

lion for capital construction work.

That means stricter management of the park's resources. Surveys show that's what New Yorkers want.

To one survey, 80 percent of those polled indicate they come to the Park "for passive recreation." Although it is used by thousands of joggers and

bicyclists daily, and contains 26 baseball diamonds, 30 tennis courts, and 23 playgrounds, much of its restoration is aimed at trees, shrubs, and turf.

### New Yorkers care

New Yorkers do care for the green life in the Park as evidenced by grants—

skating rinks, rustic shelters; name it and chances are it's getting fixed.

But, Serpe's speciality is plantlife and his goal is lofty, if admittedly a bit unrealistic.

"When people walk in off the streets I want to give them the feeling that they're in the Adirondacks. Hey, I know it can't be the Adirondacks but we can give them that feeling," he says. "I'm not interested in making it a botanical garden but we want to make it as naturalistic as possible, a place where people can come and enjoy all the wildlife."

### Trees catalogued

New techniques aid Serpe and other park workers. Computers are used as management tools with a complete inventory of every tree in the park over 6 inches—its condition, location, size, and type—accessible at a finger tip. There are 24,000 trees in the Park, including 2,000 American elms, and use of the computer and a regulated visual inspection routine have reduced tree mortality significantly. Other cities, including Washington D.C. are using Central Park's system as a model.

Recent surveys have also catalogued animal and bird populations, but Central Park holds surprises even for the experts.

"I saw a parrot. I saw a parrot I tell ya," Serpe, a self-confessed "bird nut" says to skeptical Hart. Down goes the coffee, out the van door goes Serpe, up over a fence to the base of a naked 30-ft. black cherry tree. There it is, bright green, about the size of a 16-oz Pepsi bottle.

"Still looking for our first leopard though," Hart tosses off nonchalantly as Serpe attempts to whistle the curious parrot to his waiting arm.

Not quite an Oscar Madison-Felix Unger combination, but close enough.

Serpe is a New Yorker, a "West Chesterite," he corrects. He's been working with plants since he was a toddler (his dad's an arborist). The intense, slender Serpe, a University of Connecticut graduate, limits himself to one cup of coffee daily. ("I promised my wife") and usually swallows his lunch by mid-morning ("he's too nervous to wait," a co-worker explains).

Bewhiskered Hart, a well-travelled Kansas native who now serves



Frank Serpe and John Hart—committed to keeping Central Park "naturalistic."

like the \$1 million provided by the late John Lennon's wife, Yoko Ono, for the creation of a small wooded preserve called "Strawberry Fields"—and thousands of hours of volunteer labor,

## Central Park's rebirth is sparked by the privately funded Central Park Conservancy

over 4,000 in 1984 alone.

As Serpe and sidekick John Hart coast along the Park's meandering trails in the blue van evidences of restoration are everywhere. Archways,





as deputy director of horticulture, took a circuitous route to the Big Apple, including a stint as grounds management supervisor at a South Dakota campus, five years in sunny Sarasota, and some work on a private estate in New England. Hart, the holder of a Masters degree from Michigan, is a day-at-a-time kind of guy.

They're a big part of the story. But, the rebirth of Central Park is molded

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**“What we lost in this park was not the trees but the understory”**

—Serpe

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by fascinating personalities, people like silver-haired whirlwind Lynden Miller. The Conservatory Garden, a stylized English border garden in the Park's northeast corner (right across from Harlem) is her baby. Few babies receive such attention. This garden is budgeted about \$50,000 annually.

The fashionably attractive Miller, with a park employee scrambling to keep pace behind a wheelbarrow of mulch, buzzes to clumps of sagging plantlife (it's 20 degrees and blowing like crazy), all the while keeping up a furiously animated conversation with Serpe.

“She's really something,” Hart says almost in awe.

So is the Conservatory Garden. Even in winter it's a showcase of Miller's efforts, and those of the New York committee of the Garden Club of America which began its rescue several years ago.

In the spring it's ablaze with color, first crocus, then 20,000 hybrid tulips. Summer brings the planting of pink and white geraniums and fall features the spectacle of 20,000 Korean mums. Mix in some annuals such as blue salvia, snapdragon, and cleome. Conservatory Garden is just one of Central Park's recent success stories.

Another is an area called Long Point, a finger of land sticking into a small lake popular with the rowboat set. Park workers reset all the old edging stones along the shore line while adding 5,000 pieces of plant material to the small peninsula, species such as bayberry, blueberry, and Russian

olive. Thorny ornamentals discourage foot traffic in environmentally fragile areas.

Serpe and Hart say the reestablishment of the Park's understory is cornerstone of their work. Says Serpe: “What we lost in this park was not the trees but the understory. We just lost it, the shrubs, the flowering plants, the grass. Some areas of this park were just like a desert.”

With the planting of 30,000 shrubs, 200,000 bulbs, and 400 understory trees (species such as dogwood, mountain laurel and redbud), Central Park is beginning to approach the look Serpe seeks. “We try to stay with naturalistic plant material. But, it is not necessarily native and we've had some trouble finding some of this material in the nurseries.”

### **Turf restoration**

Popular turf areas in the park have been getting more attention too. This is where the new aggressive maintenance spirit is most evident. A former dustbowl, the Sheep Meadow is now a handsome turf area groomed for beauty and passive pursuits such as picnicking and sun bathing. Irrigation is supplied by Toro pop-up sprinklers, and fertilizer and lime are administered according to soil tests taken each spring and fall.

The success of the turf in the Sheep Meadow caused park administrators to upgrade the three-acre East Green as well. “They're calling it a revolutionary type of turf area, but it really

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**“It can't be the Adirondacks, but we can give visitors that feeling”**

—Serpe

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isn't,” Serpe says. “It's a sand concept area and a lot of athletic fields are similar, with extensive irrigation and good drainage.” Workers brought in 1,620 cubic yards of sand and laid 2,750 feet of drainage pipe in this one area.

Use of the East Green, like that of the Sheep Meadow, is going to be carefully monitored. “We can close 'em down anytime we need to,” Serpe says. Sturdy fences with padlocked gates encircle the grassy areas.

And the classy Mall, lined with stately American elms, is finally green again. The seven-acre area is regularly overseeded with Hounddog, a turf-type tall fescue. The Great Lawn (the scene of massive rock concerts and anti-nuclear demonstrations and dubbed the “Not So Great Lawn” by some critics) could be their next turf restoration project.

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**“They're calling it a revolutionary type of turf area, but it really isn't. It's a sand concept area.”**

—Serpe

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### **Problem areas**

While the marriage of Conservancy and parks department has been a good one so far, not every project has been successful. The seeding of 10 acres of wildflower meadows hasn't lived up to expectations, but there's still hope since Serpe feels it might take three to five years to develop a good stand of wildflowers.

Serpe and Hart deal with a workforce of 12 persons year-round, 16 during the summer. Additional high school students help in the peak season. Serpe's budget breaks down to about \$300,000 for tree care, \$200,000 for horticultural maintenance, and \$124,000 for turf care.

The Park has come a long way since Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux won a design competition in 1858, and workmen spent 16 years carting in nearly 5 million cubic yards of stone, earth and topsoil to turn a patchwork of stone quarries, fetid swamps, and pigsties into one of the world's most celebrated locations. They planted 500,000 trees, shrubs, and vines.

Olmsted's dream almost died and so did the Park in the early 1970s because of apathy, management with a laissez-faire attitude, and New York's financial woes which dried up funds for proper maintenance. That's changing in a big way.

“Everything had to be carted in to make this park,” Hart reflects. “I guess you can call it a huge flowerpot.”

Finally, it's starting to look like one again.

**WT&T**

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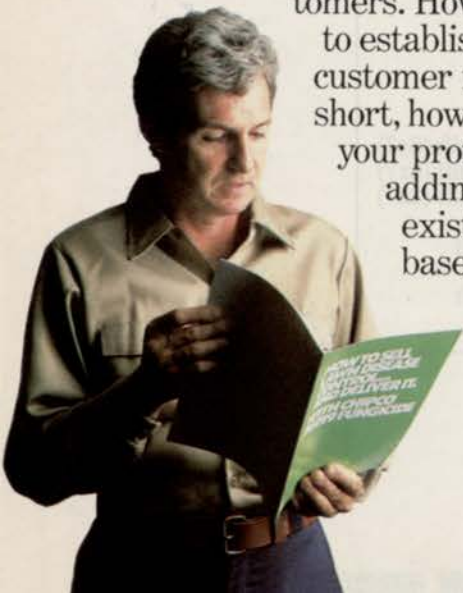
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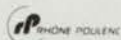
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Despite few disease and insect problems, the South Pacific's endless growing season poses a special mission to Jonathan Kajiwara, entomologist at Hickam Air Force Base on the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

## An Unrelenting Challenge

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

If you squint as the plane touches down on the coral reef runway at Honolulu International Airport you can see golfers teeing off at Hickam Air Force Base.

The roar of commercial as well as military jets overhead doesn't seem to bother the steady stream of people waiting to line up their shot down the fairway.

It's almost as if every golf course is located right alongside one of the country's busiest airports.

The amount of play on the two courses (one is a Par 3) keeps general manager Sammy Souza and his crews busy. The courses as well as all other landscaping on the base also fall under the domain of Jonathan Kajiwara, entomologist of the Pacific Air Command,

Air Force unit on the island of Oahu.

His responsibilities encompass bases in Hawaii, Guam, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and other South Pacific islands—seven in all.

Kajiwara, a slight, unassuming man, acts as a consultant to the seven bases and oversees all functions "necessary to run a small city."

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ment, Kajiwarra says he supports the engineering function at each base, which includes the landscape work.

Extremely mild tropical temperatures all year, few disease and insect problems and breathtaking vistas of ocean and mountains would make it seem Kajiwarra was sitting in a landscaper's paradise.

Not quite.

It's the beautiful weather that, ironically, poses Kajiwarra's main agronomic problem.

"Because of our year-round almost constant warm temperatures, everything grows well here," Kajiwarra attests. "Maintenance is a year-round job. Coconut tree trimming alone is tremendously time consuming and expensive. We do it twice a year."

The climate is technically subtropical, but in reality, it's more tropical.

The "winter" season is from late September through February. The temperatures are lower in the nighttime (60s) and it rains more. Grass-growing is diminished, but turf in Hawaii never really goes dormant.

### \$1 million contract

Management Technical Services, a California-based company, holds the more than \$1 million contract to maintain 400 acres of "high visibility" areas on base.

Landscaping work at the base has been contracted out for the past 20 years.

Enlisted personnel maintain non-contracted areas.

The entire base is 4,000 acres and is an Air Force major command and the principal air arm of the United States Pacific Command.

Most of the turf is bermudagrass with some St. Augustine and kikuyugrass.

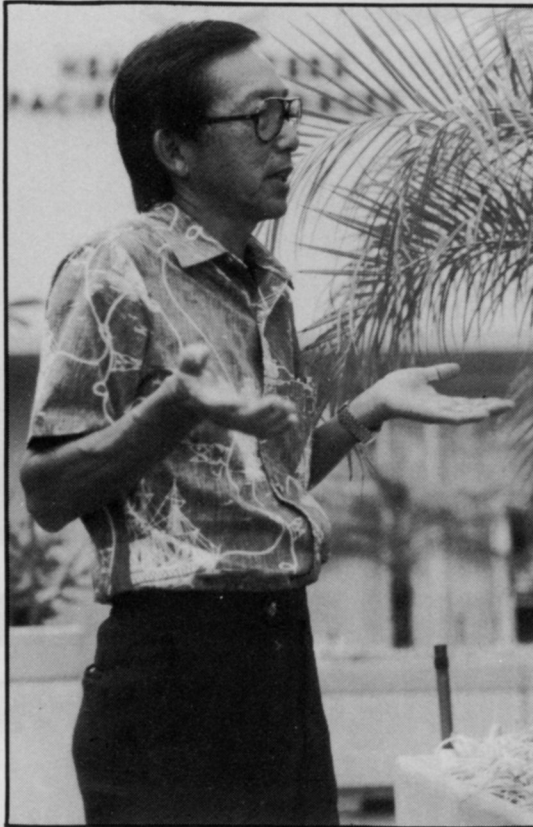
"Our disease problems are mainly on the golf course (helminthosporium was cited), and are pretty similar to those on the mainland," Kajiwarra said. "Diseases in general are not a problem."

Major weed problems come in the form of crabgrass and purple nut-sedge.

What is a problem, according to Ka-

jiwarra, is finding qualified help.

"It's not an easy thing here in the islands," he says. "We even have trouble keeping a contractor once they start working on the contract. They find the job is much more demanding than they thought it would be."



Jonathan Kajiwarra, Hickam AFB entomologist

The contractor's work is enforced by a military inspector who makes sure what needs to be done is getting done. If it's not, a fine is levied.

Tree trimming is the only maintenance job that goes out to local bid.

Underground irrigation has been installed in lawns in the high visibility areas. If the Air Force irrigation system is not sufficient for the needs of a particular area, the contractor is responsible for irrigating it.

"Water is a big problem, here," Kajiwarra says, "more so than maintenance. Some contractors use water guns and hoses. The leeward side of the island is a particularly dry area."

Every summer usually sees mandatory water restrictions on the entire island of Oahu.

The area where Hickam is located gets about eight inches of rain annually. A mere five miles toward the mountain, that figure jumps to a staggering 130 inches of rainfall a year.

### Plant selection

Kajiwarra's criteria for plant selection is simple—it must survive under any condition with minimal maintenance.

Because of the structure and budgeting of the military, landscaping is not an over-endowed area of the budget. What doesn't fall under the contractor's realm the military takes care of. Often, experience and expertise in agronomy is limited.

Around the front of the base headquarters building, Kajiwarra has chosen Phoenix and MacArthur palms planted in large containers in a courtyard-like front entrance. In the planters with the palms is variegated mondo grass, Hawaiian fern and lawai fern. The self-contained planters provide a neat appearance for the front entrance while adding a touch of native green vegetation.

### Grass growing (in winter) is diminished, but turf in Hawaii never really goes dormant.

entrance while adding a touch of native green vegetation.

Jim McMurtrey of B. Hayman Co., Inc., a Jacobsen distributor, says machinery in Hawaii gets a workout six to seven days a week, up to 365 days a year.

"It's a fix-it situation rather than a preventive maintenance situation," he says. "You really must inform the customer on how to get utility out of his equipment."

One of the high maintenance areas of the base are the nine athletic fields. Baseball fields, especially, are one of the most popular spots with as many as three games a day being played. All the baseball fields are bermudagrass.

"I'd say our fields get more play than most public fields," Kajiwarra says.

The majority of landscaping at Hickam is Spartan; the military has a way of cutting to the bone. In the constraints of a military setting, though, the base is well manicured.

Kajiwarra assesses the situation pragmatically.

"In Hawaii, you learn to work with what nature gives you—and then to expect surprises." **WT&T**



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