

Excavation and the planting of large trees helped bring a character to the Villas at Park Aire that has brought numerous landscape awards to the contractor.



LANDSCAPING THE MULTI-FAMILY COMPLEX

Turning an abandoned airstrip into a showplace of turf, trees and shrubs is an exhilarating experience, says Jim Gibbs, president of Green Bros. Landscaping Co., Inc., in Smyrna, Georgia.

Gibbs ought to know, for it was his company that helped transform the old Parkaire airport in Cobb County, Georgia, into the Villas at Park Aire, a condominium complex that has brought Gibbs several landscaping awards, including the Grand National Landscape Contractors Award and an award of merit from the National Landscape Association.

The Villas at Park Aire is one of a series of four condominium complexes slated for the old airport property. The villa site is approximately 12 acres along an entrance boulevard developed for the four villages.

"The Villas at Park Aire presented a challenge to everyone concerned from its inception," said Gibbs. "The site is on the runway and plane storage area of the old airport and thus virtually flat. Using four building types, two of which are one story, a unit density of ten units per acre was achieved. This represented an extraordinarily high land coverage for a project of this type," he added.

"From the very beginning," said Gibbs, "the developers knew it

would take a lot of imagination and ingenuity on the part of the architect, landscape architect and landscape contractor. Careful selection was made as to qualified firms that would be able to work together and coordinate all of the expected and unexpected problems that could arise."

Gibbs said the challenge was clear. In order to market and sell the condominiums, the team would have to create a look of lushness for the abandoned airport, and they would do this by creating a surrounding of low valley and mounded hills planted with large trees and shrubs. "Only with the creation of a newly planned and planted environment would the developer be able to offer what they felt the public was looking for in today's market."

Because of the complexity of the project and an awareness that all phases of this development would require special co-ordination, a carefully developed set of plans was prepared at a scale of one inch equals eight inches. This package included grading, staking, co-ordination of utilities (underground) and the planting plans.

The first step was to add interest to the flat and mostly asphalt covered site with regrading. This provided as much as 12 feet of vertical change within some of the court-

yards between the buildings. Gibbs used retaining walls and large grass mound to break up the new spaces into more personal units.

A wide pallet of plant materials was selected for this project designed by Planners & Engineers of Atlanta. "Lacking any natural trees, it was important to bring in as many large trees as possible to offset the mass of wooded buildings and paved areas, to provide shade, and to give the complex an established feeling," explained Gibbs.

Specimen crepe myrtle, *cederus deodara*, pampas grass and multi-trunk clumps of river birch were used for impact and interest at important locations.

A strong emphasis was placed on evergreen material throughout the project to provide a year-round feeling of lushness. Potted plants were brought in to break up the paved surfaces. "They are softer to the eye and create a more relaxed atmosphere," emphasized Gibbs. Hanging baskets were added for color along with wisteria covered arbors.

Overall Gibbs thoroughly enjoyed the project. "What you are involved with in landscaping are areas," he said. "And when you have large areas, as with a condominium complex, you have to think in terms of smaller areas within the large ones to really landscape nicely.

"What's nice about the condominium challenge is that you can get into smaller areas more easily. You can use a lot of different plant materials too which makes the job more interesting."

Jim is particularly proud of the Villas because of its many levels of interest. "We mounded areas on the sides of the drives which create the effect of the drives being set in six feet lower than the surrounding areas," he said. In the pool area alone there are 12 feet of vertical change.

Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of the Villas is its feeling of establishment and character

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brought about by the planting of older, larger trees. "We couldn't plant six foot trees and wait ten years for them to grow" said Gibbs, "The project had to be sold soon." A 75-foot crepe myrtle was placed in a very prominent position near the pool with the help of a crane. The river birch were 25 feet tall, magnolias 20 and 25 foot.

This was accomplished despite a three-month delay in construction. "We had planned this job to be

planted in April," Gibbs said. "But it worked out we were planting during the summer months which meant we had to move all of the plantings in full leaf."

To prevent loss, which amounted to less than three percent, bigger balls of earth were dug. The 35- to 40-foot cedars deodara placed at the entrance were dug in the summer months and moved right in. But many of the other plantings were brought in ahead of schedule to an on location storage area.

An automatic sprinkler system was installed to keep the plants

healthy for the months they were stored. "We started bringing in trees and shrubs as early as March," said Gibbs. "We would keep them misted until they were planted." Planting began in June and continued through August.

The on location "nursery" permitted better co-ordination with the construction. "As with most jobs," explained Gibbs, "someone would say, listen, in three weeks I want you to go in and do that area. But in three weeks they just didn't have the area ready. With the storage area, we were able to move into an open area quickly."

Gibbs also helped speed the project by having two five-man crews on call. They would assist the five-man crew on the job continuously when a large area would open up.

Gibbs attributes the success of the Villas at Park Aire to co-ordination and co-operation. "Our company was involved with the project from its inception," he said. "We worked very closely with the architect and landscape designers. We also worked closely with our growers. When we bought the plants we had to make sure they were going to be shipped on time. Then we had to unload them and store them properly. In the meantime we co-ordinated our crews on site."

This co-ordination helped overcome problems with underground utilities, walkways that didn't turn out as planned and drainage. Drainage, he emphasized, was a big factor. "You've got to have good drainage for a successful project."

Gibbs sees a bright future for multi-family complexes but only if the total package is one of quality. "So many people, the wrong people, decided to build condominiums because it was the thing to do," he said. "They threw them up with little concern to quality in construction or landscaping. But people got smart. Now they look for quality."

"People are just more conscious of the environment and environmental improvement today. They really don't know what's inside the walls, but they can recognize good quality landscaping. They are looking for it and are willing to pay the price." □

Portrait of a winner

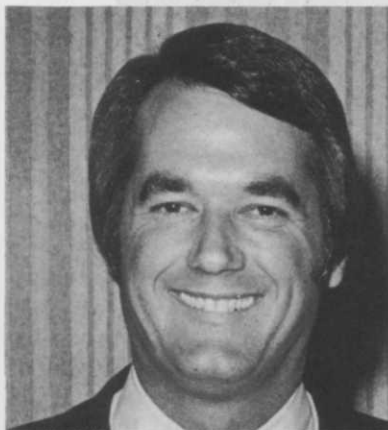
Jim H. Gibbs Jr., president of Green Bros. Landscape Co., Inc., is an affable young man with a zest for his work that is rare these days.

Gibbs, who holds 36 landscape awards, came to Atlanta in 1966 following graduation from the University of Georgia where he received a degree in horticulture and completed three years toward a degree in landscape architecture.

"I started out in business administration," he recalls, "but I just didn't like it. I wanted to do something more creative." Gibbs studied both horticulture and landscape architecture because he wanted "to be more involved with the installation yet have a design-built company."

When he began with Green Bros. in 1966, the company had six nurseries. Today it has 18. He began the landscape company working out of one of the nurseries then later moved the company to its present five and one half acre site in Smyrna. His staff includes designers, landscape architects and four five-man crews.

Gibbs' theory of management is simple. Get the best man for the job from your own ranks. "People who work as foremen for other companies sometimes aren't willing to make the



changes," he explains. "We've found our best foremen come out of the ranks. They start out knowing how to plant properly, how to do the job the way we want it done."

Although Gibbs holds education in high regard, he puts more emphasis on talent and attitude. "If you've got talent and are willing to work then that's it."

Gibbs believes too many people today are out solely for themselves. "They think what can I get out of the company instead of what can I put into it. They figure everything out to an hourly wage. We don't keep these type of people very long."

"If only more people would realize that if they thought more about the company, the company would prosper and reward them."

For Jim Gibbs and the Green Bros. Landscaping Co., this theory has worked very well.

Gibbs is married and the father of three children.