

Doing what has to be done: INGENUITY AND VERSATILITY

How the four-person grounds team at one of our nation's leading historical sites goes beyond the call of duty.

by Ron Hall,
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■ The grounds team at The Hermitage must be both ingenious and versatile—and it is.

Otherwise horticulturist Mark Provost, grounds manager John Lohmann and gardeners Kristin Diekmeyer and Susun Stahl could never maintain the 650-acre Andrew Jackson estate.

The Hermitage, the estate of General Jackson, includes two mansions, the Jackson family cemetery, tree-shaded grounds, out buildings and open fields.

Remarkably, both Jackson's Greek Revival mansion and the adjacent flower garden, are relatively unchanged from Jackson's time. The surrounding grounds are a bucolic mixture of shaded paths, 120 acres of turfgrass, a small vegetable garden, hay fields, and a smattering of woods.

"We're pretty diverse," says Provost in his east Tennessee drawl. "I guess we do a little bit of everything."

Provost's title is horticulturist (a Tennessee Tech graduate), but in his seven-year employment at The Hermitage, he's also baled hay and done more than his share of bush-hogging and mowing.

This past winter, he and the other three team members reconstructed the unique picket fence at the Hermitage Flower Garden. It was a labor of love...but labor.

He and Lohmann hand-chipped each opening for the 720 pickets while Kristin and Susun painted the redwood fence.

"We'd rather work a little bit harder to make things just right," says Provost, vice president of the Middle Tennessee chapter of the PGMS.

"The Hermitage is an important histor-



The Hermitage Garden, designed by William Frost in 1819, remains essentially the same.

Leah Romine provides visitors with a history of the garden.

Far left—John Lohmann and Mark Provost, right, oversee 650 acres.

ical site. Obviously we can't do a lot of spraying, and we can't do a lot of weed eating or trimming either."

Maintenance challenges—Lohmann, 11

years at The Hermitage, still shudders at the memory of the mowing schedule that he and Provost used to face.

"It seemed like we were never going to get caught up," he says of the 120 acres of turfgrass. Three seasonal college students help now. They use an aging but still serviceable Hustler and two large John Deere mowers—one a front-mount 935, the other a mid-mount 855.

Hundreds of mature trees at the site provide Provost and Lohmann with their other biggest maintenance challenge.

Storms and a surprising number of lightning strikes keep their six-inch, PTO-driven Vermeer chipper busy.

leaves on one of the final mowings of the season. They're blown into tree rings around the base of the trees that dropped them.

The Hermitage, which draws about 250,000 visitors annually, is located about a 25-minute drive northeast from downtown Nashville. Jackson ("Old Hickory") was the seventh U.S. president. Her returned to The Hermitage in 1937 after serving two terms, and died there in 1845.

The Hermitage still belongs to the 19th century. Before neon. Before fast food. That's its charm.

That's what its tiny grounds staff is working so hard to help preserve.