



15th Hole
312-yard Par 3
Photo by Daniel
Zelazek



Westin Innisbrook Resort

1,000 Rooms - 1,000 Acres

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

The Westin Innisbrook Resort is located on Florida's west coast between U.S. Highway 19 and Alt U.S. 19 just north of Clearwater. The property claims the highest elevation in Pinellas County on the 11th tee of the Island Course as it straddles an old prehistoric beach dune called the Gulf Ridge.

From 1970 to 1974 golf course architect Larry Packard and the Wadsworth Construction Company transformed the rolling terrain into 45 holes of golf consisting, in their order of appearance, the Island Course, the renowned Copperhead Course, and the 27-hole Sandpiper Course.

Peter Bass, CGCS has been at the helm of this multi-course resort operation for nine months and he says he quickly focused on the scope of his operation by remembering these three facts: 28 lodge buildings, 1,000 rooms and 1,000 acres of golf courses and grounds. Pete works for Troon Golf, which manages all of Westin's golf properties.

Westin is cutting Pete some slack, however, as last week they outsourced all the resort's common-area landscaping to the ISS Company, which had been doing the landscaping around the condominium buildings



The rolling terrain of the Copperhead Course can be seen on the signature 14th hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

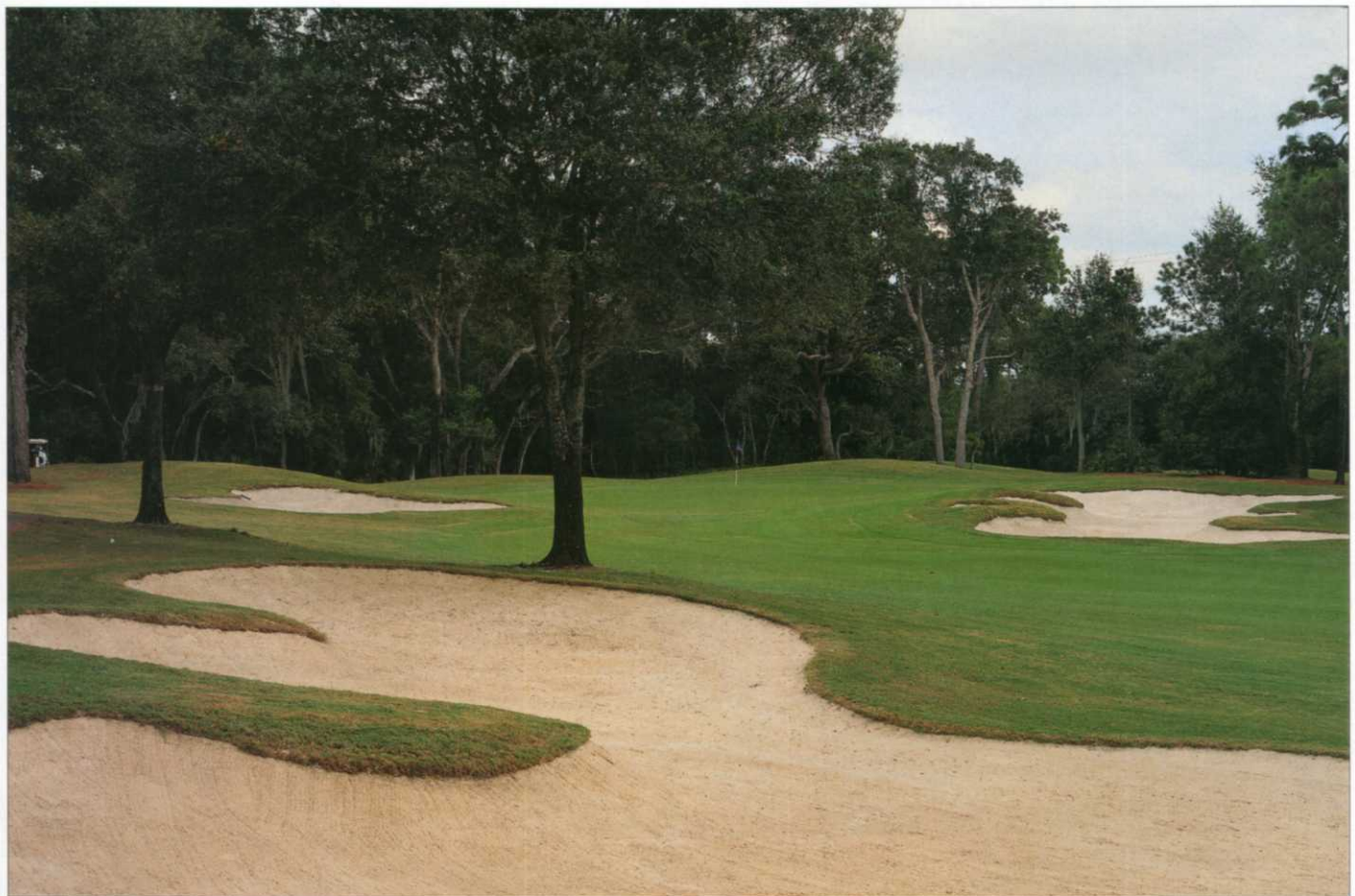
for the past 16 years. Pete estimates his staff was spending at least 20 percent of its time on this non-golf-related work.

With the addition of another nine holes to the original Sandpiper Course to create two new 18-hole courses — Eagle’s Watch and Hawk’s run — and the acquisition of an off-site course — Tarpon Woods, now called Lost Oaks — Pete and his staff needed to concentrate only on golf course maintenance responsibilities.

Staff of 123

The Innisbrook golf maintenance staff consists of 123 people. Pete is the director of golf course maintenance over five courses. Each course has a salaried superintendent, an assistant superintendent and a supervisor/foreman.

“I have weekly staff meetings with the superintendents and each one of them has a weekly staff meeting with their respective crews,” said Pete. “They



Twilight on Copperheads’s 1st hole. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.



The 175yard 13th hole (shown on cover) as seen from the tee. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.

all work together very well. They share equipment for special events or when someone has a piece of equipment down.

“We don’t shift the crews around very much. The one exception will be the J.C. Penney Classic coming up in December.”

With one central maintenance complex for support services, housekeeping and golf maintenance, Pete’s operation, like many others, suffers from lack of space to house all the equipment.

“Some day, it would be nice to have individual maintenance areas for each course’s equipment, he said. “Right now everyone has to originate and return to this compound. We don’t have service roads connecting the courses, so we have to use the main roads. There is a travel time factor in our labor costs.

“As new owners, Westin wanted to make an impression on the membership and our new and returning guests,” Pete

explained. “Working with Jeff Spangler, head agronomist for Troon Golf, we have upgraded and changed some of the annual ornamental beds to highlight the three clubhouses and the 1st and 10th tees on all the courses.

“We have also added new mowing contours around the greens surrounds on the Island Course to provide chipping areas.

“Most importantly we are overseeding the fairways for the first time. We wanted to provide the best value and conditions for our guests all year, so we felt that the time had come. That cold front last week dumped almost 10 inches of rain on our new seed. It really impacted the Eagle’s Watch and Hawk’s run courses because they were the last to be seeded.

Getting the overseeding down and established has been a priority for Bass and his staff.

“We started with the Copperhead

course, since it is the tournament site,” said Bass. “We put down all of our green’s seed with the first application. We don’t have time to split applications. The fairways were seeded at 500 pounds per acre, and we are applying granular ammonium sulfate and sulfate of potash every week supplemented with a complete foliar minors package also weekly to really push the ryegrass establishment.

“The PGA tour would have preferred we didn’t overseed, but they understood at this time of year we had to get ready for our heavy winter play. We will maintain the fairways at 7/16” cut for the tournament.”

Overseed experiment

Bass is trying an experiment with the overseeding on the new courses.

“I used an 80-20 blend of ryegrass and Poa trivialis on those fairways at 350 pounds per acre. We want to see if the ball sits up a little better and we want to



Peter R. Bass, CGCS Director of Golf Course Maintenance

Originally from: Acushnet, Massachusetts.

Family: Wife, Antoinette; Children: Tom, Dave, Peter and Andrea.

Education: AA in Turf Science from UMass Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

Employment History: Crew member, New Bedford Public Links, New Bedford, MA; crew member/intern, Sunningdale CC, Scarsdale, NY; crew member, Westchester CC, Rye, NY; assistant supt., Hauppauge CC, Hauppauge, NY; superintendent, Cypress Run G.C., Tarpon Springs, FL; superintendent, Palma Ceia CC, Tampa, FL; director of golf maintenance, Westin Innisbrook Resort, Tarpon Springs.

Professional affiliations/Offices held/Honors/Awards: Certified member GCSAA; Member of the FGCSA; former secretary/treasurer West Coast GCSA; former committee member FTGA; all chairs in the Long Island GCSA board; past member of the Metropolitan GCSA of New York City.

People in or out of the industry who have influenced your life and career: My father, Raymond Bass, a retired superintendent. He was a great role model for honesty and work ethic. Stan Brown who taught to love the game of golf. Bob DePencier who gave me his friendship and some of my first technical knowledge of the business. Bob Rankin and Phil Zimmerman for their professional support. Brent Wadsworth for sharing construction and landscape experience and philosophy. A note of interest: Dennis Ledger, one of the PGA Tour agronomists, was a classmate at UMass.

How did you get into the business? When I was just a kid in 1955, I did some caddying but I didn't like it. I went to the "greenskeeper" at the public links course and asked for a job. My introduction to the business was raking bunkers and hand mowing greens with a Pennsylvania push mower. I worked after school and summers until I went to college. After one year of pursuing a chemistry major, my father said, "You love golf. Go for it!"

Goals, Accomplishments, Philosophy, Advice: Prepare a golf course for a major tour or USGA event. Became a CGCS in 1991. Be consistent, honest, fair and firm in your demands of others. Do your job the very best you can the first time and do your homework before tackling a project. Plan ahead! I don't like surprises! Work with your crews and be a daily presence on the course. Maintain an open policy for ideas and discussions. Acknowledge jobs well done and don't accept poor efforts. Surround yourself with positive thinking people.

Memorable moments: My wedding day. I had a bad-fitting tuxedo and we had an ice storm that day. All of our children were born on snowy days. After we moved from New York to Florida in 1982, our water pipes froze that winter. Trips to Germany, France and England. Coaching Little League and Junior League baseball.

Hobbies and interests: Golf, action movies, mystery novels and family.



From left, front row: Alan Bollenbacher, John Fake, CGCS, Mike Blanchard, Carl Collins. Back row: Charlie Comblo, Bill Grosser, Bob Makres, Rob Gates, Chuck Knowles, Bob Messinger, Pete Bass, CGCS. Not pictured: Andrew Troutner, Jeff Troutwine, Malcom Hardinge, Steve Davis. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Westin Innisbrook Resort

Location: Tarpon Springs, Florida.

Ownership: Starwood Capital Group.

Playing Policy: Resort.

90 holes: Copperhead (18) Par 71. 7,807 yards. Rating/Slope = 74.4/14; Island (18) Par 72. 6,999 yards. Rating/Slope = 74.1/132; Hawk's Run and Eagle's Watch (under construction), formerly 27-hole Sandpiper course.; Recently acquired Lost Oaks (18) formerly Tarpon Woods C.C.

Management Team: General Manager Westin Innisbrook Resort, Michael Welly; Facilities Manager Troon Golf, Jay Overton; Director of Golf Course Maintenance, Peter Bass, CGCS; Course Superintendents = Copperhead, John Fake, CGCS; Island, Carl Collins; Eagles Watch & Hawk's Run, Mike Blanchard; Lost Oaks, Andrew Troutner; Support Services Manager, Alan Bollenbacher.

Designed by: Lawrence Packard. Constructed by: Wadsworth Golf Construction. Opened: 1971

Major renovations/projects: Additional nine holes under construction for Eagle's Watch. Opening scheduled for December 1997. Recent purchase of Tarpon Woods C.C. renamed Lost Oaks of Innisbrook.

Acreage under maintenance (4 courses): 650 acres.

Waterways: 3 acres managed by Aquagenix

Greens: 12 acres. Average size = 6,000 sq. ft. Turf type = Tifdwarf. HOC: .125 - .150 in. Overseeding - Type and rate: Poa trivialis @ 18-20 lbs/M. Putting surface goals: 8.5 Medium fast.

Tees: 11 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC: 3/8"-7/16". Overseeding = Perennial Ryegrass @ 25 lbs/M.

Fairways: 160 acres. Tifway 419. HOC: 7/16"-5/8". Overseeding = Perennial Rye @ 500 lbs/Acre.

Roughs: 200 acres. Turf type = Tifway 419. HOC including seasonal changes) = 1.5"-2.0". No overseeding.

Bunkers: 280 bunkers. All hand raked. Sand Pro with plow blade used for erosion repairs.

Irrigation - Source = Pinellas County effluent stored in five holding ponds. Direct line connection to new 9 holes on Eagle's Watch at 95 psi with booster pump. Five pump stations with turbine pumps. Toro VTII Hydraulic Control System. Single and double row coverage.

Staff: Total of 123 including superintendents. Administrative assistant, Linda Abel; projects manager, Bob Messinger; general grounds superintendent, Joe Manning. 6 assistant superintendents; 14 mechanics; 5 irrigation technicians, 4 pest control operators; 3 administrative/clerical support.

Special circumstances, unusual conditions, which are challenging in managing the turf: High, sandy ridge areas with droughty conditions followed by low wet areas on the original Sandpiper property. The golf courses are the main drainage runoff areas for the entire property. Pine needle collection and removal. Rerouting irrigation to prevent damage to pine trees. In 1991 100% sand-based greens built on Copperhead and original 27 holes of the Sandpiper. Original 1971 80-20 mix on the Island course greens.

Special events: Copperhead course - Home of the PGA/LPGA's J. C. Penney Classic held in December.

Wildlife: A variety of ducks and wading shore birds, anhingas and cormorants, swans, Canadian geese, hawks, ospreys, bald eagles, Graham's fox squirrels, grey squirrels, raccoons, opossum, and fox; 40-acre nature walk and nature preserve with identified tree species.

check out how it transitions back to bermuda in the spring. On all the courses we applied the seed with two 8-foot wide Gandy drop spreaders. It was too time-consuming. Next year I'd like to try Vicon or Lely spreaders to speed up the process."

Overseeding is one of those tasks we all must face in the fall, but the Innisbrook property offers some of its own management challenges. The property is a primary drainage area for the surrounding area west of U.S. 19. Within the property, the roadways, parking lots and condominium grounds all drain onto the golf course and its series of retention ponds. The beautiful, rolling terrain can become a nightmare as intense rain events accelerate downhill, eroding bunkers and native areas maintained with mulch.

"Last week we spent two days repairing every bunker we had," said Bass.

But when it doesn't rain, those same high, rolling hills get too dry.

"We don't have wall-to-wall irrigation," Bass explained. "We have single-

and double-row systems that have been further restricted because the pine trees were beginning to decline from the original irrigation coverage. Now when it dries out, we have to put someone on hand-watering duty to move roller sprinklers around to cover the wilting scalloped edges of the roughs and fairways. It is a long-range goal to redesign the system with part-circle heads to protect the pine trees and irrigate the turf properly at the same time."

Another part of the original construction was the crushed shell base used for the cart paths, which is wider than the paving on top. Consequently, the turf does not grow up to the edge of the path and stabilize the ground surface. Heavy rains erode the soil and shell areas which have to be backfilled. Bass hopes to be able to excavate the excess shell material along the paths and back fill with good soil to grow a good strong turf cover.

Growing a healthy turf cover in a densely wooded setting is also a challenge.

"We have several areas that are showing signs of stress from too much shade and root encroachment, said Bass." Next spring we hope to start a root-pruning program. We will begin with the greens complexes, then the tees and then key fairway and rough areas.

"We will also have to dedicate an irrigation repair crew to follow along with the pruning crew. There have been so many modifications to the 26-year-

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Pete's fleet! It takes lots of equipment to groom 600 acres of turf. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Pete partners with the tennis pro! Old nets become fairway drags with the addition of a piece of PVC. Photo by Joel Jackson.



Many Graham's fox squirrels can be found on the courses. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Camera's view of Innisbrook



Another traffic-control idea. Photo by Joel Jackson.



This flock of Canadian geese is getting an early start on their winter vacation. Photo by Joel Jackson.



old irrigation systems no one is real sure of where all the tubing and wiring might run.”

Juggling the routine maintenance on five courses and preparing for a special tour event would be enough for anyone, but Bass is also supervising the construction of the new nine holes on the Eagle’s Watch course. Bass explained, “The new nine will be holes 5 through 13 and will combine with holes from the old Sandpiper Palmetto Course to make the new 18 holes.

“The project has been impacted severely by heavy rains and we have had to repair large-scale erosion damage several times. Fortunately we have construction insurance, which will help defray some of the repair expense. We are running in four to five sod trucks daily to get the new holes completed in time to open up for play in January.”

Pilot effluent program

The new nine holes will also be a pilot program for direct effluent service from Pinellas County. The county’s treatment plant is located adjacent to the course and is tied into the irrigation main line. An in-line booster pump raises the static pressure of 95 psi to 125 psi for irrigating.

All of the courses use effluent water which is stored in irrigation ponds on the other courses and pumped out using traditional turbine pumps. Innisbrook also has a 30-acre power-line easement which is irrigated so they can distribute the effluent when it is too wet to put out on the courses.

Bass misses one other modern feature not present on the old irrigation system.

“I hope some day we can install a fertigation system on all the courses,” he said. “Fertigation can be a real useful tool, especially in getting nutrients to all parts of the golf course.

“One of my main concerns is bunker lips. Right now we are on a weekly program of foliar drenching the lips with our portable sprayers. It’s tough to get good coverage with a granular spreader on the steep faces, so the fertigation is a real plus. Of course the

ability to spoon feed nutrients is also a sound environmental practice as well.”

Audubon Sanctuary

Innisbrook management is keenly aware of the importance of sound environmental management. It has a dedicated nature preserve with a boardwalk that meanders through a wetland. Plaques identify the native plant species and an observation deck at the end of the boardwalk allows guests to sit and watch water fowl, wading birds, otters and other wildlife up close.

Once all the construction is completed, Bass is ready to get all the courses involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

“We already practice good stewardship in several areas,” he said. “It’s high time we make it official and get some recognition for the company. Not only do we use of effluent water, we collect all our grass clippings and put them in a Mill Creek spreader and scatter them on property daily.

“We are a very heavily wooded property and we continually lose trees to lightning and high winds. We stockpile the downed trees and limbs and twice a year we rent a couple of tub grinders and they come in and grind up all the wood to make mulch that we use on the grounds.”

Pete showed me Mulch Mountain in a staging area to illustrate the point.

Pete has lots to do at Innisbrook, but it is the type of position he had hoped for.

“Two of my goals were to manage a multi-course facility and prepare a course for a tour event. Innisbrook has provided me with those opportunities. I had hosted some U. S. Open qualifiers and the Florida Open a couple of times, but I wanted to experience the big show! Ironically, Dennis Ledger, the PGA Tour agronomist who just made his second advance visit was a classmate of mine in 1965 at the Stockbridge School at UMass. Small world isn’t it?

“You have to love this business. If you don’t, get out now! Because it can wear you out quick. Each day is a bal-

ancing act among what you would like to do, what you have to do and what your boss wants you to do. All the salaried staff put in 55 to 60 hours a week including me. I’m the first one in and the last one out, but I also leave my work at the gate when I go home. I learned that lesson when we were raising our four active kids.”

“Career paths can be funny. I used to work down the road at Cypress Run. We held a lot of board and committee meetings here before the clubhouse was built so I got to know the property and a lot of the people before I moved on to Palma Ceia in Tampa. You have to prove yourself, but building relationships and not burning bridges are still key factors in seeking positions.

“Now I work for a management company. After years at private clubs, I didn’t quite know what to expect. I must say I feel more secure than I did at a private club where you could get fired on a whim, contract or not.

“At least a management company operates with a business approach. Goals and performance are better defined and there are a lot of opportunities to explore. Salaries may not be as competitive at all levels, but the benefits and opportunities as the company expands are very good.”

“Another issue driving the growth of management companies is the changing profile of club members. As time goes by more and more working professionals join clubs and take over leadership roles, they don’t have the time or want to spend the time to run a club.

“They want to come out and enjoy a day at the club and not get bombarded with complaints all day long. Doctors, lawyers, bankers and hotel chains don’t have the expertise to run a golf operation, so they hire that expertise!”

The Innisbrook resort and golf courses have long been a showplace of beauty and excellence in Florida’s golf industry. Now Westin Hotels, Troon Golf and Pete Bass take up the challenge and the opportunity of managing those 28 lodges, 1,000 rooms and 1,000 acres. 