Maryland family battles elements, government to keep course going

By PETER BLAIS

The Shields family has been in the Maryland golf business for 55 years. Family members have seen their courses wither in the heat, drown under heavy rains, become overgrown when fathers and brothers were away at war and unable to care for them.

Despite the worst Mother Nature and foreign dictators could throw at them, the Shields always brought their courses back into play. But John Shields isn’t sure whether his family and other private course operators can overcome their newest adversary, the government.

Short on funds and long on hope that golf is the answer to their financial woes, local and state governments have become major golf course developers. With free land, no taxes, and the ability to subsidize operations that fall below projections, government-owned facilities start with a tremendous advantage over private course operators like the Shields, owners of Glenn Dale (Md.) Golf Club and Twin Shields Golf Course in nearby Dunkirk.

“It’s welfare golf and it makes it very hard on the private sector,” Shields said. “With all the munis coming on line, we [United States] could end up with more courses than we need and private, daily-fee operators could get squeezed out. The only choice our family may eventually have is to turn our land into house lots.”


Ray died in 1980 and John, a graduate of the University of Maryland’s associate turfgrass program, returned home to help his mother, Hinky Shields, manage Glenn Dale. Ray’s surviving brother, Roy, took over full-time operation of Twin Shields, leaving Glenn Dale to John and his family. John, brother Jeff and sister Pam Jasper bought Glenn Dale from their mother in 1984. (Roy, his daughter Karen and head pro of 20 years John Dodson operate Twin Shields.)

Glenn Dale underwent some major changes beginning in 1984. The family redesigned the course and reconstructed all the tees. They planted 1,000 additional trees, including Annapolis Country Club. The Shields family has operated Glenn Dale (Md.) Country Club for almost 40 years.

California writers ass’n honors American Golf Corp.’s Price

PEBBLE BEACH, Ca. — American Golf Corp. Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer David Price has been awarded the California Golf Writers Association’s (CGWA) Golden State Award, recognizing the golf operations entrepreneur’s contributions to the game of golf in the state of California.

The award presentation was made by San Francisco Chronicle sports writer Pat Sullivan during the CGWA’s Annual Awards Banquet HERE.

Price operates an impressive list of past Golden State Award winners that includes Bing Crosby, Dinah Shore and golf course developer Sandy Tatum.

“I am thrilled to be honored by the California Golf Writers Association and to join such a renowned list of past recipients,” said Price upon accepting the award. “It is especially gratifying to be recognized in my home state, where American Golf has worked hard to provide golfers with an enhanced value and a high-quality golf experience... In addition to expanding the opportunities for Californians of all levels and backgrounds to learn and play the greatest game of golf.”

Price’s outstanding service and contributions to the game began nearly 30 years ago when, with the down payment of a single dollar bill, he acquired a financially-challenged country club in Yorba Linda, Calif. His innovative concept of applying the business principles that had proven effective in other industries to golf course operations led to profits where others had failed. He subsequently leveraged these profits into other acquisitions, and by the mid-1970s had established American Golf as the premier operator of public golf courses in the world. In 1994, the company went international with the acquisition of six properties in the U.K., and today its management portfolio includes an additional 200 quality private, resort and public golf courses — 63 in California — in 23 states.

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BRIEFS

CJT HANNAH MANages WIDOWS WALK

SCITUATE, Mass. — The town has selected Cortacan Jennison Hospitality (CJH) to manage Widow’s Walk Golf Course, an 18-hole, daily-fee facility designed by Michael Hurdzan and selected Corcoran Jennison Hospital-

Golf Course, an 18-hole, daily-fee facil-

ity and Willow Run Golf Club in Pewaukee, Wis. Tantallon is KSL Fairways’s fifth course in the Washington area. Willow Run is located just 15 minutes from downtown Milwaukee.

VIENNA, Va. — Billy Casper Golf Management has named new directors of golf at two of its facilities. Bill May — formerly of Tee and Tee Golfland in Portland, Maine and Bath (Maine) Country Club — is now at Kennebec Heights Country Club in Augusta, Maine. Thomas Beideman — formerly of Cattle Creek Country Club in Glenwood Md. — has joined the soon-to-open Links at Calledon in Mount Airy, Md.

ARIZ Firms Team Up in Denver

DENVER — Troon Golf Management and SunCrown Development have joined forces to build Castle Pines North Golf Club in south suburban Denver. The same team developed and operated Troon North Golf Club in Scottsdale, Ariz. Tom Weiskopf will design the facility.

GOLF COURSE NEWS

NGCOA APPOINTS PAIR

MT PLEASANT, S.C. — The National Golf Course Owners Association has named James Bailey director of membership and sponsorship and Heather Siegel communications director. Bailey was formerly vice president of marketing for CNA Insurance Companies in Chicago. In his new position he will focus on member recruitment and retention, chapter development and member benefits. Siegel has been with the association for a year. She will create and fill industry-specific publications, focus on media relations and serve as associate editor of the association’s monthly publication, Golf Business.

MARKETING IDEA OF THE MONTH

Marketing on the ‘Net’ wave of golf’s future

By DEBORAH SANDERS

As a course owner or general manager, you market your course locally and perhaps in national periodicals. But how about marketing in the newest forum, the Internet? The World Wide Web with its navigation to your e-mail address and pictures, and often its sound and video clips — and almost always its hypertext links that allow the user to jump to another Web site — is probably the most important aspect of marketing on the Web. If you’re piggybacking on the Web site of another golfing entity, it enables potential customers to reach you directly and immediately.

You may want to build your own Web page, for an investment. You may want to buy your own design, or you may want to use DesignSite (tm) LLC, which has put together sites for a recording studio, an industrial equipment company, and many law firms.

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Shields family
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trees, installed a new irrigation system, constructed four miles of macadam cart paths, upgraded the clubhouse and renovated the swimming area. The club has since sponsored a local U.S. Open Qualifier, two LPGA Northeastern Championships, and many other events.

The tremendous change in golfer's expectations was one of the major reasons for the upgrade, John said. Television coverage of professional paths, upgraded the clubhouse and trees, installed a new irrigation system, the new mowing equipment, chemicals

reasons for the upgrade, John said. "We're sort of a "gray collar" facility. "We're sort of a

end at a private club," John said. "We'll even help them set up an appointment with the membership committee at any of the nearby private clubs."

That attention to customers is important at the Shields' operations. In fact, the families are re-emphasizing customer service in 1996. "Next to the golf courses, customer service is the most important thing we have that can set us apart."

The Shields plan to stay in the business into the foreseeable future, but have no plans to acquire additional courses unless members of the next generation want to become involved in the business. All are involved in the club's operation. Hinky handles invoices and billing. Jeff operates the food and beverage operation. Alvin, Pam's husband, is being trained as the landscaper and her daughter, Michele, to take over the office operation. John, a two-term member of the National Golf Course Owners Association board of directors, is in charge of maintenance.

Many management companies have approached the Shields about leasing or buying their operation, John said. "We've considered it," he added.

"Management companies can save money on many line-item areas that a Mom-and-Pop operation can't. They can centralize and spread costs around different facilities on items like legal, accounting and secretarial fees. They have mass purchasing power that gets them discounts on equipment and supplies we can't touch. They also save taxes by leasing facilities and writing off expenses on a yearly basis that I [as an owner] have to depreciate more slowly."

"They have become very efficient by developing manuals to run each course as a business. But they can have difficulty in making the manual fit each course. Every operation is a little different and you have to be flexible to meet those needs. Sometimes management companies have trouble doing that."

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