



Manuel Francis Sr. (above) compares his experimental Tarleton Dwarf bluegrass (left hand, at right) with another bluegrass variety. Both had been cut almost two weeks previously. Manuel Francis Sr. and Manuel Jr. (above right) examine the new strain.

Manuel Francis, a retired superintendent and a gifted turfgrass developer, now is busier than ever working on a dwarf bluegrass and a new strain of Vesper Velvet

The Indian Summer of Manuel Francis

For a retired golf course superintendent, Manuel Francis is about the most active man you'll ever meet.

After a distinguished career that started in 1922 as a worker for the legendary Donald Ross, Francis last fall terminated a happy association of 22 years with the Vesper CC in Tyngsboro, Mass.

It was an occasion of mutual regret between the superintendent and his membership, because in his long tenure Francis established Vesper as a New England synonym for excellence



in turf conditioning.

It was no part of Manny's intention to sit back and contemplate the glories of a record that earned him an international reputation. He had a clear eye on the future.

This year, Francis is putting in just about the customary course superintendent's pre-dawn to post-dusk working routine in an enterprise he has been planning for quite a while.

This is a turf nursery, established on 168 acres of an abandoned cranberry plantation in Marshfield, Mass., known as

Manuel Francis and Son, Inc.

The partner is namesake Manuel Francis Jr., who earned a degree in economics from the University of New Hampshire, but has been working for 10 years as superintendent of Belmont CC in Massachusetts.

The nursery was started three years ago on a spare-time basis by both father and son, and Francis Sr. has some specific aims for its development.

"We will specialize for a select market," he says. "We will deal with the golf courses and will

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By TOM FITZGERALD

MANUEL FRANCIS

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concentrate on sod, with no branching into the seed business. The sod business is really in its infancy."

Thirty of the 168 acres at Marshfield are now under cultivation, with more in preparation. There are 20 acres in Merion bluegrass, seven in Vesper Velvet bent and two in Fylking.

A great deal of Francis' attention is devoted to an experimental section of one acre where he continues his work on a dwarf bluegrass, which is not yet ready for distribution.

Manny has been engaged with this project for nearly four years, with original observations made

lie for a fairway iron shot.

Francis believes the grass will have diversified use, not limited to fairways and tees. "I have been cutting it under putting green conditions as low as one-quarter inch for a couple of years, and it stands up very well," he says. "I think it should be a good putting surface for public courses which have very heavy play."

The Vesper Velvet is a natural product for Francis' nursery, because it was developed by Manny 30 years ago. While it was named for the course where he worked for so many years, the selection actually was made at the Old Orchard (Maine) CC.

Vesper Velvet is used on some, or all, greens at approxi-

dust and I tried it because I felt it would provide an artificial cushion without the abrasive effect of some other agents.

"When used in properly generous amounts," he continues, "sawdust absorbs nitrogen and feeds it gradually back to the plant. The sand in the mixture helps provide pore space."

To bring pallettes across the fields to the truck loading area with minimum damage, Manuel Jr. devised the idea of steel skids—similar to the old Yankee "stone boats"—on which the pallettes are laid. They can then be dragged easily and quickly by a tractor with floatation tires.

Manuel Sr. has been on call for many years as a consultant. ("But only at the invitation of the course superintendent.")

For 14 years he spent winters in Mexico as an adviser on courses such as Club Campreste de La Ciudad de Mexico, Club de Golfo de Bellavista and Club de Golf de Mexico.

He has worked with Percy Clifford, a Mexican course architect who was born in that country of American parents. Manny also trained Mexican course superintendents and one of his protégés presently is superintendent at the Marques CC in Acapulco.

Manny asked to be excused from his Mexican affiliation this past year because of his concentration on the new business in Marshfield.

Francis has great depth of knowledge in turf culture, but he insists on confining his discussions to the practical. "There are many fascinating aspects, such as genetics," he says, "but I think these are properly left to the men of science."

Along these lines, Manny introduced a couple of bits from his self-deprecating philosophy:

"In learning what I know, I have killed a lot of grass."

And: "I read the course instead of a book." □



The steel skids for hauling pallettes were developed by Manuel Francis Jr.

in a plot of the back garden of his home in Tyngsboro. "For now at least," he says, "we are calling it Tarleton Dwarf bluegrass because the selection was made at the Lake Tarleton CC in Pike, N.H."

Although he is a careful and patient investigator, Francis is confident about the favorable characteristics of his dwarf bluegrass, particularly in the Northeastern states.

"It has the advantage of slow growth so that it does not require frequent cutting," he says. "It is a low feeder and is quite resistant to winter injury and common bluegrass diseases."

A visitor to the Marshfield nursery was invited to inspect a section of the Tarleton Dwarf, which had not been cut for two weeks. It still provided a good

mately 60 courses in New England, and Francis is now working on another strain of this fine-bladed, upright grass which has demonstrated resistance to chemicals and wear.

Manuel Francis Sr. has the kind of family background suited for his specialty. His grandfather was a nurseryman in Portugal and his father ran a coffee plantation in Brazil.

Manny has been an innovator through most of his career.

More than 30 years ago, he was using sawdust and sand for top dressing on greens. "The sawdust was an accidental discovery," he recalls. "I had a course at South Portland, Maine, with weak greens," he says. "In tight spots, I believe in investigating every medicine on the shelf. I had a pile of saw-