

Mister Lee is really a good ol' Joe

*An early champion
of golf course
superintendents
lets his courses do
the talking*

By
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When talking to him, his name, is Joe; when talking about him, most superintendents refer to him as Mister Lee.

Whenever architect Joe Lee is asked about himself, the answer always begins with "We," as in "We try to design golf holes that are visible from the tee, so that guests have an equal chance at par with the regular member."

The "we" is not an imperial pronoun, however. The only vestige of Joe Lee's aristocratic heritage (he's descended from Robert E. Lee's older brother, John) is his incredibly courtly manner.

Actually, the "we" refers to Betty Peter, the one-woman staff whom Lee credits with design, drafting, land planning, public relations, and office management, as an integral part of everything he has created. She's been with him for

26 years, joining the Dick Wilson/Joe Lee partnership a few years before Wilson passed away in 1965.

With Peter's support, Lee has designed or renovated more than 200 golf courses. At age 70, he has another 20 or so projects in various stages of completion.

About a third of his courses are in Florida (See list, page 67). Half of his Florida courses are concentrated in South Florida, his home territory.

He is immensely popular with golf course superintendents there, not only be-

cause of the extraordinary attention he gives "his" courses, but because of his promotion of our profession.

He was one of the first architects to encourage the hiring of a superintendent during the early stages of construction.

And he supports superintendents in their work.

"I'll always remember him going before the membership at Quail Ridge on my behalf during a particularly difficult period," says Tim Hiers, former president of the Florida GCSA, now golf course manager at the John's Island Club in Vero Beach.

Most of all, superintendents who know Lee admire his respect for the land and his understanding of the difficulties faced by superintendents as they try to balance the needs of nature with the demands of golf.

Like most world-famous architects, Lee has a trademark, but it's not an architectural feature such as Jack Nicklaus' mounds or Pete Dye's railroad ties.

Joe Lee's trademark is commitment and dedication to a project.

"We have always taken the position that our job is never done," he says. "As a golf course moves through time, conditions change. It's our responsibility to adapt the golf course to the evolving conditions."

The extraordinary number of visits he makes to a project during construction assures his client — his "regulars" include heavyweight developers Arvida and Marriott — that the job will be done right without costly alterations.

Each course is special to him and is not forgotten after it opens for play.

"Joe is never too busy to answer any questions about the golf course or to help

'A gentleman and a fine human being...'

It has been nearly 20 years since the day I first saw Joe Lee.

I was standing in a sand trap at Sugar Mill CC, shovel in hand, trying my best to please the old fellow directing my shaping efforts. Joe was passing by on an inspection tour with the project superintendent and paused to survey our work and suggest some minor adjustments.

At the time, this first encounter had little significance for me. I was fresh out of high school with no idea that I would ever go into the golf course business. All I really remember is having an impression of Mr. Lee as a true gentleman and fine human being.

Six years later, I knew — among other things — that the correct term was "bunker" instead of "sand trap" and I

officially met Joe Lee when I returned to Sugar Mill as its first trained golf course superintendent.

My first impression not only proved to be accurate; it has come to define the true essence of this remarkable man. As I mature and begin to realize how few people achieve greatness in their fields while retaining their greatness as human beings, my respect and admiration for Joe grows.

He is a real-life hero to many of us who have come to know him. His contributions to golf and especially to the golf course superintendent rival his incredible accomplishments as an architect.



Mark Jarrell