimal water, and only have needed to be pumped out once in 18 months.

"They sure beat Port-O-Lets, and they are much more comfortable and user friendly," Powers says.

Powers is driven to ensure all aspects of Crystal Springs have high standards.

"My staff hears two phrases almost daily," Powers says, "and they are 'safety first' and 'pick up the garbage.' We won't let our course look like the highways around here."

For the birds

The red-naped sapsucker that was sighted at Crystal Springs signaled to Powers that something awesome is happening around him.

"Seeing one of those is rare for this area," Powers says of a species of bird usually located in places such as the lower elevations of the Rocky Mountains. "Why was it here? It just has everything to do with the environment. The trees. The Peninsula Humane Society released two red-tailed hawks, and they are still around. We even have hummingbird feeders for the enjoyment of our patrons when they finish a round of golf."

Crystal Springs, fully certified by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and Wildlife Habitat Council since 1998, has four raptor perches on the course. Non-irrigated areas between tees and fairways were overseeded with fescues, wild ryes, brome and California barley to create a wildlife corridor, connecting native areas and providing cover and a food source. Signage on the course provides golfers information about what they may see during a round of play.

"They (members) appreciate the work our guys do," Powers says. "They know we're doing it for them."

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