

# Bellevue Biltmore Country Club



*A Jewel Along the Gulf*

1950

1985

## HARVEY E. PHILLIPS

### Superintendent / GC & Grounds The Belleview Biltmore Resort Hotel

By: Irene Jones

Take a moment to remember your first high school job...how many jobs ago was that anyway? I worked at Lamb's Pharmacy on St. Petersburg Beach over on the West Coast, recently I had occasion to drive by the place only to find that it is no longer there. It seems like another life time, getting off the school bus and going to work at the drug store.

This week I asked Harvey Phillips about his position as the Superintendent of Golf Course & Grounds at The Belleview Biltmore Resort in Clearwater, Florida. (featured on our cover this issue)

*My first question:* "When did you start to work for The Belleview Biltmore Golf Course?"

*Harvey's answer:* "When I was in high school, in December 1950, I went to work for one season. My first job was general golf course labor, raking sand traps and using hand rotary mowers."

The job that was to last "for only one season," turned into a life time profession which has allowed Harvey to realize his full potential in the golf course industry. He remained



Harvey Phillips

constant in his employment at The Belleview Biltmore Golf Course and in 1953 was promoted to Assistant Superintendent. In 1956 Harvey accepted the position of Golf Course Superintendent, which he has held up until this time.

Harvey's father, James Thomas Phillips, was a citrus grower in the 1930's, 40's and early 50's. Harvey was studying agriculture to follow in his father's footsteps as a citrus grower but recognized in the early 1950's that the groves in and around Clearwater were going out. That was when he applied for work at the Belleview Biltmore Golf Course.

One year after going to work for the golf course Harvey married Thelma Mascé in December 1951. Married thirty-four years Harvey and Thelma have one daughter, Janet who is currently attending The University of South Florida in Tampa. Janet is majoring in Education; this is her third year of study.

Some of the contributions Harvey has made to the golf industry here in Florida are: President of all local Golf Course Organizations on the West Coast of Florida, Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association President, President of The Florida Turf-Grass Association for the years 1979 and 1980, and recipient of the Wreath of Grass award in 1977.

(continued on page 41)



18th Fairway, West Course,  
with Hotel in the background.



*Construction of Biltmore Hotel in 1895-1896.*



*Golf at the Belleview Biltmore C.C. in the early 1900's. Henry B. Plant on the tee.*

(continued from page 39)

As I was interviewing Harvey for this article he was checking the plaques in his office regarding the dates in which he served in the different offices. He couldn't come up with the exact year for his term as President of The Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association, because as he explained it, "I was about the 2nd or 3rd President way, way back about 15 years ago and no plaques were given out then."

After reading up on The Belleview Biltmore Hotel and Country Club it is easy to see why Harvey was motivated to remain with the resort for all these years. Called by some the "White Queen of the Gulf," the Belleview opened its doors on January 15, 1897. Construction of the hotel was begun in 1895 and continued through 1896. An army of workmen with mule-powered scrapers, wagons and carts graded the area and set the stage for masons and carpenters who erected the original one hundred forty-five room hotel. "Heart Pine," or Yellow Pine was brought in from north Florida and south Georgia. This type of pine solidifies with age and today the wood used to build the original West Wing rejects both carpenters' tools and termites' jaws.

Henry Bradley Plant, recognized as Florida's greatest 19th century railroad developer was more than any other person responsible for the identification of upper Pinellas County as the ideal location for a luxury resort which was to later become the Belleair and the Harbor Oaks section of Clearwater which includes the Belleview property. Mr. Plant's agents purchased those thousands of acres.

(continued on page 42)



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15th Green, West Course.

(continued from page 41)

When on January 15, 1897, the Belleview opened its doors it soon became the favored winter retreat of railroad presidents, steel magnates, and other industrial barons. A special siding east of the hotel accommodated private railroad cars. Recreations most recognized at that time were: bicycling and walking, along with "SIX SPORTY HOLES OF GOLF WITH SHELL GREENS."

The SHELL GREENS caught my attention and I asked Harvey about them, "Shell was ground up to construct the greens, the surface was brushed and rolled daily," Harvey was quick to point out, "That was before my day, everything was grass when I came on board."

"The White Queen of the Gulf," the largest occupied wooden structure in the world, "The Grand Dame," 89 years old is now recognized as having introduced the world to resort golf. It may actually have been The Belleview that began the movement of golf towards the resort hotels.

Morton Plant, who took over the hotel after his father died in 1899, was an avid golfer. History states that, "From the time when Morton Plant took the helm at the Belleview, he felt strongly that golf, then in its infancy in this country, would play an important part in the resort's growth and development," since it was generally accepted then that grasses suitable for golf greens would not thrive in Florida and that sand greens were the only answer Mr. Plant began extensive experiments with grasses, soils, fertilizers and methods aimed at a solution. At his order, trainloads of gondola freight cars filled with rich topsoil from Indiana rolled over the rails...thus he became a pioneer in this field.

When Morton Plant assumed control of the hotel in 1899, the six holes were promptly expanded to a nine-hole course with sand greens, designed and constructed by Launcelot Cressy Servos. By 1909, the layout was extended to 18 holes. And by 1915, Plant hired Donald J.

Ross to design and oversee the construction of two 18-hole golf courses on the hotel grounds. Ross was and still remains one of the world's celebrated golf architects.

In the 1920's, golf course maintenance men were sent out in the early morning to remove snakes sunning in the sand traps. Today Harvey manages the 36 holes with a maintenance crew of 18 people and the snake detail has been eliminated. The golf holes stretch over a long, high bluff...the highest elevation in all coastal Florida...fairways follow natural terrain and features of the land as Ross found them. The high plateau, cut by creeks and ravines draining into the bay below, make for many rolling fairways and many natural water hazards uncommon in Florida.

The golf courses bordered by giant live oaks and lush tropical foliage with the blue waters of Clearwater Bay as a backdrop soon helped to cause the hotel to sprout wings, The East Wing was added in 1910, doubling the capacity of the hotel and The South Wing was opened in 1925 bringing the hotel up to its present room capacity of 400. The Belleview Biltmore has developed an identification with golf and with golfers that it will never lose. Having had the responsibility for maintenance and management of the golf courses for the past thirty-five years Harvey Phillips has a lot to be proud of.

On March 8, 1980, the Belleview Biltmore Hotel was recognized as a Historic Site and placed on The National Registry of Historic Places. The hotel has served four generations who have sought warm sunshine, gracious leisure, a wide variety of recreation and the relaxed serenity of a spacious private resort estate. I have a personal goal of visiting The Belleview Biltmore Resort Hotel in the very near future....

\*The hotel is only open four months a year (January through late April). The seasonal private country club serves both members and hotel guests. ■



4th Green, West Course, as Donald Ross designed it.