

Alex champions 'farm club' training system at Grand Cypress

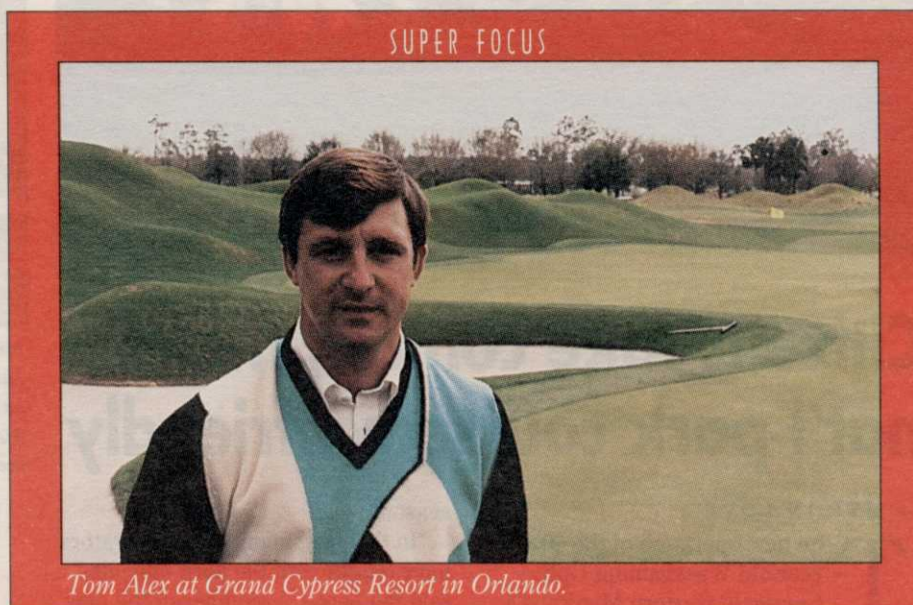
By MARTY LAYNE

Tom Alex, director of golf course maintenance at Grand Cypress Resort in Orlando has had the good fortune of watching the development of two great golf complexes.

His first job in the early 1980s was with the Players Course in Jacksonville. A virgin northern Florida swamp covered the site. Alex, a Connecticut native fresh out of the University of Massachusetts' Stockbridge School of Agriculture, was first assigned to clear some areas around large live oaks with a machete. He hadn't taken more than a couple of swings when one of the denizens of the area—a large ominous-looking snake—raised its head defensively. It was Alex's welcome to Florida, where he has been ever since.

Alex's positions at the Players Club included irrigation technician, spray technician, assistant superintendent and superintendent. In 1983, he accepted a new challenge and moved to Grand Cypress Resort. Once again, he entered on the "ground" floor. An orange grove covered what was to be the Grand Cypress Resort. Alex watched and assisted as Jack Nicklaus planned, designed and executed this beautiful complex of courses. Working with Nicklaus was a delight, even though the pace could be hectic. For the first six or seven years, one project would be completed, there would be a six-month hiatus, and the next major project would begin.

The resort opened its traditional North/South course in January 1984. The East nine holes and three separate holes for the Grand Cypress Academy of Golf were opened in January 1986. The New Course, designed with St. Andrews in mind, opened in January 1988. The resort has 45 holes available to guests of the Hyatt Regency and the Villas of Grand Cypress on the property, plus three holes dedicated to academy



Tom Alex at Grand Cypress Resort in Orlando.

students.

The North/South Course is more traditionally designed. It has terraced fairways, grassy mounds, and plentiful landing areas. The challenge of the course is usually the second shot, which must be aimed at well-bunkered greens.

The East Course is a wooded course with transitional mounds. The course was designed using the natural aesthetics of the land.

The New Course is probably the most well known. It is a wide-open "meadow" design, a reminder of the great Scottish courses. One hundred and forty-eight bunkers guard 16 holes. Mostly fairway, there is little rough except on mounds, where grass is allowed to grow higher. Greens are larger and all but four are double greens.

The three courses present a wonderful challenge for the guests. They may participate in three different golf experiences without leaving the resort property.

The designs also present a challenge to Alex's maintenance staff. The New Course in some ways is easier to care

for. There are no rough cuts to manage, and in the winter the dormant Bermuda grass is allowed to grow so that it provides a challenge to those who play a bump and run game.

On the other hand, there are 148 bunkers, only two of which can be entered by trap raker. While three maintenance workers are raking all the traps on the North/South and East courses, four to five are raking traps on the New Course.

This difference in course design has dictated Alex's management style. His goal is consistent grooming of all courses, a challenge where 80,000 rounds of golf are played yearly.

His staff of 58 is divided into three teams. Each team manages one course and answers to a supervisor and assistant supervisors two times a week. They also meet as a group biweekly. This team approach allows Alex to pull special maintenance teams from each of the courses when the resort hosts special events like the World Cup Tournament in 1990.

Alex believes in letting his superinten-

dents handle the day-to-day maintenance problems so he can concentrate on the agronomics—pruning, fertility and environmental issues.

A chemical containment and fill station was one of the environmental changes that Alex instituted two years ago. Any rinsate that misses tanks can be repumped into the tank simply by hitting a switch. Chemical-laden vehicles are parked there at night in case of breach or tank rupture. It this should occur, the chemical will be retained, preventing any contamination of surrounding areas.

Alex is a member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and the Central Florida Chapter of the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association. He enjoys the camaraderie, sharing of ideas and interests, and the joint problem-solving that goes on in these meetings.

He appreciates the fact that he works for a resort that takes care of him personally and professionally. The golf courses are well-respected at Grand Cypress Resort, and an adequate budget and staff always have been provided, making Alex's job manageable.

Part of the manageability of the job stems from the "farm club" system Alex has instituted. New hires start in auxiliary positions and, with experience, are moved to full technicians.

Alex takes pride in the fact that over the past 10 years he has developed a talented workforce.

He observes his workers becoming more and more skilled, and often finds himself in the position of supporting their natural desire to move to a new course.

Courses like Metro West, Lake Nona and the new LPGA Course have Alex to thank for their superintendents. Watching this natural process, and promoting it, is gratifying to him. As he says, he's only giving back to an industry that has given so much to him.

Rutgers readies short courses for wintertime

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. — Rutgers University's Cook College has scheduled several short courses geared for turfcare professionals next winter.

The school will run its two-year Professional Golf Turf Management School from Jan. 3 to March 11 and its Professional Turfgrass and Landscape Management with Selected Topics in Commercial, Residential and Utility turfgrass from Jan. 3-14.

The one-day Fundamentals of Turfgrass Management will be conducted Jan. 6, and the Urban Forestry class will be held Jan. 7, 14, 21 and 28 and Feb. 4.

Introduction to Golf Course Turfgrass Management, taught by superintendents, will be taught Jan. 11, 12 and 13.

People may contact the Office of Continuing Professional Education, Cook College, Rutgers University, P.O. Box 231, New Brunswick, N.J. 08903; telephone 908-932-9271.

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