

EXPANDING landscape's boundaries in Florida

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

Valley Crest is expanding the traditional view of landscape contracting. The "contracting" part gets bigger and bigger.

"Landscaping now is, maybe, 50 percent of our business," says Charles Parker, operations manager of the Valley Crest location in Orlando. "Concrete and related site work make up the balance."

Valley Crest is the nation's largest landscape and site construction company. Orlando is one of nine company locations in the United States. The central Florida operation is coming off of a \$30 million year. But everything seems to be getting bigger in central Florida in the 1990s.

Orlando, of course, is home to mega-at-



tractions like Disney World, Universal Studios, and Sea World. All are beautifully and massively landscaped. They're presence has dramatically changed the local landscape industry. Both its scope and its quality.

Valley Crest is among a handful of central Florida companies capable of delivering the "big" landscape project. This, at first view, is remarkable since Valley Crest has competed in central Florida only since about 1992. It entered that market by purchasing Oyler Construction. (Tom Oyler remains part of the overall operation with sister company U.S. Lawns.)

Parker began managing the Orlando lo-

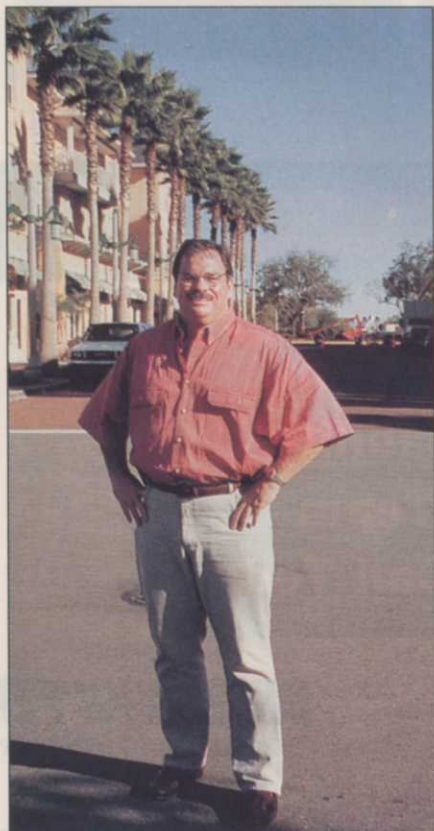
Charles Parker, operations manager for Valley Crest in Orlando, says he sometimes feels 'like a kid in a candy store'.

Valley Crest has the personnel to tackle tough jobs like this themed concrete work at a hotel at Walt Disney World.

cation about four years ago. He credits much of the Orlando site's rapid growth to the vision of Valley Crest President Richard Sperber, and the experience and support of the parent company headquartered in Calabasas, Calif.

"We have a \$300 million company backing us with a vision that is wide open," says Parker. "I sometimes feel like a kid in a candy store. Where else can we do the kind of work we're doing and have this kind of support?"

The projects that Orlando's Valley Crest location have completed in a few short years is, by any measure, impressive:



► providing the site work and landscaping, including irrigation, for the Wilderness Lodge and Coronado Springs hotels at Disney World.

► completing about \$10 million in projects in Disney's new Celebration City in Kissimmee, FL, including installing streets, parks, the Town Center and much of the lakeside entertainment area.

► And now Valley Crest is working hand-in-hand with Disney to transform 800 acres of raw land on the Disney World property into Animal Kingdom, the resort's fourth major theme park. Valley Crest, in addition to installing a bewildering variety and number of plants, is doing the themed concrete and other hardscaping.

Parker says he has more than 100 pieces of equipment and about 160 people at the Disney site. They work out of a fourplex office. When they're done with their part of the "Africa" section of Animal Kingdom, they begin the "Asia" section. Disney's Animal Kingdom will have four separate themed areas when it's completed.

"We have an agreement with them (Disney) to maintain everything that we

Valley Crest installed this landscape at the Coronado Springs Hotel at the Walt Disney Resort near Orlando, Fla.

plant until the end of our project, then they will maintain it. They have great expertise," says Parker.

Parker thinks Valley Crest's diversification gives clients the advantage of working with a single contractor. This makes the contractor more accessible, and more accountable. From the contractor's standpoint, it provides several advantages, including more control of a project.

"What often hurts a landscape contractor the most is scheduling. Maybe the irrigation contractor doesn't do his job just right, and the landscaper ends up hitting a pipe," says Parker. "Or the electrical contractor comes in after the landscaper is done and tears up some of his work. The lonely landscaper can be doing his work again and again, and not be getting paid for it.

"We've diversified to handle more and more of that exterior work so that we can control, as much as we can, our own des-



tiny until the project is complete," he says.

While Parker isn't expecting the Orlando landscape construction market to remain as hot as it is now, he's confident that Valley Crest has established itself and will continue to expand in the Florida marketplace.

Speedway a test of time, material

Valley Crest landscape and site construction company had a race with the clock this year as it worked to complete the landscaping for the California Speedway in less than 150 days.

The Speedway is located in Fontana, Calif., on near-desert land that was previously the site of the Kaiser Steel mill yard. Valley Crest worked hard to bring in turf, trees and ornamental plants to give sparkle to the Speedway oasis.

The Valley Crest people were used to the short timetable. It had to resod the Atlanta Olympic Stadium in 36 hours after the opening ceremonies tore up the turf.

Valley Crest used 150 landscape personnel, divided into round the clock crews. Leading the way were Operations Manager Dick Bruttig and Regional Vice President Chuck de Garmo. Bruttig is now

branch manager of Valley Crest's Los Angeles office.

Sixty-five pieces of heavy equipment and more than 30 vehicles were used on the job.

Material acquisition challenge

The infield was sodded with enough dwarf tall fescue to cover more than 190 football fields. A total of 7.8 million sq. ft. of turf was used for the site.

Entrances and roadways throughout the facility were lined with 345, 30-foot Palm Trees and miles of Waxy Privet Ligustrum hedges. The flower beds were planted with *photinias* and blooming yellow and red day lilies, and more than 29,000 shrubs. Valley Crest installed more than 1000 trees and 430,000 sq. ft. of ground covers.

The project demanded an extraordinary irrigation system, and again, Valley Crest was up to the task, as it pulled 280 miles of irrigation wire. Seventy-five miles of irrigation pipe was installed.

The irrigation is a 600-hp system, which can produce 2000 gallons of water each minute. The system uses an initial 300 hp pump to push water up from a 900-ft. deep well located 1.5 miles away.

The water travels through a 16-inch casing to a 600,000 gallon underground reservoir located at the base of an old Kaiser Steel tower at the center of the raceway. From there, four 75-hp variable-speed pumps energize the system, to distribute the water through 14,000 sprinkler heads.

At the center of it all is the race track, a 2-mile, 14-degree oval. Aggregate for the track surface was brought in from Michigan. More than 300,000 tons of asphalt were poured at the track.