

Build, design, maintain and manage — Newgent does it all

By MARK LESLIE

KISSIMMEE, Fla. — One thing in the life of Steve Newgent is for sure: He'll never get bored. He wouldn't have it.

Newgent, who builds, maintains, designs and manages golf courses, said: "I can't wait to get to work. I've been that way for 30 years."

Newgent had a foretaste of his life while still in college. He would begin his day getting a construction crew started building Indian Harbor Pines golf course, and end it shaping the Satellite Beach course's greens and bunkers. He built nine holes at Ironwoods Country Club in Gainesville and 18 at West End Country Club in Gainesville while a married student in 1968-69.

Today, Newgent basically lives on the road, out of his Chevy Suburban, traveling between the several courses his company is building, the one or two he is designing, the six on which he handles the maintenance contracts and the one his firm manages.

At 6:30 a.m. he is shaping a green. At 6:30 p.m. he is checking an agronomic problem at one of his "maintenance" facilities.

"I never ever wanna be bored. I don't like sitting in the same place," Newgent said.

He ensures that he's not sitting long by operating his Golf Masters construction business — formerly Fore Golf — along with its subsidiaries Golf Art Maintenance and Golf Art Club Corp.

The word "art" reoccurs in his businesses because Newgent sees his work as that.

"I'm an artist. I love creating," he said. "Country Club of Ocala — I shaped it all. Stonecrest [in Bellevue] — I shaped it all.

"Most people hire me because I do it. That's my trademark. I've finished every green my company's ever built."



Steve Newgent stands at his newest design — Country Club of Ocala, which opened in mid-February.

"Steve is the best shaper and golf course builder in the country in my opinion," said Joe Lee, who has hired Newgent to build more than 50 of his courses. "Steve is a hands-on guy. There are so many who get away from their business once they get successful. Steve's got good people working for him. But at the crucial times he is on the dozer shaping a green or box-blading it out."

Is Newgent the only person in the industry who designs, builds, maintains and manages?

"Others design and manage, or build. But I don't know of anyone else who also maintains," Lee said.

Newgent said he has designed a baker's dozen golf courses, including Pine Oaks, a facility in Haines City, which he will also maintain and operate once it is finished.

He is especially proud of Country Club of Ocala, which he designed and built. It opened in mid-February.

Among his current construction projects are The Highlands in Chester, Va., which he designed, and River Downs in Baltimore, designed by Art Hills.

Among the courses he maintains by contract are Ironhorse Golf and Country Club in West Palm Beach and Winston Trails in Boynton Beach.

Bruce Futch is president and Newgent's partner at 2-year-old Golf Masters, while Steve Parker is general manager of Golf Art Maintenance and Golf Art Club Corp.

Perhaps their most famous client has been Disney World in Orlando, Fla. Newgent, who was superintendent of Disney's Lee courses from 1970-73, has had a hand in grading and finish shaping

THE SCORECARD:

Courses built: More than 125
Courses designed: 13
Courses maintained: 6
Courses managed: 3

for all six golf courses there, including three by Lee, the Bonnet Creek Golf Club courses by Pete Dye and Tom Fazio, and the reconstruction of nine-hole Oak Trail track.

Chance, Newgent said, has played a key part in his career. Bob Lagasee "happened to know" Newgent's father, Jack, when Patrick Air Force Base needed a construction superintendent. Newgent, then a turfgrass student at the University of Florida, was available in 1969. Newgent "happened to meet" Disney officials when they approached University of Florida for help with a landscaping problem. Disney landscape architect Bill Evans remembered Newgent from that meeting and one day called him in for a telephone interview with Lee, who was about to design in first Disney golf course.

That led to his work as a construction supervisor for that project, the following superintendent's job, and another "happened-to" that affected his future. At Disney, Newgent worked with the Disney Classic in 1971 and "happened to" meet Arnold Palmer.

Newgent left Disney in 1973, formed his own company, and took his first job: doing the landscaping and installing the irrigation system for the Bay Hill condominiums in Orlando.

"Within two weeks I had two golf courses to build — nine holes at Sherwood Country Club [in Titusville, Fla.] and Sweetwater Oaks [in Longwood, Fla.]. Then it took off. I've built 125 golf courses since then."

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Variety spices Newgent's life. Course maintenance is an important ingredient to that variety.

"I like this because I'm not sitting on the same golf course," he said.

"I started contract maintenance 10 years ago," Newgent added. "It works out really well. The developer doesn't have to fiddle with labor, the payroll, purchasing inventory, etc. He has a firm contract figure and knows what he's got to pay. Our six courses are ones I've built, except for Ironhorse."

"We supply the superintendent, manpower and equipment. We handle all the permitting. The owner supplies absolutely nothing, except a facility. We have a Class A superintendent on each job and I visit the site each week."

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What does the future hold for the 49-year-old Newgent?

"What I really want to do is more architecture and maintenance," he said. "There's a need for it, first of all. Secondly, it's a steady income. The construction business is very cyclical. Anything I design I'm going to build. I have two sons and a son-in-law in the business and they're also very hands-on. I'm training them to where eventually (say, 10 years) I can design and they'll build."

"It's been a great life. I wouldn't have traded anything I've done in the golf course business for any other kind of job. In 30 years I've never deviated from it."

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