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 are prepared for 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.”

That prospect unnerves Shields, whose father, Ray, and uncle, Roy, moved from Ohio to Maryland in the mid-1930s. The twin brothers worked at East Potomac Park for the Loefler family, operators of East Potomac and other courses, including Annapolis Country Club.

Ray and Roy bought the Annapolis club in 1941, but were shortly thereafter called into the service in World War II. With no one available to maintain Annapolis Roads, weeds and small saplings took over. When the hostilities ended, the two returned and began the work of reclaiming the neglected facility. Older brother Bob (who later became head superintendent at nearby Woodmont Country Club in Rockville) helped restore the course.

The Shields sold Annapolis CC in 1958, but not before a brief, four-year fling operating White Flint Golf Club from 1950-54 and acquiring the property to build Glenn Dale Golf Club in 1957.

Ray and Roy later designed and built Twin Shields Golf Club in Dunkirk, which opened in 1969.

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, 80, 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 grasses and flowers to combat the heat. By 1987, the course was playable in the summer.

Continued on page 58
AGC sets sights on 400 golf courses

SANTA MONICA, Ca. — American Golf Corp. (AGC) plans to add nearly 30 quality courses to its prestigious portfolio each year for the next four years — bringing the number of private, resort and daily fee courses it operates to more than 400.

In the past 18 months, AGC has undertaken management of 31 new properties, including 10 private country clubs and 21 daily fee and resort courses. President David Price credits this growth, which has conveniently been accompanied by increased profitability, to an innovative corporate re-engineering initiative launched in 1995.

Eight functional areas were scrutinized as part of the initiative, resulting in a more streamlined, efficient structure that lends itself to increased focus on specific course/club operational issues.

Internet markets

Continued from page 53

Managing Director Fred Willard can be reached at E-mail fred@designsite.com.

You may want to piggyback on an existing Web page. At last count, there were 2,973 Web sites devoted to golf or golf courses. Of these, I have selected nine potential collaborators, plus a bonus. If your course is owned by a larger company, your organization probably already has a Web page. If not, as an independent course, you probably wouldn’t want your marketing material on a page the competition has generated.

Here are some selected sites:

• S PlusNet’s Golf Information Center (the URL or address is http://www/splesnet.com/golf) is actively looking for sponsors. It is owned by an employment agency, which can be reached by phone at (508) 799-5959 or by fax at (508) 786-2731.

• If you are in the market for a new course or to sell yours, you will be interested in Golf Courses & Hotels Across the Country for 1997 Exchange or Sale (http://www.mauli.net/87Eqmartyn/301Exchange/NNNInvestments.html). You should know, however, that there was only one course listed when I looked at the site at the end of February.

• The Masters 96.com Review is an example of an event-specific site. Of course, this April championship event will have been held by the time you read this, but you can get in line for inclusion on the Masters97 site. The URL is http://www.masters96.com.


• The Golf Network Review covers key events like the four majors and the Ryder Cup. See http://www.golfnetwork.com.

• iGolf-the Players’ Exchange Review is the “People” magazine of the golf Web. You can find it at http://www.igolf.com.

• Golfers Delight Review features electronic golf equipment. This high-tech site might be just the place for you to advertise your course. Look at http://www.webcomm.com/~dms/golfd.html.

• Courses in several major metropolitan regions are featured in Drive! Review. It’s at http://www.greengrass.com.

• Getting Around the Planet Review is a general travelogue with golf courses featured. See http://www.pathfinder.com/Travel.

Finally, I promised you a bonus. There are scores of locality sites that feature the tourist attractions of various places in the country. Some feature golf courses only like Michigan Golfer. Some include all sorts of attractions like the Arizona Central—Travelers Information Review (at http://www.azcentral.com). Whether you build your own Web page or piggyback, you need an E-mail address and yours should contain your own domain name for maximum exposure of your golf course’s name. The domain name in an E-mail address such as DMS94122@aol.com is the segment after the @ sign. Network Solutions of Herndon, Va., is responsible for registration services for domain names. Registration costs $50 per year with the first two years payable in advance.

Only large companies register directly with Network Solutions, which requires the firm to have a pair of independent computer servers (at physically separate locations and on different networks if possible) of its own to serve the domain.

Smaller companies would register a domain name through AT&T, PSI, or any other Internet service provider, which searches the database and then on behalf of you submits your application to Network Solutions.