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He uses pump equipment that dispenses the topsoil at 4 to 8 cu. yds. per hour, and adds microorganisms, organic amendments and fertilizers so the soil retains an abundance of life. Also key is making sure the soil provides enough moisture for the plants, yet remains permeable enough to let the water through.

He carefully plans drainage systems and creates innovative approaches for erosion control, landslides and water features in hard-to-reach or sensitive areas. By using structural steel pilings and anchors, reinforcement bar, and wire mesh armatures, he blows shotcrete and carves and paints them to resemble natural granite or other rock outcroppings.

Schraven's projects have not only earned word-of-mouth accolades, they have garnered more than 30 awards from such organizations as the International Ero-

**Shotcrete boulder techniques were used to camouflage the ugly steel anchoring system and provide long-term stabilization for this landslide restoration project.**

sion Control Association, the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and its Washington chapter.

#### **Tea for turf**

For over a year, Schraven and his employees have been using a microbrewed tea to nourish plants and control foliar diseases. A special "microbrew," developed by Norbert Viet and marketed by Michael Alms of Growing Solutions, produces compost tea on an industrial scale with high concentrations of aerobic microorganisms to help reduce anaerobic growth in soil.

"A German came up with a way of reproducing microorganisms at an extremely rapid rate," Schraven explains. "We go from 10,000 (microorganisms) to over a billion in 18 hours with the use of vortex nozzles that spin in a tank. We put compost in and actually make a

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# (XXL) PERFORMANCE FOR (S) AND (M) JOBS.



## Seed Aide® Mulching Granules for rapid turf establishment.

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 tea brew that we put in our truck spray units."

The process not only helps break down organic matter, it prevents diseases and allows mineral uptake and vitamins to the plants, Schraven says.

Schraven also flies in earthworms from California and Oregon to add to the soil to create a self-sustaining ecosystem. "What happens is nature is starting to take care of things," he says. "We have no dieback. When I do my installation jobs, I don't even have a per-

centage that I count on loss of plants. I say if a plant isn't making it, it's my fault. There's no 5% loss factor."

After Schraven tests and retests his intuitive approaches — topsoils, organic amendments, fertilizers, etc. — he sends them to the Soil Foodweb, one of the more prominent laboratories, which is headed by Elaine Ingham. Although he trusts his instincts, he knows scientific proof convinces skeptics.

#### **"Cost" of going organic**

Schraven admits that what many prospective clients fear most about "going organic" is the perceived high cost. "They don't understand that it's actually going to save them money," Schraven says. "We fertilize our lawns a maximum of two times a year — and sometimes not at all, because we don't need to. The soil is building itself. You just need to add some of the organics and the rest keeps on going of its own accord."

It's not uncommon to reduce clients' fertilization and water use by 60% to 70%, he adds. "It's just not needed; things are established." He estimates that if the city of Seattle went organic and installation methods were changed, water consumption would drop at least 50%.

It's difficult for someone as passionate as Schraven is about nature to understand how many landscape indus-



**Schraven designed this spa, which is gunit and lined with boulders. It includes seating areas and jets to keep water moving.**

try professionals don't take more steps to cut pollution. So he pulls no punches when he blasts those who damage the environment.

"Industry standards are way, way below what I consider integrity level," he insists. "The way many landscapes are installed is what I call horrendous. I don't believe in industry standards of two or three inches of topsoil on compacted earth to lay lawns on. I don't believe in pit planting. I believe in getting a good foundation like nature intended."

Many landscapes look picture perfect, Schraven says, but have little or no sustainable base of life in them. "In short, they look fake and are deader than a doornail," he says. "I call it the 'individually wrapped slice of cheese syndrome.' They're shiny and packaged to the hilt, but no real food is to be found inside." He wonders why such people get into the business.

"I mean, you have to ask yourself why you're a landscaper," Schraven says. "Is it just a business? If so, you could have been into cardboard boxes or nails. Or is it a love that you have, something in your heart that you want to create? Do you really want to install more beauty on this planet and leave it a better place than when you got here?" **LM**

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## All decked out

**A deck builder is only as good as his deck supplies. The right choices could make or break your design/build future**

**B**uilding decks is one thing, but building ones that will last and get you good customer referrals is quite another. One step that you can make is choosing your deck materials carefully and not settling for anything other than the best. After all, your hard work is at stake, not to mention your customers' satisfaction.

Jud Griggs of Lied's Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, WI, has years of deck building experience and knows exactly what to use.

"We will suggest a pressure-treated understructure but seldom will we use pressure-treated wood for the decking material itself. Pressure-treated material, as it dries, will crack and won't weather uniformly," Griggs said.

Leid's normally opts for a good quality cedar or redwood. "Depending on your budget, there are some other types out there, too," he said. "Some of the new wood is so strong and lasts forever, particularly jarrah and ipe."

Recycled wood, containing wood fiber and plastic, is ideal for marine use, Griggs said, because it lasts forever and won't rot.



Slip resistance isn't a concern if you do a few things right the first time, Griggs said. "It depends on the sealer or preservative you use. Some brands that are advertised quite heavily are parafin-based and will make wood slippery after a good rain. If you use a quality sealer that seals the wood and doesn't put a parafin finish on it, then you're fine."



▲ L.B. Plastics' maintenance-free PVC decking, railing and cladding systems come in beige, white or gray. New additions to the Sheerline decking and railing lines include a residential decking surface and PVC brackets. The Sheerline Column Clad for treated wood posts is ideal for porches and balconies. For more information contact L.B. Plastics at 800/752-7739 or circle no. 278

◀ Durable Deck resurfaces existing decks and ramps in a long-lasting, safe and attractive vinyl covering. Rather than replacing old deck structures, Durable Deck is especially designed to be installed on top of existing decks. For more information contact Anchor Decking Systems at 888/898-4990 or circle no. 279

## Property at a glance

**Location:** The Breakers, Palm Beach, FL

**Staff:** The Breakers Golf and Grounds Department

**Category:** Hotel, motel or resort

**Total budget:** \$2,800,000

**Year site built:** 1897

**Acres of turf:** 94

**Acres of woody ornamentals:** 6

**Acres of display beds:** 1.5

**Total paved area:** 15 acres

**Total man-hours/week:** 1,560

## Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Extremely salty sea air
- ▶ Guest playground/traffic and wear
- ▶ Age of property

## Project checklist

(Completed in last two years):

- ▶ New beach club and ballroom "beach front" landscaping
- ▶ St. Augustine lawns replaced with bermudagrass in high-profile areas
- ▶ Construction and landscaping of new 12,000 sq. ft. croquet lawn

## On the job

- ▶ 36 full-time staff, 6 seasonal employees, 3 licensed pesticide operators

# The Breakers

## The 1999 Grand Award Winner of the Professional Grounds Management Society for Hotel, Motel or Resort

There's nothing like the smell of an early morning sea breeze, or the smell of diesel fumes and freshly cut grass. Just ask the grounds crew at The Breakers, who have the sights, smells and sounds of balmy Palm Beach, FL, to comfort them during their work day.

The guests who come for rest and relaxation at The Breakers expect beautiful and entertaining landscaping, and that's why Director of Golf and Grounds Daniel Miller and his crew have to maintain such things as flower displays that go through 25,000 annuals a year, a 20,000-sq.-ft. courtyard and the Children's Secret Garden. The children's garden features colorful butterfly-attracting plants such as pentas, lantana and passion flower, sculpted topiary monkeys and cranes and, in the center of the maze, a wishing well fountain.

The crew members have to be on their game at the Spa Courtyard, where everything is exposed to the elements. To combat Mother Nature, the crew installed salt-tolerant plantings. There is also a constant change out of color to maintain vibrancy and keep things fresh.



▲ A fully-suited spray technician with a Jacobsen spray unit is up first thing in the morning to quickly run his scheduled safe pesticide treatment through garden walks.

▶ Looking down the main entrance drive toward the featured 1926 Grand Fountain (recently restored) and a flower display featuring 4,000 annuals. Canna lily, excitement coleus, and red begonia are framed by a sculpted triphazilia hedge and bermudagrass lawn.

Editors' note: *Landscape Management* is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2000 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2000 Awards, contact PGMS at 120 Cockeysville Road, Suite 104, Hunt

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