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Circle No. 115 on Reader Inquiry Card

A person wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants is seen from the side, carrying a white backpack sprayer. They are holding a long spray wand and directing it towards a path of vibrant yellow flowers in a garden. The garden is filled with various green plants and shrubs, and the overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day. The person's focus is on the task of spraying the plants.

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A well-maintained campus center where there's always activity.

infield and foul areas are overseeded.

Most of campus turf, mainly common bermuda, turns brown in the winter. Overseeding is rare at the U of A. It's a luxury when Raetzman is worried more about getting a crew to a campus hall to fix

a broken pipe.

Preventative maintenance

The snail's pace of the university bureaucracy can get to you. After 18 years, Raetzman deals with it.

He doesn't always get the equipment he needs when he needs

it. Sometimes he doesn't get it at all. "With the operational funds, especially with equipment replacement, we just don't get the replacement money as soon as we would like," he says.

It's made him a better manager and his crew more effective. "We still have mowers that are 8, 10, 12 years old. That's a compliment to the PM (preventative maintenance) guys. PM takes money out of our operation but that's what you have to do."

The department's 17-year-old backhoe was finally replaced this year.

"In the last several years the administration has been a lot more receptive. This year we probably have the most capital equipment money we've had since I've been here," says Raetzman.

It's a sign that Raetzman and his crew are landscaping their way out of anomomy.

He's excited about that. "I like the thought of being involved in the future of this university," he says. **WT&T**

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The XT-300

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SUBDUE



The Palm Court on the University of Miami campus.

TROPICAL ARBORETUM

The University of Miami in Coral Gables, Fla., boasts a landscape cornerstone of 25 palm tree varieties. And the landscape has just begun to be taken seriously.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

The University of Miami in Coral Gables, Fla., could be described as a tropical paradise. But just a few years ago it was a wasteland.

No one paid much attention to the school's landscape. Lethal yellow wiped out most of the coconut palm trees, and landscape design seemed almost nonexistent.

Then, in 1982, Edward Foote was named university president. "The president came here with a dream, and that dream is being carried out," says Clarence Lefler, director of the physical plant. Lefler was in his position only a few months before Foote took over the campus.

Foote's dream was to make the university into a tropical arboretum. With more than 25 varieties of palms on campus, many donated fully-grown from the estate of a wealthy widow, his dream is coming true. Campus landscaping is so important to Foote that he even requires the crew to cut the hedge outside his office in an A-frame, which allows light to get to the under branches.

"President Foote's philosophy is to create a setting so the kids know they are in south Florida," says Alan Weber, director of grounds/landscaping for ARA Environmental Services. "He feels

it's conducive to learning."

The university has contracted with ARA since 1978 for grounds maintenance, custodial, and moving services, explains Boyce Level, ARA resident manager. Level has worked for ARA for about three years.

Though not employed by the university, Weber and Level work directly with Lefler on planning and maintenance.

87 foster children

They affectionately call Lefler "Dad," an appropriate title for a man who, along with his wife Lois, have raised five children of their own, adopted one, and have been foster parents to 87 others. Lefler projects the same deep sense of caring with "his" campus, as he does with his children.

"Our goal was to first do a bunch of little spots on campus to get the overall feeling of improvement," Lefler explains. He negotiated four groundskeepers to do small projects taking less than a week, such as planting a hedge.

One of these projects was to plant ferns under the ficus trees, known

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A well-landscaped plot on the south Florida campus.

for their extensive root systems. Ficus trees cannot be planted near buildings since the roots can easily break through the concrete.

Several ficus trees grow on the banks of the university's lake, since the roots protect the bank from erosion.

The 6.3 acre lake, located at the back of the campus, is equipped with its own alligator and barracudas.

Although the crew cleans the man-made lake regularly, no chemicals are used to upset the ecological balance of the saltwater intrusion in the lake.

"We haven't transformed the lake into a swimming pool," Weber says. Many of the plants on the banks are left wild to maintain the natural look. Steps carved out of coral stone are located on one side of the lake. Weber says no one could afford to buy similar steps today.

It is hard to decide whether the lake or an area known as "Palm Court" is the most beautiful part of the campus.

Palm Court was developed two years ago. Royal palm trees surround a cascading jet 7,000-gallon fountain. Concrete blocks are arranged in a checkerboard pattern between the trees where students can sit and study. A brick paved pathway leads up to and encircles the fountain.

That pathway causes Weber a few headaches. Since everything grows so rapidly in southern Florida, weeds and grass pop—up quickly—occasionally between the bricks. Crewmen spray the bricks but are careful to avoid killing neighboring turf.

St. Augustine turf is used on the approximately 250-acre campus, of which 150 acres are intensively maintained. "St. Augustine grows horizontally. It takes the heat, covers rapidly and doesn't need to be highly maintained," Weber says.

Regular pruning

When Weber started working on the university about a year ago, he discovered most of the grass under the trees had turned brown from lack of light.

The trees are now pruned regularly to allow the light to get to the turf. Also, removing the lower branches makes the campus safer for the many blind students.

Weber tries to achieve a balance with planting shade trees so students can get relief from the heat and pruning trees back.

The pH levels are so high in south Florida soils that plants need extra nutrients to grow. Fertilizers alone don't provide enough nutrients, so crews regularly spray through the leaves.

Weber also puts a weather shield, most frequently on the palms, which is a thin coating used to maintain moisture in the leaf and prevent windburn and sunscald.

The university's irrigation system stretches nearly 100 acres. Watering is crucial because of the quick drainage of the sandy soil.

Weber often uses a polymer under the root system of a newly-planted tree since it can expand and hold 30 times its size in water. Overwatering, however, can cause an outbreak of dollar weed, the campus' biggest enemy next to fireants which also invade regularly.

Weber says he goes through equipment faster than northern schools because it's used year round. He uses his lift trucks most extensively and keeps at least five chainsaws on hand because of the amount of pruning.

The baseball field, home to the high-powered Hurricanes, has synthetic turf, which suffers from mildew.

The crew maintains two soccer fields and two football fields of bermudagrass. The four fields are all practice fields only and, therefore, don't require special maintenance.

Weber would rather put his time into designing areas on the campus. Although the university often contracts out for landscape design, Weber prides himself on the areas of campus he has designed.

Before coming to the university he worked at Miami's Baptist Hospital. There, he won the American Association of Nurserymen's national award for institutional design. He will receive his award in Washington, D.C. this month.

One area he has designed is the student union. He says he's most proud of this since so many people walk through the area each day.

Weber put in planters with ferns, crown thorns, and solitaire palms to brighten up the union. With the combination of Weber's design changes and Lefler's designated three-man crew for short term projects, the campus is indeed resembling paradise.

The hurricane factor

But when paradise is located in southern Florida, your crew has to be prepared for hurricanes. Hurricane season runs from June to November.