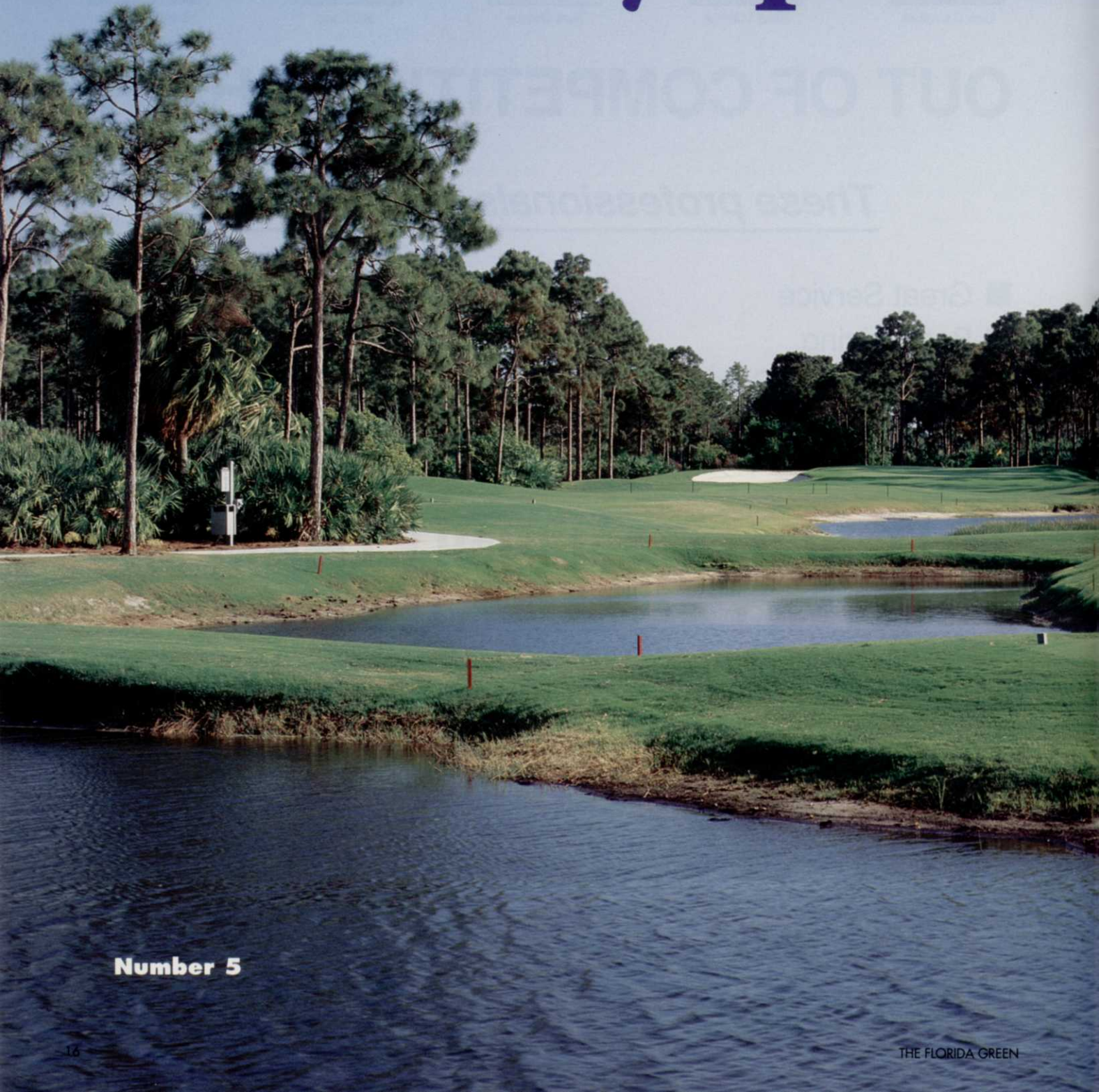


'Bentgrass in a very special



Number 5

Florida... situation'

The Reserve *Golf and Tennis Club* Fort Pierce

BY LARRY KIEFFER

Tim Cann, CGCS, is in a class by himself. He has grown bentgrass year-around in South Florida for more than three years on greens that have no drainage tiles... and survived. And so has most of his grass.

"Our members know that we have good greens for eight months and pretty good greens for another month," says Cann, head superintendent at The Reserve G&TC in Fort Pierce.

"They know the greens are going to be bad for three months every year. They have come to accept the bad greens in summer because they know what a good surface they will have for eight months.

"Bentgrass in Florida is a very special situation. You couldn't think about having bentgrass down here if you get any play in summer. You'd have to have another 18-hole course with bermudagrass greens if you got even 30 rounds a day in summer."

So far, summer traffic has not counted for many of the 30,000 annual rounds at the 6,980-yard,

Photos by
Brian Everhart

par-72 private course owned by Pittsburgh businessman Jack Piatt. Although about a third of the members are year-round residents, a nine-hole, par-three course with Tifdwarf greens entertains those with enough patience to work on their putting in Florida's summer heat.

Still, maintaining bentgrass in Florida on greens with no drainage is fairly remarkable, particularly when you consider the size of Cann's staff — 13 counting an assistant, two technicians, two mechanics and a crew of eight.

"I've got a part-time cup-cutter," professes the 31-year-old native of Wallingford, Conn.

"Actually, it's not as heroic as it sounds," he adds. "My assistant (Mike Strahowski) and I are working superintendents. We do most of the syringing so the others can stay with their routines.

"We sometimes put in long hours, but it's really a pretty relaxed atmosphere around here. The owner and the members accept the summer situation because they get great greens in winter and my boss (Executive Vice President Michael Dillman) understands the limitations in-

***But no
drainage
tiles?***

herent in working with nature. This is not a high-pressure job."

But no drainage tiles?

"Well, we have installed some tile ourselves on the low spots that wouldn't drain," he said. "When (father-and-nephew architects) George and Jim Fazio built this course in 1984, they thought they had good sand to work with and that they wouldn't need drains."

The attitude was prevalent among golf architects a decade ago. And the senior

Fazio, who died in 1986 with nearly 50 designs to his credit, was best known for two things — losing the U.S. Open to Ben Hogan in a three-way playoff with Lloyd Mangrum at Merion CC in 1950... and for doing things his way.

As a top-level touring pro, Fazio wanted the superior surface of bentgrass at The Reserve, which he owned. It sported greens planted in a combination of Tifgreen 2 and bentgrass when the course opened in 1984, but the Tifgreen had a lot of problems, so they took out the bermudagrass in 1986 and put in pure Penncross bent.

That was two years before Cann arrived. Since then, two of the greens in the middle of summer have been replaced by Tifdwarf.

How have the others managed to survive the summers?

"Well, the big thing is the cloud cover that rolls over from Lake Okeechobee every afternoon," says Cann. "That helps more than anything else to keep us cool.

"I have a good topdressing program with a light application every two weeks and we do a lot of spiking, but you have

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to be careful because that damages the plant.

"The biggest thing is limiting the amount of water. You can never get them really dry, but we regulate the amount of water they get at night so we can syringe during the day and not get them too wet. Regulating the water is the real challenge of managing bentgrass greens."

Rising to challenges has been a way of life for Cann.

In high school at Wallingford, he worked at a nine-hole public course leased by a professional golfer and his brother. The pro's wife helped out in the golf shop and Cann did most of the "outside work," becoming the de facto superintendent.

He brought his six handicap to his brother's alma mater, St. Leo College in Wesley Chapel northeast of Tampa, to play on the golf team and scope out the Florida scene. He hoped to follow in his brother's footsteps and play for pay.

"I quickly learned that I didn't have the game you need to be a top-flight professional so I decided to look into

maintenance," Cann says. He got a job at the St. Leo course and, after completing one year at the small college, transferred to the University of Florida at Gainesville to begin his education in agronomy.

"After I enrolled, I started looking around for a part-time job and I ran into Jeff Hayden."

Cann pauses long enough to let anyone familiar with golf course maintenance in Florida fill in the rest of the story for himself. Cann became part of Hayden's Lake City Farm Club.

"I finished the semester at Gainesville and then worked for Jeff fulltime at Turkey Creek until classes started at Lake City in the fall." Cann and the rest of Hayden's special crew continued to work part-time at Turkey Creek, commuting from the School of Golf Course Operations at Lake City Community College on weekends and sometimes once or twice during the week.

He was graduated from LCCC with an A.S. in golf course operations in 1984 and landed at River Wilderness CC in Parrish

as assistant to Mike Miles. River Wilderness developer Lloyd Sheehan started work a year later on Imperial Lakes down the road in Palmetto and gave Cann the top job.

"I was able to bring that course to opening day from groundbreaking through grow-in and I stayed there until 1988," Cann recalls. He also became friends with golfers Andy Bean and Paul Azinger, who represented Sheehan's developments on the PGA Tour.

In 1988, Cann succeeded David Cheesman at The Reserve, at Cheesman's suggestion.

The Reserve sits lightly on an environmentally sensitive piece of property about 15 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. The golf course is cut out of natural wetlands — vast areas of which have been left intact — and a thick, long-needle-pine forest which shelters abundant wildlife, including bobcats, eagles, deer, fox squirrels and lots of 8-pound bass.

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The Reserve Golf and Tennis Club, Fort Pierce

Built in 1984 by George and Jim Fazio; currently owned by Pittsburgh businessman Jack Piatt.

Private, 18 holes (plus short 9-hole, par-three), 6,980 yards from back tees, 5,256 from front; 30,000 rounds annually.

Greens: Penncross bentgrass (2 in Tifdwarf, overseeded in winter with bent); average 6,500 square feet; hand-mown to .125 in season, .187 in summer.

Tees: Tifway 2, not overseeded; 60 boxes averaging 2,000 square feet; cut to .450.

Fairways: Tifway 2, not overseeded; lightweight mown to .500.

Roughs: Tifway 2 cut to 1.5 inches by ground-driven five-gang unit; some rough is pine bed cleared of palmettos.

Irrigation: double row where necessary fed by existing natural lakes.

Staff: 13 including assistant superintendent, spray technician, irrigation technician, two mechanics and crew.

Superintendent: Tim Cann, 31, single. Born Wallingford, Conn. Lake City Community College A.S. in golf course operations, 1984. Certified in 1991. **Affiliations:** Treasure Coast GCSA, Florida GCSA, FTGA, GCSAA and USGA. **Previous Employment:** Assistant superintendent River Wilderness CC (Parrish); superintendent at Imperial Lakes (Palmetto).

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Number 8

to take them; hunting is prohibited.

Even though the crew maintains 130 acres of fairways (including the par-three), the course is tight with small landing areas.

Irrigation comes from the connected lakes — “half the property is lakes and the other half is wetlands and forest... mostly wetlands,” says Cann — that are fed by rain and runoff. The lakes empty into the Atlantic through one of the canals dug by the Army Corps of Engineers.

“We’re not allowed to pump any water from the ground, but they do let us transfer water between lakes so we move a lot of water from one side of the property to the other,” Cann says.

“It’s a very good golf course,” says Cann, who plays to a 10 handicap these days and is grateful to be able to play often enough to keep it there. “It’s well-laid out, challenging with carefully placed bunkers (60) and lots of water (comes

*half the property
is lakes and the
other half is wet-
lands and forest...
mostly wetlands*

into play on 15 holes). Most holes have a tunnel effect off the tee.”

Cann has enjoyed his tenure at tending the course George Fazio intended to be his personal track. Fazio’s best-known layouts include Jupiter Hills 45 minutes

down the road and Butler National outside of Chicago. The Reserve turned out to be his next-to-last project and the last one he finished. Hawk’s Nest in Vero Beach opened after he died.

“An office job doesn’t turn me on at all,” Caan said. “Being around people and nature gives me a good feeling. If you can find a beautiful golf course that you’re happy at, it’s nice to be able to spend your day more relaxed.”

NOTE: As this story went to press, Tim Cann realized one of his career goals of managing a 36-hole course by accepting the position as superintendent at Harbour Ridge GC in Stuart, a 36-hole private facility by Joe Lee and Pete/P.B. Dye with bermudagrass greens. Tim will be succeeded at The Reserve by his assistant, Mike Strahowski. Mike has been at The Reserve for four and one-half years learning his craft from both Tim and previous superintendent, David Cheesman. ➔

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MO Tim Caan, CGCS

"My knowledge is the direct result of four people in particular — Tim Hiers, Jeff Hayden, Buddy Carmouche and Mike Miles. All these guys taught me a lot about what I do — self-discipline and dedication to the job." 🏌️

