

## Biggers Recognized for Distinguished Service



Fred Biggers, CGCS of Wintergreen Resort has been recognized by the VGCSA with its Distinguished Service Award for 2016. The award is "presented to a member who has given his time unselfishly in promoting golf course management and unification of the Virginia Golf Course Superintendents." By all accounts, Biggers earned the distinction through his professionalism and integrity, and his interaction with his fellow superintendents.

Biggers' first exposure to golf was when the family moved to Atlanta when he was 11 - his father was a flavor chemist at Coca-Cola. Dad took him along to play public courses in the area. After hitting that first great shot, he could not put his clubs down. Between the ages of 12-15, he would play as much as possible. His family was a member at Druid Hills CC where he would arrive at 8:00 am and play and practice until 5:00 pm, sometimes playing over 54 holes a day. But after a couple of years, the family dropped their membership, but that didn't stop him – he simply moved his game to the 9-hole American Legion Course in Avondale. In high school he could shoot in the mid-70's, and he played in the state championship.

Biggers then enrolled at Clemson University. As he was studying organic chemistry, and on a break, he saw a magazine with Palmer Maples on the cover – he was president of the GCSAA. Biggers snuck the magazine out of the library and became engaged in a profession he had never considered. Shortly thereafter, he changed his major plant sciences, turfgrass management. Ultimately, he got his BS, along with a business minor.

Biggers' first job was during college summers at Peachtree in Atlanta, an outstanding club. Al Frenette was his boss, and he was a retired marine drill sergeant - he ran a tight ship! Biggers learned a lot from Frenette.

While at Clemson, Biggers worked on turf plots three afternoons a week for Dr. Mazur. In preparation for graduation, Biggers took an unusual spring break trip in 1978 – he toured top clubs in the Carolinas and interviewed superintendents in Greenville (SC), Ashville, Charlotte, Pinehurst, Raleigh and Winston-Salem. The trip netted him an offer from Pinehurst, and began his career in 1978, making \$3.25 per hour. Biggers was doing spraying and fertilizer apps, and then he was sent to the new Pinehurst No. 6

course to finish grow-in, get sand in bunkers, and it opened in fall. The next spring the course hosted PGA Tour Q-School and the Ladies North & South. While there, he met Bob Toski, Jim McKay of ABC Sports, Tom Watson, Hale Irwin and others.

In the fall of 1979, Biggers was transferred to Pinehurst No. 1, which also entailed maintenance of the massive range, clubhouse grounds, practice greens and more. Bob Depencier was his boss and he was a tough New Yorker, but Biggers did just fine.

In the spring of 1980, he was tipped him off about a job at Alamance Country Club in Burlington, NC. Biggers went there that May, and the course was in horrible shape – bad equipment, bad irrigation, and a big project. Over time Fred and his team were able to bring the course back up to great shape. He loved to compete with his colleague Pete Gerdon of Forest Oaks CC, site of the PGA Tour's Greater Greensboro Open.

After six years at Alamance, Biggers interviewed for the Greenville Country Club (SC) job. He was shocked to not get it. But in 1988, the club ditched their GM and came back to him with the offer, which he accepted. GCC was a very demanding but a great place to work. Unlike Alamance, the club had plenty of money and had their goal to be the best club in South Carolina. After eight years, new management wanted to invest in the dining room and clubhouse, and capital budgets for the courses were cut. But the expectations of the members did not change. The demands became difficult, so Biggers started to check the market.

Biggers heard about the job at Wintergreen Resort in April of 1999. He accepted their offer – this was not a private club, so there were very little politics, and he had a good GM. He has been there ever since, improving the courses, originally 36 holes, now 45. Of course Wintergreen is not only a golf resort – it is also Virginia's largest ski resort. In the winter you can play golf in the valley and ski on the mountain in the same day. But this also meant that Biggers and his crew had to help during ski season. Biggers handles snow removal for the resort, and enjoys layering up and working in the extreme cold conditions.

During his tenure, the mountain course Devil's Knob was renovated. Down in the valley he oversaw a conversion of the fairway on one of the valley nines from bentgrass to zoysia, and they are consider expanding the project. Biggers is starting his 18<sup>th</sup> year at Wintergreen.

Biggers got involved in superintendent groups early in his career. He joined the Triangle Turf Association in 1978 and was also member or Carolinas GCSA. He came onto the CGCSA Board in 1982. Biggers and Randy Allen of Camden CC developed the first budget for CGCSA. A few years later, Biggers helped established the first office for the CGCSA in 1988, in an office park near Clemson. While at Alamance CC, he joined the Piedmont Turf Association. He became CGCSA President in 1991. In 1992, the South Carolina Turfgrass Foundation was formed, and Biggers was the first President. He did a lot of lobbying through the state and was very successful in obtaining getting a \$915,000 grant, spread over 10 years!

Biggers stayed active on the SC Foundation board until he came to Virginia in 1999. Dick Fisher reached out to get him involved in the Virginia Turfgrass Foundation. Biggers was President for two years. He has always appreciated the turfgrass faculty at the schools of Virginia Tech, Clemson and NC State.

Biggers was then asked to be on the Virginia Turfgrass Council board, and he worked his way up to President in 2014-2015. He is currently the Immediate Past President. He has been hosting the fundraiser tournament at Wintergreen for a number of years.

Winning this award gave Biggers reason to pause. Why does he stay involved, helping turfgrass associations? "The camaraderie of the profession is great," Biggers remarked. "It's a brotherhood – we certainly have that in Virginia!" Over last 20 years, his work has been geared to support the Universities with turfgrass research. "I always want to support research," he continued. "We need to continually strive to make the grass easier to keep."

On a personal note, Biggers feels blessed to be married to wife Caroline -- they married in 1984. They love living in the area between Waynesboro and Staunton, in a historic house which dates to 1820. Their daughter Claire lives in Richmond, where she is pursuing a masters in counseling at VCU. Their son Sam is 22, and he just graduated Mary Washington University this spring. He is now using his degree in Historic Preservation as he pursues his masters in Historic Preservation at Clemson, in cooperation with the College of Charleston.

Biggers is very active in his church as council president this year. He is in the choir and also plays French horn in the Stonewall Brigade Band, the oldest community band in the US (1855). He also enjoys racquetball and plays in a league three times a week at 5:15 am. Fred still enjoys playing golf very much. He plays most Fridays in a standing game with some buddies and also plays with the pro a few times a week in the evenings.

Fred would like to be an example of someone that tries to live a balanced life with work and outside activities, hobbies, and friends.