

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 mantarays 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. Augustinegrass 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

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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

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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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