

TIFSPORT TAKES ROOT AT THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION

The hundreds of visitors who tour the Governor's Mansion each month come away mighty impressed with the grounds, lawns and landscaping. And no wonder. Grounds Maintenance Manager Steve Johnson and his assistant, along with 10 prison volunteers, carefully tend the 14 acres of lawns, flower and vegetable gardens, shrubs, trees and ornamentals on West Paces Ferry Road. The property was part of the Robert Maddox estate known as Woodhaven until the Georgia Building Authority purchased it in 1963 as a new home for Georgia's first family.



Renovated terrace area at the Governor's Mansion. The beautiful lawn is TifSport Bermudagrass, a gift to the state from the TifSport Growers Association.

Although the house was demolished to make way for the current mansion, much of the original landscape plan, dating from the early 1900s, was retained. Steve Johnson has been taking care of the mansion grounds for three administrations...with Governor Harris, Governor Barnes, and now the Perdues. "They've all been really great to work for, especially the Perdues," he says.

To the west of the mansion, there's a beautiful open expanse known as "The Terrace." Its series of slopes and ledges form a natural amphitheatre-like setting, with an impressive statue-lined fountain and basin at the lower end. Over the years it's been used for many weddings, concerts and outdoor parties. An extensive renovation of "The Terrace" began in 2002. New topsoil was brought in, the hillside was re-contoured, and the original concrete steps were re-poured. The only missing ingredient was new grass.

TIFSPORT GROWERS ASSOCIATION STEPS FORWARD



TifSport Board Members present Governor Perdue with TifSport hat. From L to R: Jaimie Allen - Pike Creek Turf; Ben Copeland Jr. - Super Sod; Ken Morrow- Sod Atlanta; Governor Perdue; Dr. Wayne Hanna - TifSport breeder; Mary Perdue; Dr. James Sutton, Director, Georgia Seed Development Commission; and Arthur Milberger - Turfgrass America.

When word got out about the renovation, Ken Morrow, President of the TifSport Growers Association, saw an opportunity to promote TifSport Bermudagrass, one of Georgia's premier turfgrass varieties. Ken recalls, "I thought it would be a major honor for the TifSport Growers Association to have a Georgia-developed turfgrass front and center at the Governor's Mansion. With Georgia being the preeminent development and breeding center for the hybrid bermudagrass, it's only fitting that a grass like TifSport be showcased at Georgia's first home." The grass and the installation were a gift to the state and was funded by the TifSport Growers Association. Two Georgia TifSport growers took the lead in getting the project off the ground, or more accurately, into the ground. Ben Copeland of Fort Valley-based Super Sod worked out the details with the Governor's staff and provided the grass,

which was grown at Super Sod's Marshallville, Georgia farm. Sod Atlanta, Ken Morrow's company, arranged for the installation by Southern Sod Sales, a local sod broker and installer.

Governor and Mrs. Perdue couldn't be more pleased. "Mary and I are both enjoying the TifSport. It's a great Georgia variety, with a lot of vigor and a beautiful color. The installation job was just perfect, too. It was only installed six weeks ago, but you'd think it's been here for years. We've already had lots of comments about how beautiful it is."



Governor Perdue thinks Georgia First Lady Mary Perdue does a good mowing job on their new TifSport lawn.



Ken Morrow, Chairman of the TifSport Growers Association looks over landscaping plan with Steve Johnson, the Mansion's Grounds Maintenance Manager, John Boudrot, President of Southern Sod Sales, and Trent Ozburn, Landscape Architect Manager for the Georgia Building Authority.

To prepare for the installation, Steve Johnson and his crew started clearing the ground in early June. They tilled the site twice, and sprayed it three or four times with herbicides. "There was a lot of work involved to prepare all the terraces and faces, but we wanted to keep this area just like it was when it was first put in," Johnson says. "With its slopes and banks, it's really quite beautiful." After several delays due to rain, the first two loads of TifSport arrived from Super Sod at 7 a.m. on July 7. John Boudrot, President of Southern Sod Sales, recalls, "We were a little bit concerned about the slopes and how we were going to tackle them, but everything went really well. And we couldn't have asked for a better rainfall than we got the night after we put in that first delivery. The governor might even want to take credit for it! We had just the perfect amount to keep it looking good."

All in all, "The Terrace" site took four truckloads of sod, or approximately 40,000 square feet. That's three truckloads of what the industry calls 'magnum rolls,' which are 25-inches wide x 100 feet long. The magnum rolls were for the big areas, because they go out quicker and have fewer seams. The fourth truckload consisted of small rolls, which were used in the smaller trim areas.



Super Sod truck arrives with first rolls of new TifSport Bermudagrass



Southern Sod Sales worker uses special "magnum roll" installer

Boudrot thinks TifSport is a superior Bermuda. "We know our TifSport customers seem to be happier. Everybody agrees that it has a little more intense color, a little stronger spring green-up. And the textbooks tell us that it's a little better from the standpoint of winter hardiness. It's definitely a big improvement over Tifway 419." TifSport has another big advantage that appeals to Boudrot. "It's all certified. That's another problem with most other bermudas. There's just not a lot of certified bermuda around anymore, so you don't know what you're buying a lot of times. This grass won't have the irregularities we've been seeing with a lot of the older bermudagrass varieties. We really push TifSport because it's such a superior grass."

John Boudrot is right. As a patented variety, TifSport can only be sold as certified sod or sprigs, and it can only be grown by licensed members of the TifSport Growers Association. These quality-conscious sod producers have agreed to follow stringent production and inspection practices set up by the Georgia Seed Development Commission to promote on-going purity and uniformity. Currently there are 29 growers licensed to sell TifSport domestically, nine of whom are based in Georgia. There are also three international growers, in Australia, Saudi Arabia and Spain.

TifSport was developed by renowned USDA/ARS plant geneticist Dr. Wayne Hanna. It was released in 1998 after 16 years of evaluation and testing. Dr. Hanna, who recently retired from USDA, is now working full time as a turfgrass breeder for the University of Georgia.



TifSport breeder Dr. Wayne Hanna explains attributes of TifSport Bermudagrass to Governor Perdue.