

Osprey Cove

The best-kept secret in Georgia

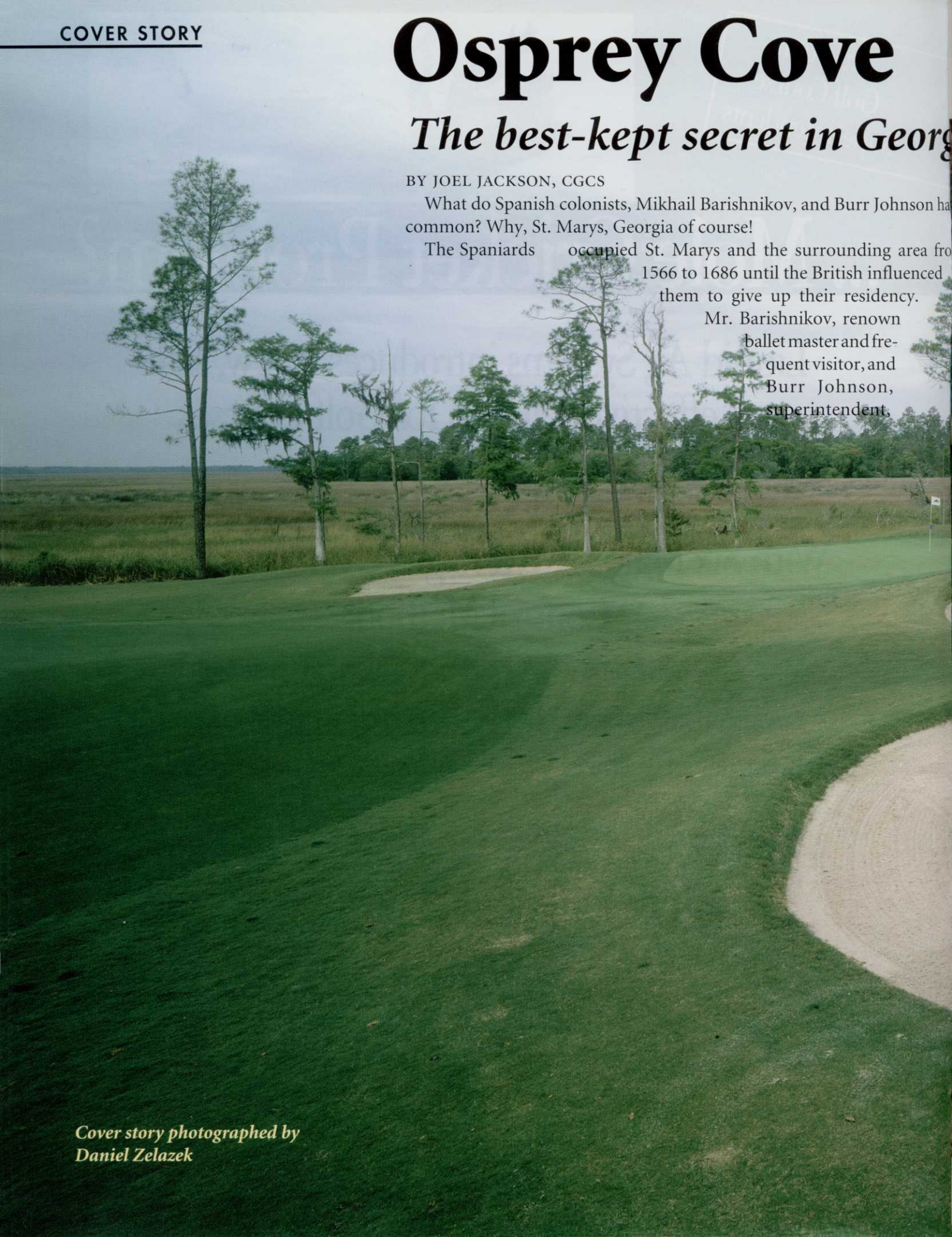
BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

What do Spanish colonists, Mikhail Barishnikov, and Burr Johnson have in common? Why, St. Marys, Georgia of course!

The Spaniards occupied St. Marys and the surrounding area from 1566 to 1686 until the British influenced them to give up their residency.

Mr. Barishnikov, renowned ballet master and frequent visitor, and Burr Johnson, superintendent,

*Cover story photographed by
Daniel Zelazek*



ia (or North Florida)

are recent time travelers who spend their time at Osprey Cove, an exclusive new development on the shores of the St. Marys river. The most recent Georgia Golf Guide calls it, the best kept secret in Georgia!”

Osprey Cove is the property of Howard Gilman, sole owner of the Gilman Paper Company in St. Marys. His vision of a well-appointed country

*Native marshland surrounds
Number Eight*

First and foremost is my father, Herb Johnson. He taught me to treat others as I would want to be treated, and he also taught me the meaning and value of hard work.



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club community on Georgia's Colonial Coast is becoming a reality with the help of Morris "Burr" Johnson, CGCS, who is in charge of all of the development's landscaping as well as the golf course. By the way, "Burr" is a nickname that stuck when, as a child, his sister couldn't say, "brother!"

Osprey Cove is beautifully manicured and maintained all the way from the main gate to the maintenance facility. It looks like a model for the way all golf facilities should look. Neat and clean. Everything in its place from the superintendent's office to the enclosed soil bins. A truly professional atmosphere that reflects the countenance of this confident and mild-mannered superintendent.

Like many of his peers, Johnson did not come directly to this profession from high school. A North Carolinian from Hendersonville, he was at the end of his sophomore year at UNC-Asheville with no firm major in sight. After consulting with his father he took a summer job as a merchant seaman with the Exxon Company to earn money for school and to find his calling. Well, the summer stretched into five years and he eliminated the merchant marine as a lifelong career.

Burr's family's roots were in agriculture and dairy farming, and one uncle in Fort Myers suggested the golf course operations program at Lake City Community College. Johnson liked the outdoors and, although not an avid golfer, he did dabble with the game in school. And so, in the company of such classmates as Buck Buckner and Dwight Kummer, Burr Johnson matriculated in 1983 and began his turf management career.

When reflecting on people who have had a major influence in his life, Johnson said, "There are two people primarily that I have to credit. First and foremost is my father, Herb Johnson. He taught me to treat others as I would want to be treated, and he also taught me the meaning and value of hard work.

"In the golf business, it would have to be Mark Hampton, CGCS when he was at the Wyndemere C.C. in Naples. I worked for Mark on my 1982 summer





Marshland surrounds the 221-yard, par-three seventh hole, providing a secluded setting for the community being developed around this semiprivate course.

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OJT while at Lake City. In that summer, I learned how a professional superintendent conducts himself and how a quality maintenance operation should be run. Much of what I learned during that time I practice today.”

In his first 10 years in the turf management business, Johnson has been involved in a variety of golf course operations.

“I have been at a resort course at the Ravines, a private, member-owned club at Palmetto Pines, and two individually owned private-semiprivate courses, Cotton Creek and Osprey Cove. The individually-owned operations are the best environments because the chain of command is very short from the superintendent to the owner.

“Mr. Gilman and the entire management team are very open to suggestions and we all have the common goal of excellence.

“We have a very diverse group of

people on the staff at Osprey Cove with none having any prior experience working on golf courses except my assistant, Mike Nettles. They have all learned from the ground floor what it takes to build, grow in and maintain a nice golf course. I get many compliments on the condition of the course from both members and our guests, which only proves what I’ve known for a long time — that we have quality people doing a quality job.”

Nettles, also a Lake City graduate, heads up the landscape division.

“Mike oversees a 10-person crew, which maintains the entrance, all the common areas and roadways, the clubhouse, tennis facility, and pool area landscaping.

“Mike also designs and installs landscaping for newly built homes. As a service to our residents, our staff will also maintain lawns at cost. This is a special



Morris "Burr" Johnson, CGCS

Education: Lake City Community College. A.S. in Golf Course Operations in 1983; University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1974-1976; GCSAA certified in 1992.

Professional Affiliations: Golf Course Superintendents Association of America; Florida GCSA, North Florida Chapter; Georgia GCSA.

Previous employment: Superintendent, Cotton Creek CC, Gulf Shores, Alabama; Superintendent, Palmetto Pines CC, Cape Coral, Florida; Assistant superintendent, Ravines Resort, Middleburg, Florida.

Family: Wife, Linda; son, Andy (5 yrs.); daughter Mary Hanna (15 mos.).

Hobbies and interests: All sports. Andy's Tee Ball team. Quality time with the family.



service offered by Mr. Gilman to help maintain the quality and integrity of the community."

No golf course was ever built that doesn't have some special challenges, and Osprey Cove is no exception.

"Two of my biggest ongoing challenges are the maintenance of the Meyer zoysiagrass bunker faces and managing the turf growing on some of the front nine holes, which were once part of the old St. Marys Country Club.

"The bunker faces are not large, but they are steep, and the grass tends to dry out quickly when we go for periods without significant rainfall. This is especially prevalent on our fairway bunkers that only have single head coverage. We try to alleviate the problem by doing quite a lot of hand watering with wetting agents. I think, over time, the 419 bermuda will out-compete the zoysia."

"On the old holes on the front nine



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A watery grave awaits a banana ball on this 526-yard, par five at number six.

Because of the severe pressure from mole crickets we do make one annual wall-to-wall treatment in the spring.

that were incorporated into the new design, it seems like we spend more time on this area than on the rest of the course trying to control outbreaks of dollarweed, johnsongrass, carpetgrass, and Virginia buttonweed.” Since superintendents are their own worst critics, Johnson knows



where the little flaws exist. All the average golfer or the casual observer will see is excellence.

There have been several projects undertaken to enhance the course aesthetics and playability.

“One of the first problems we had to

solve was the damage done by traffic in our first year. Management agreed and we have installed nearly 3.5 miles of cart path and two bridges. We also had to enlarge the teeing surfaces on the par 3 holes — 4, 11, and 17. We have also added three rain shelters for our guests.”

Environmental considerations are a key part of Johnson’s total management philosophy.

“We only fertilize according to soil sample results and then we use slow-release nitrogen sources. We also map pest populations and spot-treat to control them.

“Because of the severe pressure from mole crickets we do make one annual wall-to-wall treatment in the spring. This year we will use the coulter-slit injection



A 395-yard par-four greets the golfer at the turn, with swamp to the right and rear.



Osprey Cove Golf Club

Location: St. Marys, Georgia

Ownership: Howard Gilman . Gilman Paper Company

Management: General Manager, Gene Rose; Golf Professional, Darryl Jack

Playing Policies: Preferred tee times for members. Public play allowed.

Designed by: Mark McCumber. Constructed by: McCumber Construction Inc.

Opened: October 1990. Number of holes: 18 Turf: 120 acres under maintenance.

Greens: 3 acres. Average size, 6500 square feet in Tifdwarf hybrid bermudagrass. Height of cut 5/32" with walking mowers. Overseeding - Marvelgreen/Laser blend at 25 lbs./1000 sq. ft.

Tees: 3.5 acres in Tifgreen 328 hybrid bermudagrass. Height of cut 5/16". Overseeding . Sunbelt Tee & Fairway Blend at 15 lbs./1000 sq. ft.

Fairways: 45 acres in Tifway 419 hybrid bermudagrass. Height

of cut - 1/2". Overseeding - Sunbelt Tee & Fairway Blend at 275 lbs./acre

Roughs: 58 acres in Tifway 419 hybrid bermudagrass. Height of cut: 5/16". Not overseeded.

Irrigation system: Rainbird Linksmaster Controls, Pumps: 2 - 75 hp and 1 - 25 hp, 540 Rainbird heads.

Staff: Assistant Superintendent, Mike Nettles (LCCC graduate); Head Mechanic, Paul Merritt; Assistant Mechanic, Justin Jones (both graduates of LCCC golf course mechanics program); Chemical Technician, Jack Kennedy; Irrigation technician/foreman, Bruce Bowden; Golf Course crew - 12. Landscape crew - 10.

Turf equipment: 4 John Deere walking greens mowers, 5 Jacobsen Greenskins, 1 Toro triplex slope mower, 1 Jacobsen F-10 fairway mower, 1 Toro 7-gang pull frame mower, 1 Toro 72" Groundsmaster, 2 turf tractors — a 50-hp Kubota and a 30-hp Ford, 1 - 40-hp Ford front-end loader, 1 - 300-gal. Hahn sprayer, 1 - 100-gal. Agrotec sprayer, 4 Cushman utility vehicles, 4 EZ-Go utility vehicles, 1 Turfco topdresser, 1 Vicon fertilizer spreader, 1 Coremaster greens aerifier, 1 Ryan fairway aerifier, 1 AgriMetal blower, 1 Chevrolet 1-ton dump truck, 1 Chevrolet pickup truck.

method with Crusade. We are also experimenting with the parasitic nematode. We do alternate pesticide products to reduce the possibility of chemical resistance by the target organisms."

Johnson's vision of the future of golf is similar to many of his peers. "I see continued growth for the game with more new golf courses. But along with that growth will come even more stringent guidelines from federal and state agencies on how new and existing courses can be built and maintained."

From the friendly, cooperative, teamwork atmosphere prevalent at Osprey Cove it seems that Johnson is doing the "right stuff".

The formula for success in this business according to Johnson is simple: "Get as much practical experience as possible, and don't be afraid to ask for help from your friends and Your peers."

The most satisfying professional accomplishments so far for Burr have been being part of the construction, completion, and opening of two new courses, Cotton Creek and Osprey Cove.

"At Cotton Creek I got to meet and work with Arnold Palmer, one of the finest gentlemen in the golf business. And now at Osprey Cove, I have a great job working with wonderful people. What more could I ask?"