

THE PLANNED COMMUNITY

It took 25 years, but the original plans for the town of Columbia, Maryland, have finally been realized. Landscaping plays an important role.

by James E. Guyette

In 1962, the Rouse Company of Columbia, Md., began buying rural property in Howard County. The firm's plans to build a pre-designed community were to be realized, as today Columbia is a bustling city containing about 60,000 people and approximately 1,500 businesses.

Columbia is about 20 miles from Baltimore and 25 miles from the District of Columbia.

Residents of Columbia live in a series of "villages" that encircle a down-

town area that is billed as the focal point of the Washington-Baltimore corridor.

Each village contains a community building, grocery store and other retail outlets designed to meet the needs of each citizen. A jumbo shopping mall, a number of commercial operations and a light industrial park make the city basically self-sufficient.

When in the planning stages, the Howard Research and Development Corp. (a subsidiary of Rouse) hired a number of experts to devise the perfect community. They made such suggestions as having neighborhood schools and activity centers and pre-

serving the natural contour and beauty of the then-fallow land.

There are nine villages. A 10th is in the planning stages. Each village has three neighborhoods with 600 to 800 dwelling units. A series of pathways cross open space and lead to schools, "totlots" (playgrounds) and other amenities. Also, Columbia is graced by a number of man-made lakes.

Of the 14,000 acres in Columbia, 1,500 of them are classified as open space. In the future, that figure will jump to 3,000 acres.

Upkeep of individual yards is the responsibility of the landowner. The open space falls under the supervision of Charles H. Rhodehamel, ecologist and land manager at the Columbia Park and Recreation Association, Inc.

About \$500,000 is spent each year on turf-related activities, including mowing, trimming and seeding.

A big factor in Rhodehamel's line of work is that the open space is used for multiple purposes, from baseball to dog-walking to jogging to outdoor concerts to Frisbee-tossing.

"You can't say, 'Get the hell off my turf—you're killing my grass,'" Rhodehamel jokes. "It's not something that we can close down in certain sections."

The extensive use of turf areas means that the maintenance crew is not seen out in the field after residents start arriving home from work.

The open space abuts most of the yards and public areas, such as the maze of paths, 130 totlots and about 200 wooden foot bridges.

"Spraying is minimized because we touch on so many private properties," Rhodehamel says. Liming and fertilization are used, but Rhodehamel points out that his grass does not have to look perfect: "Our goal is not professional baseball infield turf."

Verticutting and aeration are done when needed. He says pests and fungi are not big problems.

Rhodehamel has four working foremen. There are 30 men on the lawn maintenance crew and 15 on the land development crew. They cover a number of different areas: carpentry, grading, seeding and asphalt. **LM**

James E. Guyette is associate editor of "Lawn Care Industry" magazine, another HBJ publication.



Charles Rhodehamel, ecologist for The Columbia Association, closely checks the turf at one of the community's open spaces.