

From the desk of GCM

The official blog of GCSAA's Golf Course Management magazine

She helped break the grass ceiling

Let Jan Bel Jan show you her hands. They are the first sign that she is a golf course superintendent's daughter.



"Look. Knuckle busters from tearing apart mowers in the winter," Bel Jan says, balling her fists to showcase those knuckles. "And I have used my share of chain saws."

Bel Jan certainly has proved she is a cut above so many others. Her legacy, though, remains in the this-is-an-ongoing-process category. There is still much for her to do, which is one of the reasons why she is here today in San Diego for the GCSAA Education Conference and Golf Industry Show.

One of her main causes these days is to promote the National Women's Golf Alliance. It began last year. The goal: To increase the number of women who play golf, help them enjoy the game more, and even secure golfers of the male gender in the deal. The alliance is composed of the Executive Women's Golf Association, Ladies Links Fore Golf, Golf For Cause, and Jan Bel Jan Design. They already have evaluated eight golf courses, focusing on course playability, customer service, course amenities, facility amenities and golf programs.

"We're a grass roots effort to ensure golf courses are more women friendly. When they become more women friendly, that facility becomes friendly to their spouse, their mothers, their daughters," says Bel Jan, a 17-year affiliate member of GCSAA. "Any improvements that make golf more friendly, to make people feel more welcomed, means it's more of a global thing than being just about women."

Bel Jan obviously has the credentials to be part of the alliance. She remembers riding mowers for her dad, George, when she was 14 years old at the course he was the superintendent and golf professional, Mannitto CC, in New Alexandria, Pa. She earned a GCSAA scholarship that helped put her through college at West Virginia University.

Famed golf course architect Tom Fazio hired Bel Jan, and she helped him create courses such as Old Colliers in Naples, Fla. As a senior designer for Fazio, Bel Jan specialized in working with a site's natural layout and took care to consider the environmental aspect involved.

In 1990, Bel Jan earned the ultimate reward: The plaid jacket that comes with becoming a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. In fact, Bel Jan was only the second woman to join that club. The first was Alice Dye.

"For 100 men to say welcome, you have earned the right to be here, was something special," Bel Jan says.

Bel Jan, a past president of the Florida Turfgrass Association, has been a past session instructor at the GCSAA Education Conference. She still enjoys attending classes, constantly seeking ways to be better in her profession.

There is no doubt, Bel Jan says, that superintendents have come a long way in their field.

"Their interpersonal skills are better, they are far more professional in their presentation, and their knowledge base is so far beyond what it once was," she says. "Superintendents today are an impressive group."

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