

THROUGH THE GREEN



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> **Commanding The King and Prince**

The King and Prince Provides Royal Welcome

Written by TRENT BOUTS

SOMETIMES EVEN SUPERINTENDENTS WHO HAVE HOSTED professional tournaments will tell you the butterflies flap hardest when their peers come to play. It's ironic really. Most of the time, superintendents dream of their work being better understood and appreciated. But then one day, along comes a crowd that really gets it, and suddenly their brow beads up and the heart rate goes through the roof.

Chuck Moore is an exception. Not that he doesn't feel the glare when his colleagues come to play. It's just that he's more accustomed to it than most. Moore has hosted multiple Georgia GCSA golf events at The King

and Prince Golf Course on St. Simon's Island over the years and adds another two to that list this year. The association's annual meeting and golf championship in December follows the ever-popular bermudagrass forum in September.

At least at Broadway plays, the critics sit out amongst the audience but when the Georgia GCSA comes to town, the expert eyes get to cast about on the stage itself. Even so, "I don't get as nervous as I used to," Moore says. "I guess I'm kind of used to it because we've had a few events now. I still get a little nervous but nothing major. Fortunately, we've always managed to be in pretty good shape when the association's been here. So overall it's been a great experience."

Moore says he has even picked up a few pointers from colleagues, along with his share of pats on the back. "I think most of the guys are very understanding when they're playing someone else's golf course," he says. "They understand the impact weather has so they don't have to be told why the rough might not have been mowed that morning. Besides, I think when you're not playing your own golf course, you're really there to have a good time so that gives you a totally different attitude."

Moore started at The King and Prince – then known as the Hampton Club after the original indigo, rice and cotton plantation – in 1995 as an intern under former Georgia GCSA director, Berry Collett, CGCS. He stayed on as a crew member after graduating from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and worked his way up to the assistant superintendent's role. In 1999, he left for his first golf course superintendent position at Francis Lake Golf Club in Lake Park and life felt pretty rosy. The timing and location seemed perfect. His fiancé lived in Valdosta barely 20 minutes away.

"It seemed like the perfect scenario," Moore says. Turns out he was wrong, but wonderfully so. Before long his phone rang with an opportunity he "couldn't turn down." Collett had accepted a job at Sea Island Golf Club and, with a right royal invitation, The King and Prince requested Moore's return. He has been back since the summer of 2000 and now commands what a local newspaper writer once hailed, a little breathlessly, "one of the most amazing golf courses in the nation."



Chuck Moore doesn't get as nervous as he once did when his peers come to play at a Georgia GCSA event.

It is stunning, no doubt, and in this day and age of environmental regulation, unlikely to be replicated at any point in future. Set amid salt marshes and tidal creeks, the golf course opened in 1989, presenting barely 80 acres of maintained turf. And of that, four holes exist only because of some 800 feet of elevated bridges connecting the dots between a series of tiny islands. Architect Joe Lee did well to find room for 18 holes that don't quite stretch to 6,500 yards even from the tips. But as Moore points out, coastal breezes and narrow margins for error can make the course every bit as challenging as some that play a lot longer.

The golf course is a different animal than the one Moore cut his teeth on. A \$3.6-million renovation in 2009 replaced the old TifDwarf greens with MiniVerde, and about five feet of collars in TifSport. The 419 and Common bermudagrasses that covered the fairways gave way to Celebration, which is also now on tees and in the rough. The overhauled bunkers are wrapped in Empire zoysiagrass.

Billy Fuller Golf Design oversaw the project with construction by Medalist Golf and all in all, Moore is delighted with the outcome. He no longer overseeds and finds grass growing "where we've never had it before" thanks to the Celebration. Many holes feature massive live oaks which throw a considerable amount of shade. Moore continues to run into occasional challenges when high tides can put saltwater on some parts of the course. But he has access to decent water from the Miocene aquifer and a 14-acre lake so any "bronzing" rarely lasts.

Chuck Moore with some of the bridging that connects four holes in amongst the marshes.

Semi-private, The King and Prince sees about 20,000 rounds each year, although not too many are played by Moore, who plays to an 11 handicap. Like just about every other superintendent in the business he has had to find ways to do more with less which means less time for golf, particularly in summer. "If we play, it's generally at a time of year when other people don't want to play," he laughs. He also has young family that requires his time. He and wife, Connie, have sons, Connor, 10, and Cayden, 4. They will be starting on their Christmas wish lists around the time dad hosts this year's Georgia GCSA annual meeting and golf championship from December 2-4. *



A view from the tee across the marshes to the 13th fairway.

