



Number 13

Par 3

Photo by Daniel Zelazek





Renaissance Vinoy Resort

# A Landmark in Time

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

**L**ittle did I know, when Cary Lewis became president of the FGCSA, that his course, the Renaissance Vinoy Golf Club, was part of one of our national treasures of historic places. I only knew that the course had been called the Stouffer Vinoy before Marriott's Renaissance Hotel Group bought it, and I didn't know much more than that. But then, that's what I like this job. It's full of interesting surprises.

Located on Snell Island in St. Petersburg, which is really just a peninsula on the west coast of Tampa Bay, the Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Golf Club is celebrating 75 years as a downtown landmark. The hotel is one of only 77 hotel properties on the National Register of Historic Places and is a member of the Historic Hotels of America Program of the National





*Architect Ron Garl created two sets of double greens on the Vinoy course paying homage to the Old Course at St. Andrews. This view across the #12 and #15 complex shows the ornate clubhouse in the background. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

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the Vinoy Park Hotel  
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era hotels for the  
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famous.***

Trust for Historic Preservation — an accolade bestowed on the nation's best-preserved historic properties. The Mediterranean Revival-style architecture of the hotel and golf clubhouse continues to dominate the St. Pete waterfront with style and grace.

The hotel was built as the Vinoy Park Hotel in 1925 by Pennsylvania oil man Aymer Vinoy Laughner and was considered the grandest of the boom-era hotels for the world's most rich and famous. According to the Laughner family archives, some of the country's wealthiest and most influential people of the times frequented the hotel: Calvin Coolidge; Herbert Hoover; Alf Landon; Babe Ruth; Admiral Robert Byrd; F. Scott Fitzgerald; the Pillsburys; the Fleischmanns; the Biddles of Philadelphia and the Smiths of Smith Corona.

The hotel survived the Depression of the 30s; the World War of the 40s and the Cold War of the 50s. However, lack of air conditioning and necessary repairs led to a slow decline of the once-opulent hotel and it finally closed its doors in 1974.

While the the hotel lay dormant for 18 years, the golf course remained open. The golf course opened in 1926 and, while some say Donald Ross had a hand in the original design, no proof exists to substantiate the claim. Over the years the course — built originally at sea level — was prone to flooding from storm surges.

In 1992 when Renaissance Hotels International under the Marriott flag purchased the resort. The hotel underwent a \$93 million renovation which focused

on preservation of the historic architecture while modernizing the infrastructure.

At the same time, golf course architect Ron Garl redesigned and rebuilt the old course. Using fill from seven manmade lakes on the property, Garl raised the course three feet above sea level. Two double greens salute old-style architecture and creation of waste bunkers, natural areas and improved wetlands give the course a distinctive Florida coastal course look and feel. Lewis came on board in 1992 to grow in the renovated golf course.

A native Floridian, who claims to be a fourth generation Florida Cracker from LaBelle, Lewis brought nearly 20 years of Florida golf course experience, including several grow-ins, to the project. No less colorful than his newly renovated resort home, I learned Lewis is a former rock-and-roll drummer and former high school football quarterback. Those facts have absolutely nothing to do with golf but help define his personality: outgoing and understanding of the responsibilities of leadership.

Anybody who knows Lewis will not be surprised to learn that I burned up two rolls of film and two and a half micro cassette tapes trying to capture the thoughts, ideas and stories from this good-natured professional who now takes the helm of our association. I have had the pleasure of knowing Lewis for nearly 15 years.

Wherever he is, he gets involved.

It is just part of his nature to take a deep interest in his profession and the industry. He has been the president of the Everglades and West Coast chapters and would have added the presidency of the Central Florida chapter to his resume had he not moved to St. Petersburg to take the Vinoy position.

Coming to the Vinoy and being part of the corporate environment was a new experience for Lewis, who was more accustomed to private club operations. But his willingness to learn and ability to communicate helped him rise to the position of director of grounds, responsible not only for the golf course but the hotel landscape as well. It is important to

note that the golf club and the hotel are over a mile apart, which means Lewis has had to rely on the people who work with him to make the whole operation successful.

On my tour of the golf course and hotel, Lewis proudly introduced the members of his staff from the greenskeeper sculpting the hedges to his assistant superintendent Dave Kane and landscape supervisor Tom Daley.

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*The first and ninth holes are captured here in a birds-eye view from the clubhouse tower. Photographers are always looking for elevation. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.*

***The hotel underwent a \$93 million renovation which focused on preservation of the historic architecture while modernizing the infrastructure.***

“Dave is my barometer and my compass,” he said. “Sometimes when I get too involved in number-crunching projects, meetings and find myself looking only at the big picture, Dave will get me back on course with attention to the details of our daily mission and the needs of our staff.

“I think we make a good team. I tend to be free-wheeling, cheerleader type who gets excited about new projects and changes while Dave is the steady hand who likes to follow a plan methodically to its conclusion and then move on to the next project.

“The same goes for my landscape supervisor Tom Daley, an excellent young

man with good common sense, a love of landscaping, and a good leader. Since the hotel and golf course are separated, I rely on him to keep the hotel landscape in order. We are responsible for the interior plants as well as the exterior grounds. Tom has created a finely manicured tea garden and arboretum area on the grounds which is a popular natural area for the guests.”

“My goal is to be a good resource for Tom and keep him supplied with manpower and needed materials to get the job done. I have enjoyed the additional responsibility of the director of grounds position because it has given me the challenge to learn more about trees, orna-



mentals and annuals. Both Tom and I look for ways to incorporate as much low maintenance but colorful and interesting plant material into the hotel landscape to keep it unique and distinctive, befitting its historical significance."

Another key member of Lewis's staff is Christy Cordanio, his administrative assistant.

"Besides keeping the paperwork flowing smoothly, Christy has boosted morale tremendously by making our work environment just a little nicer. She spearheaded a clean-up campaign that resulted in repainting the office and break room areas and the addition of some curtains to give it that little extra touch.

"She also organized a baby shower for one of our employees and his wife, a Bosnian couple. They were overwhelmed by the donated baby stroller, car seat and all the other supplies new babies require. They were quite taken with the American generosity."

Lewis said the clean-up bug quickly spread to the shop where painted floors and organized tool bins and walls helped improve not only appearances but efficiency and productivity as well. All of this, says Lewis, just goes to emphasize the need to stay in touch with your people and to create a good work environment.

Speaking of the environment, Lewis and his staff are currently in pursuit of attaining certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. On our ride through of the course, Lewis pointed out several environmentally friendly features built into the course design.

"The course drainage system is designed to contain all runoff on the course and will hold the first 12 inches of rainfall. Around each of our seven manmade lakes we have an interceptor drain or filter. When the water levels rise, they feed into these drains first. This may make the course drain a little slower than we'd like, but I like the additional safety factor to contain our storm runoff."

"On the site that is now the 17th hole, we used to have a stagnant, brackish area. During construction we created a salt water wetland complete with orange, red and black mangroves, salt-tolerant cordgrass and paspalum. The wa-

## Cary Lewis

**Originally from:** Labelle. Fourth generation "cracker." Family: Marla, wife of 25 years. Sons: Clayton (24) and Justin (16).

**Education:** 1978 Lake City Community College Golf Course Operations.

**Employment history:** 1978 San Carlos Park G.C.; 1978-81 Farington G&TC, Atlanta, Ga.; 1982-84 Grow-in of Windstar G.C., Naples; 1985 Grow in of The Vines G.C., Bonita Springs; 1986 Fiddlesticks G.C.; 1987-88 Self-employed Remote Sensing (Infrared Aerial Photography Service); 1988-91 Rebuilt C. C. of Orlando; 1992-present Renaissance Vinoy rebuild and grow-in. Purchased by Marriott in 1998.

**Professional affiliations and awards:** Member of FGCSA, FTGA, GCSAA. Past president of Everglades GCSA and West Coast GCSA. Rose to vice president of Central Florida GCSA before moving to West Coast Chapter. GCSAA committee work. USGA Greens Section Committee 1993-99. Chapter Director for the Gull Wing Road Riders Association (Honda motorcycle club).

**Mentors:** My mom; Al Frenette, Peachtree G.C., Atlanta; Bob Sanderson, retired superintendent and co-founder of Everglades GCSA; Clint Smalridge, CGCS, Banyan G.C.; Dan Jones, CGCS, South Florida Grassing, Inc., retired superintendent and former editor of *The Florida Green*; and Dale Reash, CGCS, Countryside C.C.

**Memorable moments:** My first grow-in. Being involved in the development of a golf course. Feeling like you're leaving a permanent mark on this earth. To experience how positive a golf course can be on the environment.

**Goals:** To be the best that I can be, but to learn that life is short and have some fun along the way. Travel the back roads of this great country and meet the real people.

**Advice and Philosophy:** Treat all people like you want to be treated. Never forget the basics. These are the things that will get you through the tough times. Stay close to your staff. They are your arms and legs.

**Hobbies and interests:** Involvement in the future of our great business. Golf. Traveling on my Honda Gull Wing with Marla and really experiencing the environment.



Cary and Marla Lewis on their Honda Gull Wing.





## Renaissance Vinoy GC

**Name:** The Renaissance Vinoy Resort and Golf Club

**Location:** Snell Island, St. Petersburg

**Ownership:** Renaissance International & Marriott International.

**Playing Policy:** Private Resort, 18 holes.

**Yardage:** 6,378; par 70. Course Rating/Slope Rating: 70.2/118

**Designed by:** Original designer in 1926 unknown; redesigned by Ron Garl and reopened in 1992.

**Management Team:** General Manager Russell Bond; Director of Golf Randy Mosley; Head Golf Professional Matthew Barnes; Director of Grounds Cary Lewis, CGCS.

**Total acreage under maintenance:** 110 acres with 94 acres of turf.

**Greens:** Average size: 8,700, total 4 acres; turf - Tifdwarf; HOC: 0.125 year round except 0.145 at aerification and overseeding. Overseed: Mariner creeping bentgrass (salt tolerant) @ 4 lbs./1000 sq. ft. with Darkhorse Poa trivialis @ 14 lbs/1,000. Green Speed goal: 9.0 - 9.5

**Tees:** 3.8 acres of Tifway 419; HOC: 0.5; overseeded with Signature Blend Perennial Rye @ 8 lbs./1000 sq.ft.

**Fairways:** 26 acres of Tifway 419; HOC: 0.5; overseeded with Signature Blend Perennial Rye @ 500 lbs./acre.

Experimenting with less heat-tolerant variety called Transist Intermediate Rye to expedite transition in the spring.

**Bunkers:** 39 with Standard M sand. Mechanically rake all bunkers with two Smithco Super Rakes. Four waste areas covering six acres. Originally in bunker sand. Converting to concrete washings (crushed shell).

**Waterways/Ponds:** Nine lakes covering 15 acres — 11 fresh water, 4 tidal and brackish water. Seven manmade 35-40 ft. deep for construction fill, two natural tidal marshes 3-4 ft. deep.

**Irrigation:** Reclaimed water; Carroll Childers pumps @ 1500 gpm. Toro Varitime II controllers. 800 hydraulic normally open heads; fertigate fall and winter with calcium nitrate and sulfate sources using dual head pump to offset high sodium content of reclaimed water.

**Staff:** 18 full time golf including superintendent and 5 landscape associates.

**Key Personnel:** Assistant Supt. Dave Kane; Landscape Supervisor Tom Daley; Shop Manager Eric Kulaas; Assist. Shop Manager, Danny Hiatt; Pest Control Technician Richard Orr; Irrigation Technician John Graffis; Administrative Assistant Christy Cordanio. The Vinoy G.C. employs OJT student interns from Lake City Community College, University of Florida and Pinellas Tech.

**Major Renovations/Ongoing Projects:** Capital equipment replacement program; renovation of waste bunkers with concrete screenings; ongoing drainage improvements; ongoing exotic plant control and removal; irrigation system upgrade in the planning stages.

**Special circumstances:** Low elevation. Only 3-4 ft. above sea level. High sodium content in soil and irrigation water. Construction with soil from old golf course with high weed seed and nematode counts. Minimal course closings for aerifications only. Balancing private member needs with resort play.

**Communications:** Daily pre-shift meetings with crew; weekly managers/supervisors staff meeting; monthly department meetings on safety and operational issues; monthly article in club newsletter; quarterly Ambassadors meeting with private club members.

**Environment/IPM:** Chipco Choice application for mole crickets with its low rate of product and effectiveness. Subsurface injection or slit injection of Nematicur and other products to make product more effective and reduce surface contact. Selective post-emergent herbicide treatments as needed. Preemergent herbicide programs for weed control. Spray buffers around waterways. Wildlife log in pro shop. Working on ACSP certification. Site for annual St. Petersburg Audubon Society Bird Count.





*The 17th hole, a 142 yard par 3 is part of a six acre manmade wetland . Photo by Daniel Zelazek*

***Wildlife is a big deal  
at this urban bayside  
golf course, which is  
currently in pursuit of  
attaining certification  
in the Audubon  
Cooperative  
Sanctuary Program.***

ter quality is much improved along with the habitat for wildlife.”

Wildlife is a big deal at this urban bayside golf course. As part of the public outreach in the ACSP certification program, Lewis has a wildlife log book at the counter in the pro shop. Members and players are encouraged to log any sighting of wildlife seen during their rounds. Others can leaf through the book and see what sightings have already occurred.

Tana McBride, a beverage cart hostess at the club, helps Lewis by making a point of looking for and document wildlife sightings. She also helps protect the resident critters by informing the maintenance staff of nesting sites, especially of the waterfowl.

Lewis is constantly looking for out-of-play areas that can reasonably be converted to native grass beds. He also encourages the naturally salt-tolerant paspalum grasses to grow in the roughs around the brackish water lakes, saying they make a decent turf at the taller rough height of cut.

Bird boxes and osprey platforms have also been added to the course and Lewis says one platform has yielded four pairs of fledgling fish hawks so far. The course is also the site of an official annual Audubon Society Bird Count, although Lewis says he wishes they would come out a little earlier. He says they are missing another 30 to 40 percent of the population. Hey, the early birder gets the count!



## Views of the Vinoy

PHOTOS BY JOEL JACKSON

The Renaissance Vinoy Resort is a wildlife sanctuary on Snell Island in downtown St. Petersburg. Already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Vinoy is working to become a Certified Wildlife Sanctuary in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. Below, right, wood storks pose near a wood duck nest box. Herons, mallards and cormorants were also approachable. However, the resident African gray parrots, roseate spoonbill and iguana were too camera shy to be photographed.

Right, superintendent Cary Lewis, CGCS shows off a unique air hose station outside the clubhouse for cleaning off golf shoes. He says it does a better job than traditional brushes.



In the clubhouse grille room, a scale model of the golf course under glass serves as the bar top. The unique visual aid stimulates and helps illustrate the recounting of golf rounds at the 19th hole.

Vinoy beverage hostess Tana McBride acts as a wildlife spotter for Lewis and his staff. She reports sightings of new species and the location of nesting sites so the mowing crews can avoid them.

A wildlife log book in the pro shop enables golfers to document sightings of birds and other wildlife. The book keeps members involved in the Audubon program and helps meet the outreach requirements for certification.





*This formerly sandy soil waste bunker between holes #3 and #4 is being converted to a crushed oyster shell material. This crushed material, similar to coquina gravel, provides a better playing surface to hit from and requires less maintenance for grooming. Photo by Joel Jackson.*

Lewis has experimented with many of the new biological and organic products, trying to find materials that will allow him to use the most environmentally friendly products as possible.

"Some of the materials show promise, but most still take too long to control a pest or disease if a serious outbreak occurs. But we are definitely in a trend of using less pesticides by improving our management of the soil. I firmly believe in sub surface and slit injection methods of applying needed pesticides to reduce surface contact with golfers and wildlife and to put the chemical directly where the pests are. This makes them safer to use and more effective."

Lewis says his primary pest problems are mole crickets and weeds.

"Chipco Choice has been a great tool for combating mole crickets. It's the best thing to come along in my time. Weeds are another story. This course is so old

and has so much weed seed buried in the soil that we are challenged to keep them under control. We follow spring and fall preemergent herbicide programs and do selective post-emergent spot spraying as needed."

The biggest agronomic problem Lewis faces is the high sodium content of the soil. With its 75-year history of salt water flooding and tidal action plus the 400-800 ppm of sodium in the irrigation water, Lewis must constantly be on the lookout for signs of sodic reactions in the soil.

"We installed an acid injection unit on our irrigation system and found that by adding small amounts of calcium nitrate and sulfate via the dual head injector, we could almost create a "liquid gypsum" effect to help tie up the sodium in the soil. Our biggest challenge comes during the dry spells when the sodium settles out of the soil solution. When the

rains come they naturally flush the sodium out. We also aerify and apply granular gypsum to help keep the sodium levels manageable."

Keeping the course in good shape not only requires Lewis and his staff to focus on the grass and the soil, but also on the golfers. Since the Vinoy is a private resort, Lewis has the dual role of keeping members and resort guests happy. Lewis works closely with Director of Golf Randy Mosley to assure that the course is kept open as much as possible to serve both groups.

"Randy has previous private club and resort experience so he knows the challenges we face," Lewis says. "We touch base almost daily so we know what's happening with play and maintenance at all times. Randy is very good at creating gaps for us when we absolutely need to do critical maintenance."

"While his focus is understandably



member-guest satisfaction and service, he also knows that maintenance has to be a priority to achieve that. When we disagree on an issue, we close the door, sit down and discuss it, and when the door opens we are on the same page and support each other.

"Since there is no greens committee per se, I meet quarterly with the members' Ambassador Committee to discuss course conditions, projects and any other issues they might have. We do everything in our power and budget to accommodate their ideas and concerns since they are the core group of our clientele.

"Actually, the private membership and resort golf combination works pretty well. Most of the members like to play in the mornings and most of our resort golf is business outings in the afternoon after meetings."

The subject of golf and golfers brings us full circle to the history of the Vinoy. Recently named again by *Golf for Women*

## West Coast Chapter

**History:** The Florida West Coast Golf Course Superintendents Association was founded in 1949 and is second only to the South Florida GCSA in longevity. Like their South Florida counterparts their activity ebbed and flowed as distance separated the major golf regions around the state in the early days.

**Founding members:** Harvey Meeks, Bill Meeks, Harvey Phillips, Bernie Felton, Pete Chuta, Doed Bolesta, Pop Hall, Colonel Frank Ward, Tim Johnson, Walter Rich, Hans Smizzen and Gus Thomas.

**Activities:** This year the FWCGCSA will host its 37th Annual Bud Quandt Research and Benefit Tournament. Proceeds from this tournament go to benefit turf research, student scholarships, the Moffitt Cancer Institute and All Children's Hospital. The event was named in honor of Charles "Bud" Quandt, former superintendent of the Pasadena Yacht & C. C. who was an instrumental leader and guiding force for the chapter in the 70s and 80s.

**Honors and Awards:** West Coast members who have served the state with distinction include FGCSA past presidents Don Delaney (84); Reed LeFebvre (87) and Cecil Johnston (89). Cary Lewis, CGCS, is the current president of the FGCSA. Recipients of the FGCSA's President's Award for Lifetime Service Award include Bud Quandt (90); Harvey Phillips (91) and Don Delaney (93).

**Officers for 2000-2001:** President and external vice president, Eric Joy; internal vice president, Whit Derrick; secretary/treasurer, Jim Sharpe.

**Membership:** 76 Class A, B, & C members in a total of 198.

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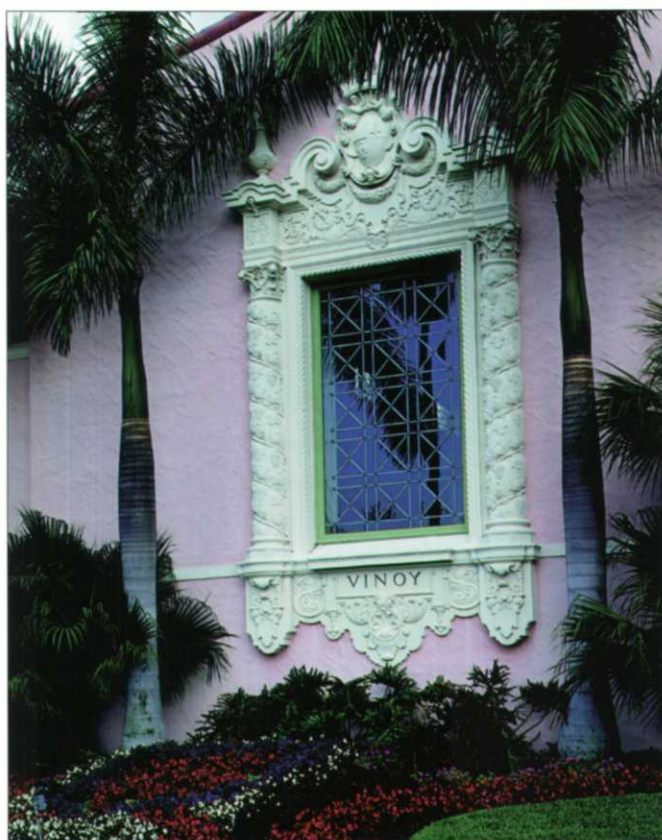
Many out-of-play areas like this location between the 3rd tee and fairway have been converted to native grass beds to reduce irrigated areas, fertilizer and pesticide applications and labor hours to mow. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Magazine as one of the top 100 courses friendly to women, the Vinoy has other ties to women's golf.

In the clubhouse is a room called the Polywog Room, named for the local women's group who founded the St. Petersburg Women's Open Golf Championship. The Greek prefix "poly" and "wog," the acronym for Women's Open Golf, constructs the name.

The event was one of the tournaments on the tour that later became the Ladies Professional Golf Association Tour. Legendary stories contend that famed area resident and lady golfer Babe Zaharias gathered colleagues in this room for some of the earliest organizational meetings for what is now the LPGA.

The Boom Era of Florida gave rise to many historic sites around the state, but perhaps none as eloquent as the Renaissance Vinoy Resort. It's nice to know that our new president is responsible for helping to preserve this landmark in time.



The 1925 Mediterranean Revival-style architecture of the Vinoy Renaissance Hotel is reflected in this unique window treatment. The hotel reopened in 1992 after a \$93 million dollar renovation and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo by Daniel Zelazek.