

STILLWATER from page 1G

We stay focused on everything involved."

Stillwater is an 18-hole private club founded in 1925 as nine holes. The second nine was built in 1959.

"I can honestly compare my course to the exclusive clubs," says Clunis. Prospective members have taken note, too. The club's membership cap is 415, but the waiting list is 400 names long, even though it was the last private club in Minnesota to admit females as stockholding members (1993).

Members must live within five miles of the golf course. Membership is just \$750 per year, and every penny of the club's membership dues (almost \$400,000) goes toward course maintenance.

"I get the dues money, and the clubhouse is set up to break even," notes Clunis. "Money from the pro shop, guest fees and golf car rental balances all other expenses."

Members—43 percent of whom are retired—"have done a lot of work for the club," Clunis observes. "Three times last

summer, they had 'seed & soil' days where they seeded fairways for me. They have a lot of equity in the club.

"Compliments are always wonderful. They go a long way toward getting me through the season."

Kevin Clunis is doing what he loves, and is happy and content being what he is. Every morning, he walks onto the course and watches the sun rise. "In 11 years, there has never been a day that I didn't want to go into work."

—Jerry Roche

'Unique' parks coax downtown rebirth

Here's how one community used tropical gardens, floral mounds and fountains to draw people back to a long-slumbering downtown.

■ Exciting parks can help reinvigorate a downtown. A perfect example is Sandusky, a lakefront city of about 35,000 in north central Ohio. Five acres of uniquely landscaped city gardens in the city's Washington Street Park seem to be coaxing its long-slumbering downtown to life again.

Its keeper is Tom Ott, parks and greenhouse director for the city. He and six other city employees design, plant and maintain parks that are as unique and inviting as you'll find in any city.

Ott is a self-admitted "plant" person. He and his family run a small commercial nursery specializing in evergreens on a farm outside the city, too. Although neither he nor any of his co-workers possess degrees in horticulture, he describes them as dedicated landscape professionals. "They really get into what they're doing. They care about really care about our parks."

In his early 40s, Ott is just old enough to remember when downtown Sandusky was the area's cultural and retail mecca. That's when families lined up in front of the city's two downtown theaters after shopping its two major department stores.

Or when teenagers "buzzed the ave." Sandusky Bay on Lake Erie anchored the north end of the downtown cruise; Washington Street Park, with its fragrant gardens, the southern. The kids gathered

at the Frisch's Big Boy Restaurant on balmy summer nights. They arrived in 'Vettes and souped-up Fords, but mostly family sedans. Merchants complained bitterly of the parade of brake lights and polished chrome. Friday night, after all, was a busy shopping night.

But the complaints dried up 20 years ago, as did downtown retail business—just after developers smeared a shopping mall over 40 acres of bean fields about five miles south of the city.

They left behind a shell of a downtown, and incredibly quiet summer nights there.

To hear Tom Ott tell it though, people *are* returning to downtown Sandusky although it'll probably never again be the retail center it once was. About 5,000 turned out for the 1994 July Fourth bash. Many thousands more visit the city's

annual Holiday of Lights celebration in the parks Thanksgiving through New Years. Ott and his small crew put up 35,000 lights in the parks.

Day-to-day evidence of the downtown's rebirth lies in the restored, ornate, 60-year-old State Theater; the trendy new apartments and condos along Sandusky Bay; the renovation of the former Lasalle's Department Store building into county offices. The building overlooks the park's gardens.

These parks are diverse and inviting with their lush gardens of tropical plants (palms, bananas, bird of paradise, elephant ears, castor beans), a Japanese-style sunken garden, succulent/cacti garden, fountains, intricate floral mounds. Many plants are used season after season, like several 75-year-old Phoenix palms.



Tom Ott, Sandusky Parks/Greenhouse Director, spent just \$700 on seeds and plants this season in creating a downtown wonderland.

Ott is thankful that the city has never abandoned its downtown parks.

This year Sandusky budgeted just over \$300,000 for its greenhouse and parks. "The city's been very fair with our budget. I've been real happy with the way they've treated us. Our division's never been cut," says Ott.

Parks include five acres downtown and smaller sites in other areas of the city, including flowers and beds at city offices and fire stations. Most of the budget goes for salaries. It's a bargain considering the dedication of his crew, believes Ott. "I keep getting better and better people," he says.

Realizing the budgets are always tight, Ott's crew saves money where it can.

"We only spent about \$700 on plants and seeds this season," says Ott. "We propagate almost all plants from seeds that we harvest ourselves or from cuttings. In fact, we probably couldn't even buy the amount of alternanthera (Joseph's coat) that we use."

By mid-August, co-workers begin taking cuttings of the dark-leaved alternanthera for 1995 beds. They usually prepare 400 flats—60,000 plants—used mostly as lettering or background in Washington Park's six floral mounds. Lighter green santolina forms the borders of these displays which proclaim significant events in the community—for instance, the 75th Anniversary of the American Legion. Or the 150th year of Emmanuel United Church.

"Some of the mounds are reserved up to the year 2018," says Ott, admitting that they take lots of maintenance. To climb onto the mounds without damaging the plants, workers use wooden "chicken ladders."

"We trim them every 1½ or 2 weeks. It takes all of us two days. Three of us take



Rick Choquette, left, and Tom Speir take obvious pride in Sandusky's fanciful mounds.

off with gasoline hedge shears. We've really gotten good with those shears. They can trim just about anything. And what we can't get with the gasoline shears, we get with manual shears."

In fact, if it weren't for power shears and string trimmers, Ott says he and his crew could never keep up with the maintenance.

"I'm actually kind of a plant rat. I hate to throw a plant out. Sometimes my co-workers get upset with me because we have to water, fertilize and spray everything. And it gets real tight in the greenhouse every winter."

Warm-weather specimens like the Phoenix, kentia and sago palms are gathered just before the first heavy frost in early November, trimmed (roots particularly), potted, then packed into the city's 20-year-old, 6,500-sq.-ft. greenhouse.

It gets very crowded in the city greenhouse through the winter, but the work goes on for the next season.

"The park system here started about 150 years ago and it's been growing ever since," says Ott. "I'm just trying to add something to it."

—Ron Hall

Bringing golfers back to your course

■ If you're interested in making sure that golfers who visit your course return some day soon, maintenance and design tricks can help guarantee repeat play. According to Laurence A. Hirsh, president of Golf Property Analysts, Harrisburg, Pa., here are some things to look for:

1) Course conditioning: are players inclined to return because greens are in great shape? Are fairways wide enough, or too wide? Has the course's appearance been enhanced with mulched beds, orna-

Maintaining good conditions and integrity of design will keep those greens fees rolling in.

mental grasses and flowers? Do amenities such as tee signs, ball washers, benches and hole liners add to the course's overall image?

2) Pace of play: A brisk pace increases the enjoyment of most players. Large tees quicken the game, while providing adequate areas for all levels of players. Hazards should not penalize novice and average golfers too severely or constantly create bottlenecks. Rangers and yard markers also help keep the game moving.

3) Maintenance: Avoid difficult maintenance areas or outdated methods. Examine manual versus automatic irrigation, hand-mowed versus triplexed greens,