

In the Hot Seat

With condominium and apartment starts up, landscape managers strive for communication and education while balancing the need for outside landscape contracting.

As the popularity of apartment, and especially condominium living continues to grow, landscape managers are finding communication and education two of their greatest allies. Communication seems to be the key to working with the sometimes unyielding condominium boards. Education of owners and association members in making them aware the bottom line isn't always in the best interest of maintenance proce-

Good maintenance procedures can translate directly into better resale value.

dures. Good maintenance procedures can translate directly into better resale value.

These were some of the findings of an informal survey done by WEEDS TREES & TURF among apartment and condominium landscape managers.

One thing is clear, condo and apartment landscape managers are in a hot seat. Not only are condo starts up, but on the average, condo managers are responsible for 126 acres (WT&T survey figure) pointing to the tremendous growth potential of the market. Figures from the Community Associations Institute, a national, non-profit membership education organization for people involved in creating, managing or governing condos or homeowner associa-

tions, show condos increasing as a percentage of total new sales.

James Dowden, executive vice president of CAI, estimates some 65,000 association communities (condos and townhouse communities) in the United States with about 35,000 of those in condominiums alone.

The Avance Mortgage Corporation estimates 20 to 25 percent of all new sales this year will be in condominiums and in some areas such as Florida, California, Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., Denver, Atlanta, Houston and Dallas, as much as 50 percent.

"Condominiums first started big in Florida and California," said Dowden. "But now, other states are catching up, especially where single family home prices have escalated past the reach of the average buyer."

The Avance Mortgage Corporation estimates 20 to 25 percent of all new sales this year will be in condominiums and in some areas . . . as much as 50 percent.

The average condominium buyer is a first-time buyer, single or a childless couple (either young or retirement age), paying under \$50,000 for their unit.

Dowden said roughly two-thirds

of all condos have some form of professional management, and roughly 32 percent do it through boards. The majority, he said, contract out for maintenance because the average condominium in the United States is 100 units in size,

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too small to justify its own landscape management staff.

That brought up another concern that surfaced in the WT&T survey. There is increasing competition from landscape maintenance contractors. One respondent said his budgeting process had gotten more involved and complicated each year largely due to the increase in competition.

The highest rated survey categories serviced by outside landscape contractors were turf herbicide application, insecticide application, tree trimming and spraying and flower and ground cover care. Most in-house functions were turf trimming, fertilizer application, turf seeding and turf aerifying.

Tree-spraying was one of the least done in-house functions.

The majority of condo facilities own their own equipment.

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The Breakers

Henry Flagler's renaissance hotel in Palm Beach is now Joe Inman's landscape.

By Maureen Hrehocik, Associate Editor



The Ocean Course at The Breakers is a Donald Ross design.

Sitting majestically on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Palm Beach, FL, is The Breakers. The world-renowned Italian Renaissance hotel each year attracts hundreds of visitors to enjoy the lavish life it has to offer.

For Joe Inman, superintendent of golf and gardens, three of his biggest headaches are the wind, sand and surf that attract guests to the opulent resort.

"When the wind kicks up, it carries sand all over the place and destroys many of the annuals," said Inman. "We've developed an excellent replacement program, though."

The resort is still run by descendants of Henry Flagler, railroad magnate and co-founder of the Standard Oil Company, who built the original Breakers. It burned in 1925, 12 years after Flagler's death. His third wife, Mary Lily Kenan, rebuilt it to the structure that is now standing.

With the constant problems of wind and sand, Inman uses wind and salt-resistant plant materials such as cactus, century plants and natural screens such as Australian pines.

To control erosion along the beachfront, Inman uses boulders to stop the ocean from gnawing at

the beach and to keep turtles and manatees away from hotel guests. Beach morning glories and sea oats also help prevent erosion and help with beachside weed control. Beach cleaning is contracted out. St. Augustine grass is used along the back of the hotel. Because of salt damage, about 1,000 square feet must be replaced annually.

Inman says caring for the 95 acres of hotel property (65 acres in turf maintenance) around a structure that has been declared a National Landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is an ideal job for him. He is responsible for the hotel



Joe Inman, superintendent of golf and gardens; **Chip Guile**, head of the nursery and grounds; and maintenance worker **Randy Latta**.

grounds, two croquet courts which the Palm Beach Croquet Club uses as its home court, nine clay and five all-weather tennis courts and two golf courses, each with its own superintendent.

His work obviously agrees with him. With a pleasant disposition and quick smile, he takes a laid-back approach to managing his staff. The beauty of the grounds reflects more than efficient turf management. There, among the formal gardens and carefully manicured lawns, is an unmistakable amount of pride in the men who do the work so many come to admire.

"I love my work," Inman says. "The key is getting everything down to a system."

An innovation that Inman and Chip Guile, head of the nursery and grounds, devised is a "spaghetti" irrigation system for the main circular garden in front of the hotel. The garden contains 300 potted plants and each has its own individual spaghetti-like watering hose, fed from the central irrigation system. Inman likes the ease of replacing individually-potted plants.

Breakers West is the largest of the two golf courses with 125 acres to be mowed (250 total acres.) One hundred acres of Tifway 419 fairways and tees are fertilized with 96

pounds of nitrogen per acre in March and September. The Tifdwarf greens are fertilized with two pounds of nitrogen a month. A urea, water soluble fertilizer plus fungicide applied weekly is used in the winter (46-0-0) and sulfur coated urea (19-4-10) in the summer.

Superintendent John Baute says his main problem is water.

"Last year we had too much water, this spring we had too little," he said.

"Because this isn't a private club, we're open 365 days a year which makes maintenance a little harder," he continued. "We also have transient players here for the most part that may not take care of

"I love my work," Inman says. "The key is getting everything down to a system."

the course as well as members would."

Baute says he's particularly proud of the course's location—being totally surrounded by trees, not houses.

A crew of nine, including one mechanic and one cart mechanic, care for Breakers West.

Bill Remy is superintendent of the Ocean Course, directly adjacent to the hotel. It is one of the oldest courses in Florida. It was designed by Donald Ross and is the site every spring of the American Cancer Society Benefit Tournament. The course is 62 acres. Fifty acres are fertilized twice a year with 96 pounds per acre of nitrogen. It has 2.5 acres of Ever-



Part of Inman's "spaghetti" irrigation system among the individually-potted plants in the main circular garden.



The Breakers is still run by descendents of railroad magnate Henry Flagler.

glades #1 greens.

"We have the old-style elevated greens at the Ocean Course and that's something not usually found in the newly-designed courses in South Florida," he said.

The Ocean Course gets heavier play than Breakers West, possibly because it's the shorter of the two courses and is closest to the hotel. Breakers West is about 15 minutes away. Because of Palm Beach city ordinances, Remy's crews can't start mowing until 7 a.m. He also has to contend with a half automatic, half manual irrigation system.

"The manual half should be converted within the next year or two," he said.

The Ocean Course also has a crew of nine, one mechanic and one cart mechanic.

Overseeding is done the first week of December, one green at a time, so as not to disturb play. On Breakers West, Inman uses 3,500 pounds of a mix of Citation, Birdie and Omega ryegrass; on the Ocean Course, 1,500 pounds of Kentucky Bluegrass; and on the hotel grounds and golf course fairways, 10,000 pounds of annual ryegrass.

The hotel grounds has a crew of 11 and one supervisor. The grounds sport 3,500 summer annuals, including marigolds, bush daisy, canna lilly, torenia, and dusty miller. Winter annuals are

begonias and geraniums. Plant beds have more than 2,000 plants, mainly hibiscus, oleander and copper leaf. Phoenix, caryota, dictyosperma, alexander, areca, royal, coconut, sabel and chamaedorea palms provide ambiance as well as

With the constant problems of wind and sand, Inman uses wind and salt-resistant plant materials such as cactus, century plants and natural screens such as Australian pines.

homes for wild parrots. Last year, many of the palms were infected with lethal yellowing and were replaced with Malayan dwarf coconut palms. Five miles of hedges include ligustrum, exoria, crown of thorns, carissia and pittosporum. More than 500 poinsettias decorate the front foyer for Christmas, and at Easter time 325 individually-potted hydrangeas are on view. All potted annuals are bought through a local supplier.

Inman's insect control program is curative rather than preventative. On the golf courses he has problems with sod webworm and army worms and uses Sevin and

Dursban to keep them under control. His worst problem, however, is mole crickets.

"We had a lot of rain last year which drowned many of the larvae, so the problem shouldn't be as bad this year," he said. Oftanol usually keeps them under control. The frequency with which he replaces plants also acts as a check on insects.

Most of Inman's equipment is Toro.

He has six Toro Greensmaster 3s, two TurfPro 84s, two Groundsmaster 72s, a Rake-O-Vac and vacuum blower. His sweeper and trim mower are Jacobsen.

"We don't use rotary mowers on Bermudagrass," Inman said. "We want a hand look without hand labor."

His 300-plus equipment list includes two Dedoes aerifiers, a Ryan Greensaire, Bean turf sprayers (125 and 300-gallon capacities), a Ditch Witch trencher, Ryan sodcutter, Asplundh bush chipper and Cushman trucksters. His machinery is trucked between golf courses.

"I have a very good relationship with distributors," Inman said. "They've even let me try certain pieces of equipment, and in general, are very cooperative."

Breakers West is irrigated with a Toro Vari-Time 690 Series automatic sprinkling system powered by two, 50 hp centrifugal pumps fed from lakes and wells. The Ocean Course is automatic with Moody controllers and Rainbird heads for nine holes. The other nine are irrigated with a galvanized pipe and quick-coupler system. It uses city water and Inman said water bills can run as high as a couple of thousand dollars a month. The hotel grounds used to be hand watered and with sprinklers. Now, it is on a semi-automatic system.

"Eventually, we hope to put it on timers," Inman said.

About 600 yards of premix 70/30 soil and 50 bales of peat moss are

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used a year on the golf courses and in flower beds.

The Breakers has its own nursery, but the three-person staff is only half the size Inman would like it to be. Three acres are under shade and five acres are devoted to container stock. The nursery grows most everything (except annuals) that's found on the hotel grounds, including palm trees.

Overseeding is done the first week of December, one green at a time, so as not to disturb play.

Inman works on a budget of over \$500,000. "In one respect I have no budget," he explains, "If I have a legitimate expense, we usually buy it."

Inman started out as a business major at the University of South Carolina, but left after two years to become the golf pro at Camp Lejeune, NC, where he stayed for four years. That was only the start of being a golf pro at such courses as Sea Pines Plantation at Hilton Head, SC; Yeaman's Hall Club, Charleston, SC; and the Surf, Golf and Beach Club at Myrtle Beach, SC. He taught golf at Patrick AFB in Cocoa Beach. In 1976, he enrolled at Lake City Community College in Lake City, FL, and graduated with an Associate's Degree in Golf Course Operations. In 1979, he came to The Breakers working in the nursery and then was promoted to assistant superintendent at Breakers West. In Sept. 1981, he was named superintendent of golf and gardens.

"Ideally, I would like to be in a position where I can be a golf pro and a superintendent," he said. "Some clubs are calling them golf managers."

At age 41, Inman is doing what he likes to do. He's in a satisfying career, golfs about once a month (he's a 3 handicap golfer) and is an amateur photo buff.

"My ego and self-esteem here are very satisfied," he says. **WTT**

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Some respondents, however, pointed to the fact that it was less expensive to contract out certain jobs than to have them done in-house.

"I can see more contracted landscaping and gardening in the

There is increasing competition from landscape maintenance contractors.

future because of cost," said one manager.

In the majority of cases, the landscape supervisor specifies the landscape program and the purchase of chemicals. Budget planning is done mainly from September to January.

Survey results show very low participation in landscape associations or organizations by apartment/condo landscape managers.

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Hungry, Young and Friendly

In four years, Seacrest Services has become a leader in South Florida landscape maintenance

By Maureen Hrehocik
Associate Editor



In the summer, mowing at Century Village and Leisureville is done every seven to 10 days.

commitment to his work and has been responsible for streamlining and making cost and labor-efficient many aspects of the landscaping operation.

Lopez practices the Integrated Pest Management method of pest control, irrigates on an as-needed basis, uses only zero-turning radius mowers, and, as a rule, cuts his grass higher than most. He expects the best from his workers and usually gets it.

Seacrest holds the maintenance contract to Century Village and Leisureville, both in West Palm Beach, and each covering about 150 acres. Management sources declined giving the worth of those contracts for competitive reasons.

Century Village, according to Lopez, was the largest condominium complex in the United States when it was built in the 1970s, with 7,500 units and 15,000 residents.

The sweet smell of success. Seacrest Management of West Palm Beach, FL, knows it well. The company, specializing in condominium/apartment landscaping, building services, janitorial and pest control, increased its business 50 percent this year to \$4.5 million. The landscaping portion alone increased 316 percent; impressive statistics for a company that's only been in business four years.

Ralph Lopez, vice president of landscape operations, has been largely responsible for the impressive jump in income. The success of the landscape division is as much a personal triumph for the 31-year-old as it is a business triumph. Lopez, the son of Spanish immigrant farm workers, has always set high personal goals for himself. He has transferred that



Tree-trimming is done with lightweight trucks to reduce stress on the turf.

There is no time sharing. Seacrest also maintains 25 other condominium developments from Ft. Pierce to Ft. Lauderdale, and has recently opened a Tampa division. Total acreage under its care is between 12,000 and 18,000 acres, 600 in turf acreage. The landscape division employs 60 people.

Bill Kerns and Neil Valentine bought the company in 1978 after working for it since 1968. Lopez was promoted to vice president last year after working as landscape division manager.

Lopez says the hardest thing he has to deal with are the condominium association boards; those people living in the complex elected to protect the interest of the residents.

"The changeover of personnel on boards is high, and usually what the boards are interested in is the bottom line which isn't always in the best interest of the maintenance program," Lopez says. "They are always considering how the maintenance fee looks to the potential buyer. Everyone is a resident expert (about maintenance). Trimming a tree can be traumatic."

The largest part of the maintenance fee at Century Village and Leisureville goes towards mowing.

What compounds the problem is that Lopez believes that in South Florida, the landscaping contributes greatly to the salability of the property.

"Most of the time, the board doesn't know what it takes to maintain property properly," he said.

Proper maintenance is no stranger to Lopez.

"With the Integrated Pest Management method, we treat on an as-needed basis and that way we have less chemicals in the atmosphere. It's also safer for the residents."

At the new Tampa division, mole crickets are a problem.

Two years ago, South Florida experienced a severe drought. Lopez began cutting his lawns higher and less frequently. He also used a slow release fertilizer. He changes his mower blades twice a day to get a good cut. His zero-turning radius Hustler, Heckendorn, Grasshop-

per and Dixon mowers give him the kind of maneuverability apartment and condominium care requires. He also has a prototype Heckendorn zero-radius mower with 91-inch "bat wings" that can mow in a zero radius of 54 inches. The machine is worth \$11,000.



Ralph Lopez, vice president of landscape operations for Seacrest Services, sits on the firm's prototype Heckendorn zero-radius mower with 91 inch "bat wings."

"We have the best of everything—mowers, people, management, and blend it to make a hybrid landscape maintenance firm." —Lopez

Cherry hedge and ficus are the predominant plants used at Century Village and Leisureville because of their disease-resistance and low maintenance. While some bahiagrass is used, St. Augustine is the predominant grass. Lopez contends with diseases and brown patch by using Daconil and Captan. Cutting height is 3 to 3½ inches.

"We go for structure here, not esthetics," Lopez says. "We try to put as little stress on the turf as possible."

His cutting schedule is dictated by the condominium contracts, but during the summer, mowing is usually done every seven to 10 days, in

the fall and spring, every 14 days, and in the winter, once a month.

Lopez uses a 100 percent slow release sulphur-coated urea fertilizer.

"The leaching effect provides a good, even green all-year round," he says. "Some people think it's cost prohibitive to use, but you use less in the long run because it's concentrated. Having to spread less fertilizer also means a savings in time and labor costs."

He fertilizes in the spring and fall and uses a 24-4-15 mixture in the summer.

"We change the analysis with the climatic conditions."

No selective herbicides are used at Leisureville or Century Village to take care of the torpedo, nut and bullgrass problems.

Irrigation on both properties is done from man-made lakes fed from the flood control districts. Century Village is irrigated manually. Leisureville is manual but is being converted to automatic because of problems with line breaks.

Palm Beach County takes care of flying insect control. Seacrest does do ground spraying around walks and households.

Bad drainage and trees planted by developers without their full growth potential in mind are continuing problems for Lopez.

Most of the trucks in the 50-vehicle Seacrest fleet are Mazdas. Lopez has Chevrolet and Ford cherry pickers with hydraulic buckets. Seacrest also buys used Bell Telephone trucks because they're light enough to be driven on lawns. Because of using the IPM method of pest control, Lopez's Swift 300-gallon sprayer truck is sufficient for his needs. He also has the usual assortment of string trimmers, leaf blowers and edgers. The company employs a full-time entomologist, Terry Lyons, and arborist, Ron Cower.

Seacrest prides itself on the type of working environment it provides for its employees. Incentive and hard work pay off in a variety of ways.

"We take a professional approach to everything," Lopez says.

"Follow-up is very important."

Seacrest material are people who are "hungry, young and friendly." Operational meetings are held twice a month for supervisors and foremen to clear up problems and "rap."

"I treat my people the way I'd like to be treated," Lopez says.

When a customer calls in to commend a worker for a job, the call gets posted on a "motivator board," that way everyone notices a job well done. Even the Seacrest shirts are incentive-oriented—non-supervisory personnel wear tee-shirts, supervisors have collared shirts. Picnics, softball games, Christmas parties and get-togethers help cement the family atmosphere Seacrest is proud of.

"We have the best of everything—mowers, people, management, and blend it to make a hybrid landscape maintenance firm," Lopez says.

Lopez himself is somewhat of a

hybrid. With no formal landscape or management training, he credits all of his landscape knowledge to the University of Florida Extension Service.

Lopez says the hardest thing he has to deal with are the condominium association boards.

"They have always been there when I needed them," he says. "I love this business and it will always be a part of my life."

His responsibilities at Seacrest include assisting the five-member sales department, doing proposals, public relations, buying equipment, setting up projects, doing time studies and keeping the lines of communication open in the company. He is a member of the

Florida Turfgrass Association, Florida Pest Control Association, Florida Grounds Maintenance Association and is on the Horticultural Advisory Board for the Palm Beach County Extension Service.

Lopez has worked as an estate groundskeeper and had a gardening and landscape business with his brother. But it's at Seacrest that he is realizing his real potential.

He readily admits he is not a "fat cat executive" and prefers to be outdoors driving tractors and "smelling freshly cut grass and grease on lawnmowers."

"I like to be at the pulse center of what's happening, not in an office somewhere," he says.

He's also a man who doesn't like to dwell on past accomplishments. Lopez has already set a new goal he'd like to help the company reach by 1984—that of doing \$5 million in business. With his past track record, he is well on the way to helping Seacrest realize it. **WTT**

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