

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

THE BIG BOYS

Cypress Gardens, one of the most beautiful parks in the country, boasts more than 8,000 thriving plant species. That makes landscape horticulturist Norm Freel stingy with his time.

By Jerry Roche, editor

Norm Freel is a busy man. Ask him for an hour or two of his time and he gives you 45 minutes—maybe.

And with good reason: he is horticultural vice-president of the 223-acre Cypress Gardens, arguably the most beautiful park in the country.

These are the big boys of the landscape maintenance industry.

"We're not perfect, but we know we're damned good," says Freel.



More than 7,500 chrysanthemums were grown by nursery manager Gary Smith for Cypress Gardens' Mum Festival

"We try to offer the public a 365-day-a-year flower show. We've got to look good, whether we're in a freeze or extreme drought conditions.

"A guest could visit the Gardens 52 weeks of the year and each time see different plants in bloom. And you'd have to travel to 70 countries at different times of the year to see what you could see in a single day here."

You want big?

- The Gardens boast more than

8,000 thriving plant species and more than 12 million annual blooms.

- Freel oversees the 223-acre complex with a year-round crew of 47 employees.

- Fifty acres were overseeded with ryegrass four months ago. For the job, Freel ordered 12 tons of turfseed.

- Typically, his crews will apply 45 to 50 tons of fertilizer a year.

- For last winter's Mum Festival, one acre of nursery space was

temperature gets under 40 degrees—well, that's the most nerve-wracking time of all."

Over the years, Cypress Gardens has purchased more than 1,500 kerosene, natural gas and propane heaters. It takes the crew about four hours to put the heaters out. But the worst part is that Freel can never be absolutely sure when to have them stoked up. "There are a lot of variables in the weather," he admits.



last winter.



Horticultural vice-president Norm Freel watches over his gardens.

needed to supply 7,500 chrysanthemums in seven colors.

- More than 1,000 trees are planted each year, most of them home-grown at Cypress Gardens' own 25-acre nursery.

"In our landscape, we've tried to create 'vistas,'" Freel says during a walk through the sprawling park. "I'm a believer in big material. I like things to look like they've been in five to ten years. We try plants, products—everything from seaweed to chicken feathers."

Weather woes

Despite Freel's immense responsibility, his No. 1 problem is no different than that of most smaller landscapers: the weather (believe it or not), despite the fact that Cypress Gardens rests on former swampland in sunny central Florida.

"Eighty percent of our material is either tropical or sub-tropical," Freel says, pointing to some beautiful giant cascading bougainvillea. "But in the last seven years, this has been a very temperate area. When the

Turf technique

The evident quality of the park is testament to the dedication of its Division of Horticulture.

Maintenance of the turf takes fully 50 percent of the department's time. Thirty mowers from 18-inch Snapper two-cycle trimmers to 70-inch Excel Hustlers are used on St. Augustine, Floratam, Bitter Blue Seville, Survive and other hybrid turfgrasses. Freel also hopes to seed some areas with newly-released Floralawn; and in non-irrigated areas, Argentine bahiagrass is used.

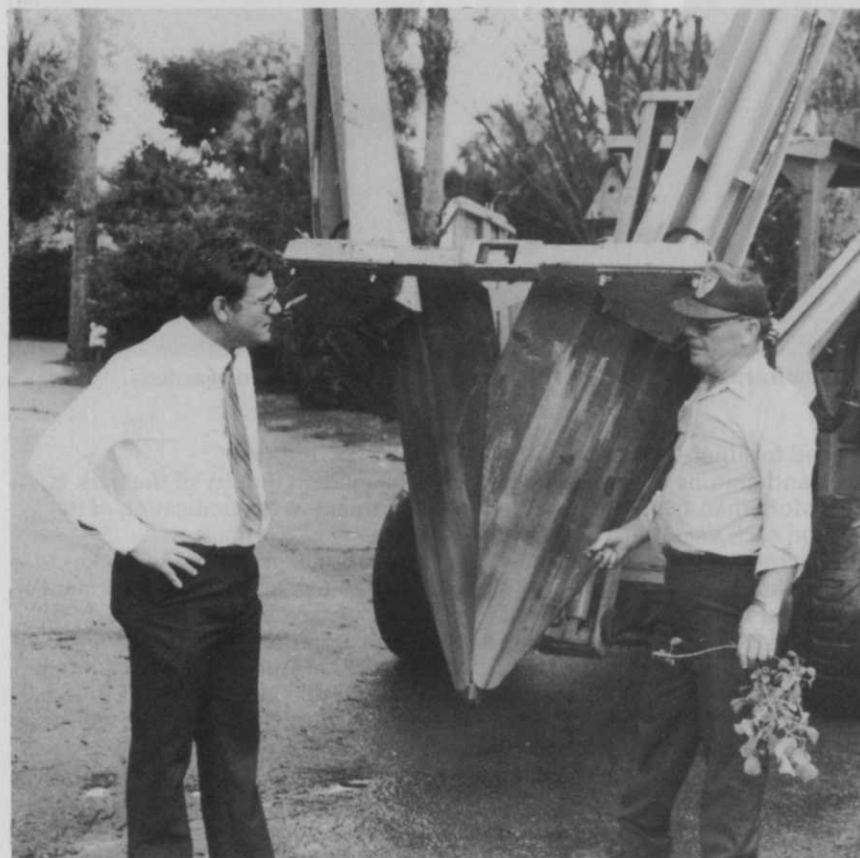
Freel talks about the park—every little gardenia, every blade of grass—with the pride of a father. He is totally dedicated to his job.

"I'm 35 years old, and I've been with Cypress Gardens since I was 18 when I started digging holes," he says. "I've done it all."

His day begins at 6:30 a.m. six or seven days a week. Both Freel and landscape maintenance superintendent Mike Wallace spend anywhere from 50 to 70 hours a week on the job. When Freel says, "I don't expect my employees to do



A view of a portion of Cypress Gardens from the 153-foot Kodak Island in the Sky.



Freel (left) discusses current problems with Ellis Lindsey, a 40-year veteran at Cypress Gardens.

anything I haven't done," you almost have to feel sorry for the employees.

Smart cookies

Freel, who has a pair of two-year college degrees plus 40 hours completed toward his bachelor's in ornamental horticulture at the University of South Florida, is not solely responsible for the park's beauty. He retains an advisory board

consisting of Dr. Thomas Scheen, Jack Siebenthaler and Everett Miller.

Dr. Scheen is a member of the University of Florida faculty. Siebenthaler is a private consultant and landscape architect. Miller is former director of Longwood Gardens, and a park designer.

When it comes to picking and choosing materials, Freel gets the input of the advisory board,

management and his own "color foreman."

"We're usually planning one year ahead," he observes. "We can do anything if we have the lead time and budget."

Constant testing

To determine how to best keep the park blanketed in year-round color, Freel notes that there is not a single seed in the standard catalog he hasn't ordered and tested at the gardens.

"If something new comes on the market, we get it at once," he says. "If it flourishes, great. If it doesn't, we try the next thing that is introduced. It's a continuous process with perhaps 40 or 50 cultivars under test at all times."

To do this, Freel has more than 40,000 square feet of greenhouse plus the nursery, which is run by 10-year veteran Gary Smith. Freel says a single year's plant growth displayed at one time would blanket 100 acres and fill several football stadiums clear to the upper press box.

Deep roots

Freel is continuing the tradition set by his predecessor Bob Kuntz, who was originally hired by Cypress Gardens founder Dick Pope Sr.

It was Pope who, on Jan. 2, 1936, opened the gates of Cypress Gardens. It was Pope and his wife Julie who literally dug the drainage canals and planted the first flowers by hand, converting a desolate snake-infested swamp into a beautiful park in four years.

Ignoring cutting ridicule and titles like "Swami of the Swamp," "Maestro of the Muck" and "The Barnum of Botany," the Popes changed the alligator-ridden wasteland into a series of beautiful canals and paths winding through seas of brilliant bougainvillea, hibiscus and azalea.

A monument to the Popes' efforts still stands today: a 45-year-old banyan tree originally planted by Dick Pope Sr.

In the time it took for the sapling to grow into a magnificent beauty, the park expanded to include all known native plants and exotic flora from every continent.

So the importance of his job does not escape Norm Freel:

"Cypress Gardens and Sea World, we're the big boys of the garden business. We've got to be good." **WT&T**

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

A STAR IS BUILT

It doesn't look like much now—just rock, dust, and hills. By October, Star Pass TPC in Tucson will play host to its pro golf tournament.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor



If brown is your color, you may want to go to Tucson, Ariz. But you'd better hurry.

That's where Star Pass Tournament Players Club will soon be rising from the rocks that dominate the southeast Arizona landscape.

Star Pass, its ground broke in April 1985, doesn't sport any green.

The brown of the desert and hills of west Tucson dominate. Today, Star Pass doesn't look much like a world-class course. It will soon.

If all goes as planned, Star Pass will host the Tucson Match Play tourney this October.

By then, course superintendent Harold Vaubel prays, the tees, fairways, and greens will be a lush green.

Star Pass, one of a growing list of TPC-owned and operated clubs, will add to Tucson's list of new and impressive courses.

Building on rock

Most likely, the Wadsworth Golf

Below, superintendent Harold Vaubel (left) and Wadsworth Golf Construction superintendent Kevin Sutherland. Top left, assistant superintendent David Michael. Near left, irrigation trenches are carved.



Construction Company, Star Pass builders, took a peek at the planned site and brought along extra dynamite.

The terrain has not made the job easier for Wadsworth job supervisor Steve Robison, who has been on the site since groundbreaking.

"This has not been an easy job to work because of the rock," says Robison. His co-worker, greens shaper Mike Hatchcock, agrees. "I can verify that because of my back," he says with a smile.

By the time Wadsworth finishes, they will have seeded bentgrass greens, and stolonized bermuda 419 fairways and bermuda 328 tees.

Then it's up to Star Pass superintendent Vaubel and crew to nurture hybrid bermuda, common bermuda, bentgrass, and desert vegetation that will lie on the course's 120 acres.

How to build a course

In the last year Wadsworth has:

- staked fairways and cleared vegetation. Some vegetation, such as the saguaro cactus, was held for later placement (Arizona law says you can't kill several desert plants, including the saguaro cactus, many of which are well over 100 years old).

- shaped fairways, in the process, dynamiting the impeding rock.

- performed all drainage work and installed the irrigation system.

- reshaped and removed all excess rock, backfilled the trenches, and then reshaped the course again.

- performed prep work for the topsoil. They then placed top soil layers of up to 6 inches over the course.

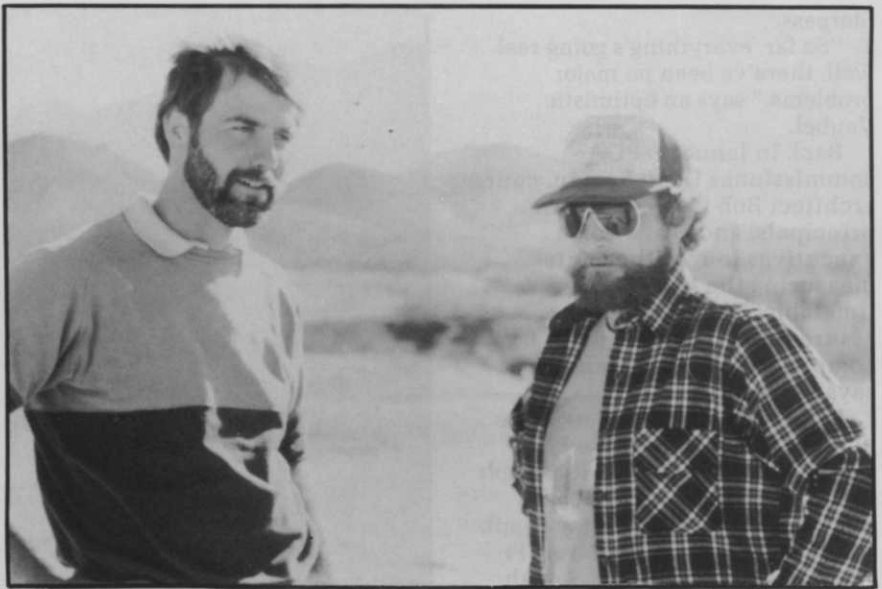
- prepped the greens, beginning with drainage tiles, a 4-inch gravel blanket, a 2-inch course sand blanket (choker layer), and a 10-inch greens mix comprised of fine sand with organic matter added (in this case, 20 percent Canadian peatmoss).

- seeded the greens, sodded the green slopes and bunker slopes, and stolonized the fairways and tee tops.

Wadsworth, no stranger to building golf courses in Arizona, has also enhanced the natural mounding that the TPC requires for a stadium golf effect.

They've also left room for underground utility cables. None will be above ground.

Wadsworth has 32 employees on site, including three shapers and 11



Greens shaper Mike Hatchcock(right) and Wadsworth supervisor Steve Robison take a break at Star Pass.

operators. The company should be off-site by early May.

Arizona has become a sort of second home to some Wadsworth employees. Construction superintendent Kevin Sutherland, a Michigan native, has spent the last three years in Arizona building new courses.

Among those: Desert Highlands, La Paloma, and Ventanna Canyon.

A good opportunity

Assistant superintendent David Michael, 28, is working on his third under-construction course. That's what superintendent Vaubel was looking for in an assistant super: someone with construction experience.

Vaubel had previously served as superintendent at Albuquerque Country Club and Desert Forest Golf Club, and assistant superintendent at Tucson National Golf Club and Goodyear Golf and Country Club.

Michael, formerly superintendent at La Mariposa Sports Club in Tucson, says working for the PGA represents a "challenge and a good opportunity."

As he tours the course, Michael seems to know every hill, every swale. The new course has become his friend.

"With the PGA, the number one concern is quality," he says. "With the pros, the quality of their game is number one and so is the quality of their courses."

Michael, who gave up a career in

electrical engineering after his junior year in college, obtained his agronomy degree from the University of Arizona.

Trodding golf courses since age six, Michael has no regrets. He's living his desire.

Vaubel and Michael will employ an 18-man crew at full strength.

The only other employee at this time is head mechanic Al Fleming, a former staffer at Tucson Country Club.

Water, water, water...

After Wadsworth clears out, Vaubel and Michael will begin nurturing the baby turf to life.

It's going to take a lot of care. Semi-arid Tucson gets only 11 inches of rain per year. Irrigation with effluent water (state law prohibits irrigation with potable water) will be ongoing, perhaps as much as 10 to 15 minutes per hour.

The 100-degree heat of the average Tucson summer, coupled with bentgrass greens, will provide a challenge for Vaubel and crew. The fairway and tee bermudagrass should prosper.

By early fall, says Vaubel, the course will be in shape for the 500 or so members the developer, Uniwest, hopes to draw.

In addition, the hilly surrounding areas will be bustling with construction of houses and condominiums. Uniwest is developing some 800 acres at Starpass.

Starpass.

"So far, everything's going real well, there've been no major problems," says an optimistic Vaubel.

Back in January, PGA commissioner Dean Beman, course architect Bob Cupp, Uniwest principals, and Wadsworth executives toured the course, measuring the construction timetable. They came away assured that the course will be completed by tournament time, says Vaubel.

"They said that Star Pass is the number one priority of the PGA," says Vaubel. Just in case, Randolph Golf Course in Tucson has been lined up as a back-up for the event.

Currently the PGA controls 14 courses throughout the U.S. with four slated for opening in 1986. Each year four more are slated to open.

Star Pass, barring unforeseen disaster during the August "monsoon season" (what residents call the rainy period); should be ripe come October. **WT&T**



This common desert scene will be a faded memory when Star Pass hosts its first pro tournament this October.

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WEED BUSTERS

Two Virginians approach the chemical spraying business differently. They go for the industrial and commercial accounts, those who usually don't use the custom applicator for weed control.

Lyle Anderson and Dave Schoonover developed a new market while starting a spray business last year.

"Our business came from an increased piece of the market pie," says Schoonover. "We picked up 150 industrial and commercial accounts. Ninety-eight percent never before

had hired a custom applicator to kill weeds."

Says Anderson, "When I wasn't spraying, I was selling. We decided we didn't like to drive by potential new business."

Where do they find this new business? "Practically any operation with a gravel lot or storage area,"

says Anderson. "We look at warehouses with surrounding areas prone to weeds, firms with outside storage areas, steamline companies, pipeline companies, property management companies, major manufacturers, utilities, and wood preservation firms."

Adds Schoonover, "We'll be developing lots of these and others similar to them in 1986. We are going from our one rig operation to three units. We'll triple our number of accounts."

Incorporated in 1985, Custom Weed Control operates within a 65-mile radius of Roanoke, Va.

"The potential is enormous," says Schoonover. "Keeping down weeds is not just for aesthetics. The practice has dollar value, though the aesthetics do constitute a value by improving the image of the business to a customer. Our customers are finding lots of additional economic values."

More workable areas

He says Custom Weed Control cleaned up an auto salvage firm at less than \$1 per car and made the area workable. "Employees not only find it easier to spot a designated model, but can pull parts without competing with a flourishing weed crop."

Partner Anderson stresses further that gravel storage areas, once overgrown, have to be mowed or dug up—unless the weed crop is killed out by chemicals.

"Weed encroachment carries soil and these areas quickly require more gravel. Chain link fences deteriorate more rapidly when overrun by weeds. Fences free of weed growth are not as prone to rust," he says.

The business fulfills a dream for the partners. Schoonover and Anderson, veterans of custom spray operations, both hold business degrees and wanted to use their experience with their own firm.

"Our goals the first year (1985) were to determine which market areas were available to us, the most effective equipment and products to use, develop new business, and operate at a profit. We feel we accomplished these goals," says Schoonover.

Market saturation

Initial business was sold by developing a mailing list of prospects



Dave Schoonover (left) and partner Lyle Anderson (right) talk with Larry Sharpe, northeast marketing manager at Forshaw Chemicals.

from many sources—Chamber-of-Commerce, trade magazines, and business and industrial directories.

Direct mail, complete with a return reply card, was followed up by a phone call. Personal sales calls were the next step.

"We wanted market saturation—not a job here and there. As a result, we have many small, standard-size accounts plus some major manufacturing firms and electrical co-ops," says Schoonover.

"We needed an effective product and we needed a system," he continues. "We leaned on distributor and company representatives and they came through.

One herbicide, Arsenal, has worked well for Custom Weed Control. Schoonover says, "We needed a post-emergence product because, early on, our customers—new to chemical weed control—had to have weed problems and the promise of bare ground control before we could sell the job."

First-time customers are informed that total kill with Arsenal takes

about a month. The customers are appraised of each time, thus giving them an education in weed control.

The partners say more than hard work is needed to begin this kind of business. They cite the need for effective products and equipment, and the right kind of on-the-job company support.

Long-term clients

The partners see their business as an annual service. After the first year of cleanup, they write a yearly maintenance contract. "We want total customer satisfaction, and we expect most every account to be a repeat customer," Schoonover states.

To both partners, image is important.

Company shirts and uniforms are standard. After every job is assessed and customer satisfaction is assured, a thank-you note is written to the customer.

Also, for keeping customers appraised of results, and especially for selling new accounts, a before and after photo record is kept of

every job. These photos are kept in a binder and used for every call relating to new business.

A great help in this first year of business has been off-season demand for their spray rig as a power washer. With major flooding in the fall of 1985, they ran 12-hour days helping clean up warehouses. A crew with industrial squeegees accomplished the task much faster with help of the power washer.

Another factor that builds customer confidence is the use of a spray pattern indicator, a blue colorant tank mixed with the spray.

"We use eight ounces of colorant per 100 gallons of water," says Anderson, "and customers can see immediately that we have provided thorough coverage."

The entire sprayed area temporarily carries a blue haze cover and is easy to see.

"We save chemical because we don't overlap, and skips are easy to spot, reducing our retreatment cost. We have a saying, 'If it's blue, it's dead,'" says Anderson. **WT&T**



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