

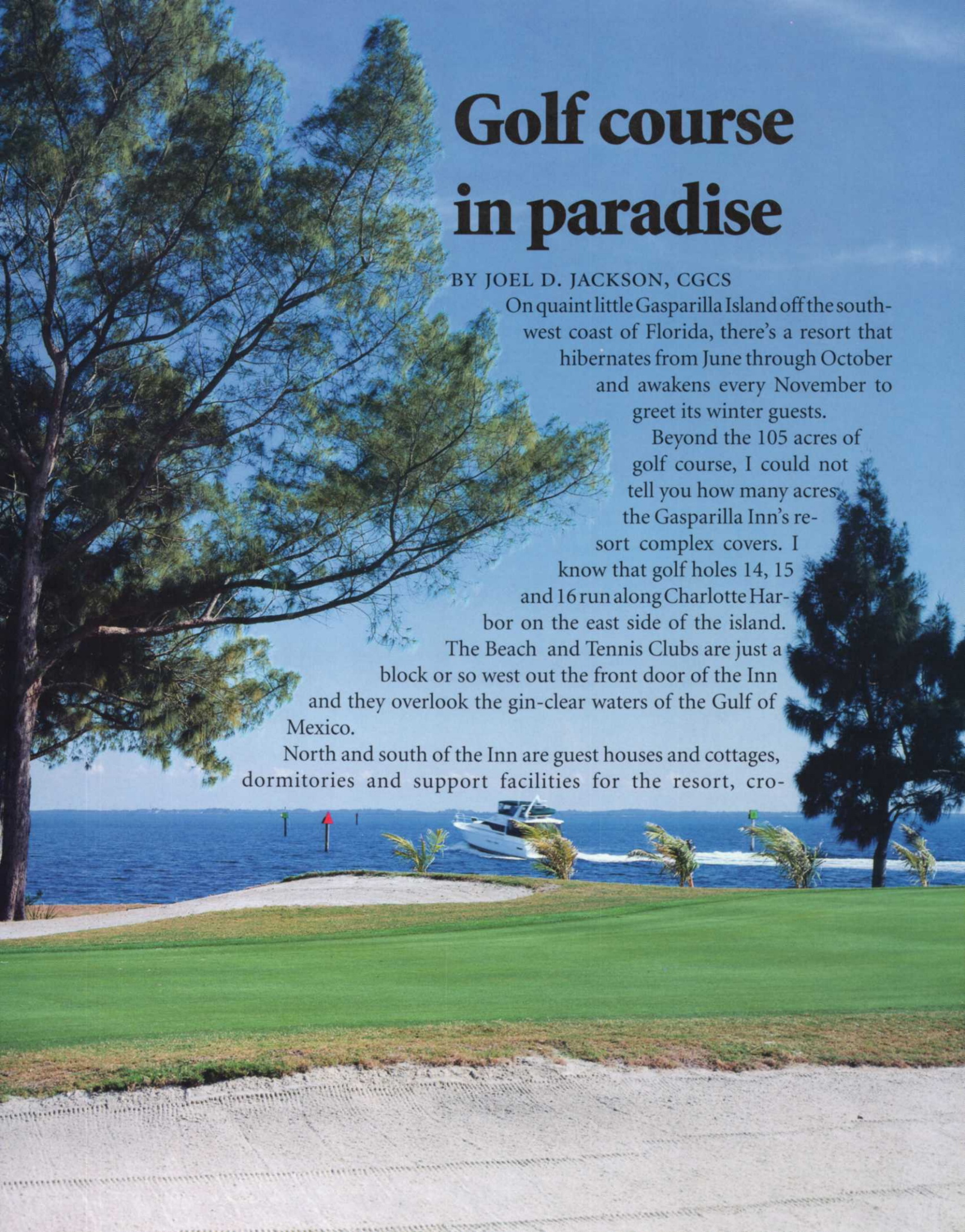
# Golf course in paradise

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

On quaint little Gasparilla Island off the southwest coast of Florida, there's a resort that hibernates from June through October and awakens every November to greet its winter guests.

Beyond the 105 acres of golf course, I could not tell you how many acres the Gasparilla Inn's resort complex covers. I know that golf holes 14, 15 and 16 run along Charlotte Harbor on the east side of the island. The Beach and Tennis Clubs are just a block or so west out the front door of the Inn and they overlook the gin-clear waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

North and south of the Inn are guest houses and cottages, dormitories and support facilities for the resort, cro-



## Island Charm



Photo by Joel Jackson

The restored train depot, formerly the arrival point for vacationing gentry, is now the hub of a quaint downtown area of shops and restaurants.

quet courts, a marina, a restaurant, and a motel all belonging to the Gasparilla Inn.

Two blocks south of the Inn on the main road is the official "downtown" of the city of Boca Grande with a few stores and shops. A gas station, a clinic and some eclectic restaurants with names like: The Loose Caboose; Loon On A Limb; and The Temptation round out the "downtown" area. The Inn has its own restaurant across the street called, The Pink Elephant. The locals just call it "The Pink."

This geography lesson is necessary to understand the range and scope of the responsibilities of the superintendent, Royce Stewart. If the Inn owns it and it has turf, trees, ornamentals or annuals, then Royce and his 18-person staff take care of it!

Royce's staff level stays constant all year while the Inn fluctuates from a small skeleton staff in the summer to a maximum of 225 people during peak season. While the head chef, a 25-year veteran and has a home locally, most of the staff works at jobs or hotels in North Carolina, New York and Maine in the



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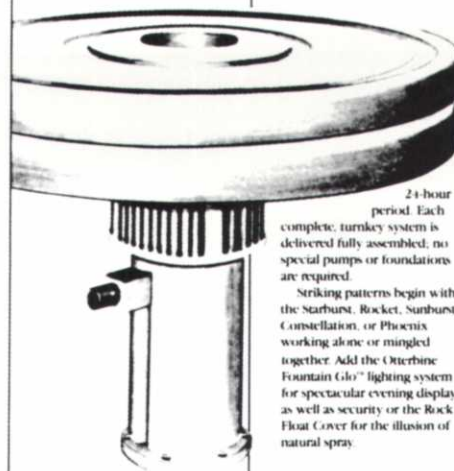
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*From behind the 15th green. The majority of the course's layout lies between Boca Grande Bayou by the pro shop and Charlotte Harbor seen to the right.*

## Island Charm



Photo by David Bailey

*Boca Grande Light used to guide phosphate barges to the natural deep water harbor at the southern tip of the island.*

summer and here at the Inn in the winter.

Many of them, like the chef, are 25- to 29-year veterans. There are five dormitory buildings on the property to provide housing for the hotel staff. Royce has a two-bedroom, two-bath apartment just a pitching wedge from his office.

I know someone is saying, "That's living on the job! That's not for me!"

There are compensations.

Housing is provided and the area is one of the premiere fishing grounds in the state. Boca Grande Pass is famous for its tarpon fishing. Royce has caught a 140 pounder and his son, Jamie landed a trophy silver king of 186 pounds after an hour long battle and a close encounter with a large hammerhead shark.

Remember, the course is closed from June 15th to November 1st.

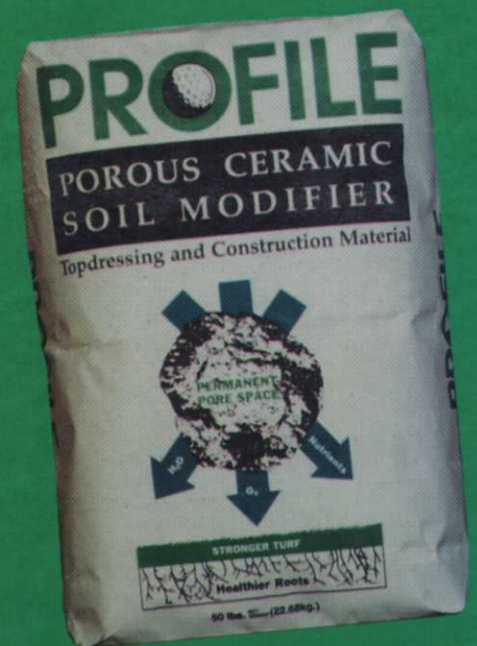
There's plenty of time to do projects like: rebuilding small tees to provide more teeing area to overcome winter wear; recontouring a green or two to have more pin positions; planting trees;

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# Royce Stewart

**Originally from:** Lakeland, Florida.

**Family:** Royce, Jr. (27), Jason (25) and Jamie (22).

**Education:** Lakeland High School, Kansas Junior College, Florida Southern College.

**Employment:** Superintendent of: Gasparilla Inn Golf Club, Boca Grande (1990-present); Imperial Lakes C.C., Lakeland (1983-1990); El Conquistador C.C., Bradenton (1977-1983); Seminole Lake C.C., Seminole (1970-1977). Manager of Skyview Lakes G.C., Lakeland (1966-1969).

**Hobbies/Interests:** Golf, fishing, baseball, football.

**Professional affiliations/Honors:** Member of Suncoast Chapter of FGCSA, Florida Turfgrass Association and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

Former positions: Board of Directors, West Coast GCSA; Vice President, Suncoast GCSA; Chairman Membership Drive, FTGA. Received 1995 FGCSA Presidents Award.

**Memorable moments:** My most memorable moments would have to be the three visits to the Gasparilla Inn by President Bush. Getting to meet him and to witness all the security measures was really extraordinary.

**Personal philosophy:** Be dedicated to your career but take time to enjoy life as well. If you do a good job with your career, that will make life more enjoyable in itself.

**Introduction to the business:** Strange as it may sound, I married into the business. My father-in-law, Jamie Jackson, was a golf professional and vice president of the PGA. He asked me to go to work for

him at Skyview Lakes G.C. in Lakeland and my career developed from there.

**Mentors:** My life and career have been influenced primarily by two individuals. Jamie Jackson, my father-in-law, and Jack Harrell, Sr. of Harrell's Turf Supplies. I will always be thankful for Jamie's encouragement and help to get started in golf course maintenance. Jack has been and continues to be a personal friend and professional mentor. Whenever I have a problem or dilemma, Jack is the first person I call because of the wise counsel I always receive from him.

**Advice:** Get a good education. Work hard. Seek advice and ask questions



when you have a problem. Sometimes you get into more trouble by not asking for help. Be sure to maintain your course to fit your general membership. Know what conditions they want and then manage the turf accordingly.

## Island Charm



Photo by Joel Jackson

*Boca Grande Theater. In days gone by, it was a sawdust-floored movie and live performance theater; now it's a restaurant.*

removing exotics, like the infamous Melaluca; and replenishing the crushed-shell cart paths.

There are scores of other landscaping projects scattered over the Inn's property to keep Royce and his crew busy all summer. On my visit, Royce had a contractor putting the finish grading on the completely rebuilt driving range.

The Gasparilla Inn was built in 1913 and the golf course was built in 1927. At that time the complex was owned by Baron Collier. The original course was a 9-hole layout. A second 9 holes was built "in-house" sometime later. The designers or creators are unknown.

The current owner, Mr. Bayard Sharp, purchased the property in 1975 and has made numerous improvements to the course over the years. Most notably for Royce, a new maintenance building finished last year. In turn, Royce converted

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# Gasparilla Inn

**Location:** Boca Grande, Florida on Gasparilla Island.

**Ownership:** Mr. Bayard Sharp

**Playing Policy:** Private. Members and hotel guests.

**Management Team:** Club President, Mr. Bayard Sharp; Club Manager, Mr. Steve Sidensticker; Head Golf Professional, Bob Kinard.

**Opened:** 1927. Designer unknown.

**Major renovations:** 1986-87 rebuilt greens with Tifgreen 328 and installed a new irrigation system; 1993 rebuilt tees; 1994 new maintenance facility; 1995 rebuilding range and replacing irrigation system.

**Acreage:** Total turf = 105 acres. Ponds and waterways = 4 acres.

**Greens:** 3 acres (including 3 croquet courts). Average size = 5,000 square feet. Turf type = Tifton 328. HOC = 3/16" summer. 5/

32"-1/8" winter. Green speed goal = 7.5. Overseeding = 4 pounds Cobra bent and 6 pounds Sabre Poa trivialis per 1,000 square feet.

**Tees:** 2 acres, Tifway 419. HOC = 1/4". Overseeding = Gator ryegrass at 24 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

**Fairways:** 35 acres, mix of Common, Ormond, and Tifway 419 bermudagrasses. HOC = 5/8" year round. Overseeding = Gator ryegrass at 425 pounds per acre.

**Fair-roughs:** 20 acres, same turf mix as fairways. HOC = 1.25". No overseeding. Deep roughs = 2". No overseeding.

**Irrigation Source:** Effluent. Equipment: Pumps = 2-60 hp mains & 1-30 hp jockey. Controls = 48 Toro VT12 satellites. Heads = Double row Toro 670's.

**Staff:** Total of 19 including superintendent.



## Unusual conditions:

Coastal barrier island. Tidal salt water ponds. Salt water intrusion into soil profile. Soil = muck over oyster shell. Permitting required to prune mangroves as needed. Course closed annually from June 15th to November 1st. Weight restrictions on bridge requires special trucking and stockpiling of materials.

**Grow-in:** When the course was built in the 1920's, the primary equipment was a mule and buggy team.

**Mowing/maintenance equipment:** Green, tee

and approach mowers = 5 Toro triplexes. Fairways = 2 John Deere 3235's. Roughs = 2 Toro Grounds Masters.

## Cultural/Pest Control/

Fertility programs: Frequent verti-drain aerification of fairways. Annual gypsum applications at 1,500 pounds per acre for high sodium levels. Use slow release Polyon fertilizers. Pest control spraying only as needed.

## Wildlife inventory includes:

Bald eagles, Osprey (nesting platform on #13 tee), waterfowl and wading birds, Wild turkeys and raccoons.

## Island Charm



Photo by Joel Jackson

Banyan Street is one of the most popular photo opportunities the downtown area

the old maintenance site into a pitch and run practice green area with a comfort station complete with porch and chairs.

The golf course is unique for its historical preservation of some local dwellings. The pro shop is an old three-story beach house complete with a widow's walk tower on the top floor.

The second-story apartment served as quarters for one of only five superintendents the golf course has ever had. A gazebo was very tastefully added in 1990 to create a porch and snack bar area. Barged up from Useppa Island in 1930, this old beach house now dominates the golf course skyline.

Just north of the main hotel building is the Croquet Club. The small building that serves as the clubhouse is another old home from the area.

Royce said, "Every year around mid-January, the Inn hosts a week-long cro-



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Photo by Daniel Zelazek

*This is the range and scope of the responsibilities of Royce Stewart: If the Inn owns it and it has turf, trees, ornamentals or annuals, then Royce and his 18-person staff take care of it!*



All photos on these two pages by Joel Jackson except photo of Inn at upper left.