

# Meehan: Patience a key to survival in the Caribbean

By PETER BLAIS

**M**ike Meehan is living the dream of many a golf course superintendent, managing a golf course on a Caribbean island.

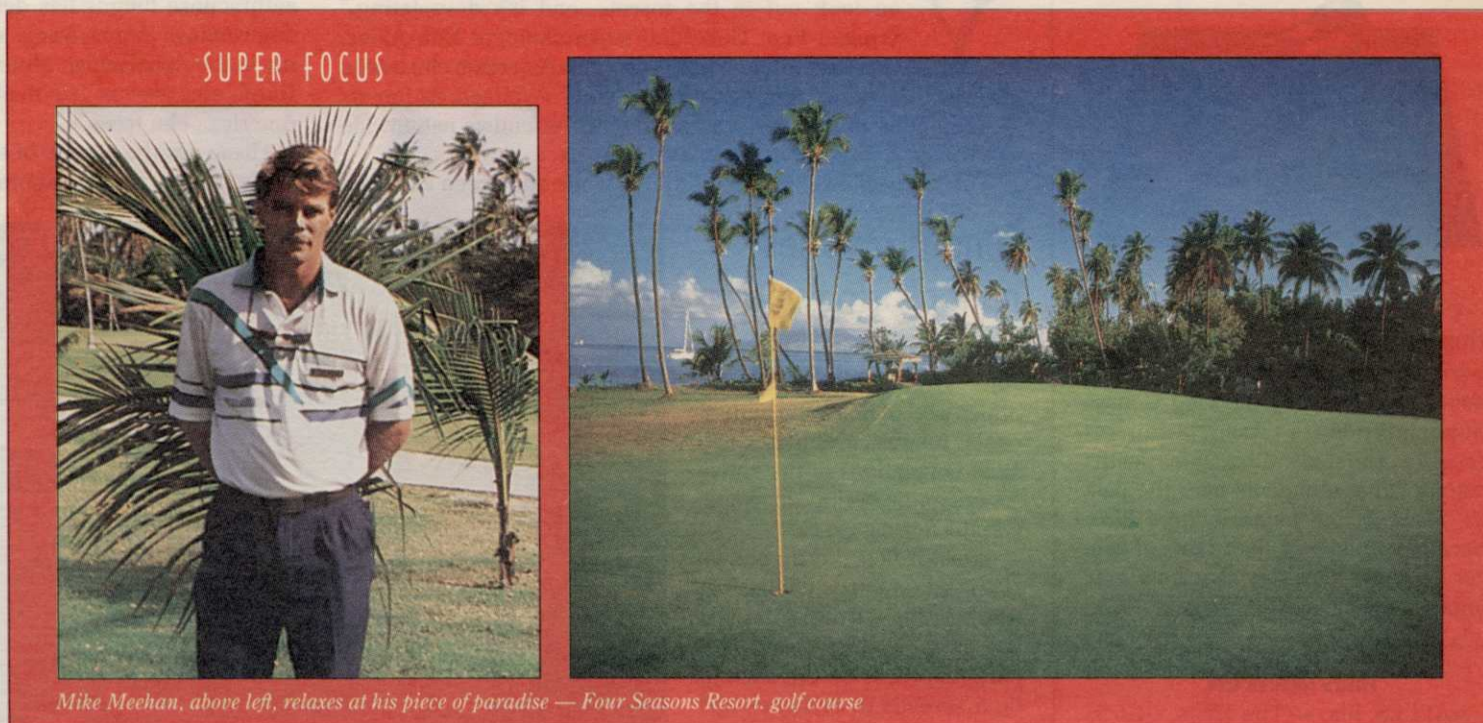
The superintendent of the Four Seasons Resort layout on Nevis admits he'd never trade in the island's gentle trade winds for the rigors of sloshing through a Northern mud season in his native New York.

But, he warns, there is more to operating a Caribbean course than directing others from a hammock slung between palm trees while sipping rum punch.

Uninterrupted electrical service, not having to teach new crew members simple skills like driving, next-day delivery, daily newspapers and indoor plumbing are the types of things superintendents take for granted in the states. Not so on Nevis, a 36-square-mile island of 8,000 citizens, a 25-minute boat ride from its sister isle of St. Kitts.

"Patience is the key to surviving down here," said the 36-year-old golf course veteran. "You have to make a lot of compromises with your course and staff."

Meehan arrived on Nevis in September, 1990, a half year before the Robert Trent Jones II-designed track opened. His patience was tested right away when heavy rains wiped out three holes (9, 10 and 13) and caused power outages. This came on the heels of Hurricane Hugo, which struck a year earlier and set construction back eight months.



Mike Meehan, above left, relaxes at his piece of paradise — Four Seasons Resort, golf course

Four Seasons' own generators allowed construction to continue. The resort's self-contained power source has proved helpful on numerous occasions when one or both of the island's two power stations have shut down.

The contractor also complicated things during construction. The French majority owner of the resort (Four Seasons manages the facility and owns just 15 percent) insisted on using a French firm that had built athletic fields, but never a golf course.

The contractor made some interesting decisions, like removing 480 sprinkler heads from the original design, Meehan said. It soon became obvious they were needed and will be installed.

"We're waiting for controls for

the computerized pumping station now," Meehan said in early April. But with the help of Jones' on-site architect, Kyle Phillips, and a hard-working crew, "We made it come off," Meehan noted. The 196-room resort, which doubled the island's total hotel beds, opened with nine holes on Feb. 14, 1991.

Meehan offers much praise for his 52-person staff. That includes the resort grounds employees he also oversees. The crew includes 21 for the golf course, 20 for the grounds, seven mechanics and four in the nursery.

Pay is lower than in the states, so crews are somewhat larger, Meehan said. Turnover is also much lower. "We've only lost four or five guys in the past year and a half," he noted.

Island-born personnel are hard workers. Many are well-educated, former teachers and government employees who can make more money mowing tees, changing bedsheets or waiting table than they could at their former jobs.

But none had ever worked on a golf course. So, training became a major priority.

"Things you take for granted in the states, like assuming a job applicant can drive, you can't just assume here," Meehan explained. "I'd send someone out on a riding mower and find out he had no idea how to operate it."

"More of my time is taken up with personnel issues than anything else. I try to speak with everyone on the staff every

day."

With utilities undependable and most supplies having to be shipped from Miami, Four Seasons has tried to be as self-sufficient as possible.

Bermudagrass sprigs to plant and repair the course are grown on a 20-acre nursery located behind the 7th hole.

The 350,000 gallons of irrigation water used daily comes from two sources. The Four Seasons' own treatment plant returns 55,000 of the 60,000 gallons of water used daily by employees and guests. Wells on nearby government land supply the rest. The course has a 1 million gallon storage capacity.

The hotel's generators have kept the resort operating at full

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## Spray school added after successes

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Due to overwhelming requests, a third spray technician seminar is being planned for Monday, June 28, at The Landings here. Proclaimed by many as one of the best educational seminars ever, the sessions held on Feb. 15 at The Standard Club in Duluth and Doublegate Country Club in Albany hosted nearly 200 Georgia members and/or golf course employees. The program was so thorough it received five hours of pesticide recertification credit from the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

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