



# Snapfinger Woods- A Natural Development

An Atlanta land developer envisioned building one of the finest golf courses in the city — despite serious flooding and drainage problems on the land that he owned. He then teamed up with a club manager determined to provide what he calls the best dollar value in golf of any club in the area.

The result — a successful formula for the golf club operation at Snapfinger Woods, a complete 1,450-acre, multi-use community 13 miles east of downtown Atlanta.

Since the start of construction at Snapfinger Woods in 1971, the developer, Phipps Land Co., has invested thousands of dollars and man-hours in not only the completion of a challenging 27-hole facility, but also in solving the drainage and flow problems of Snapfinger Creek. At the same time, the new manager of Snapfinger Woods Golf Club is implementing an extensive series of improvements designed to offer every club member the most value for his or her money.

**Natural beauty preserved.** The project has been a gradual and methodical one but has nevertheless kept pace with a continually increasing popularity of and demand for golf at Snapfinger Woods, according to Joe Hamilton, Phipps vice president. "The golf course and club facility has been and was always intended to be one of the primary attractions for the people who moved into our apartments and condominiums here, but it is also a major drawing card for new residents, prospective tenants in the industrial park, and any other people who might be interested in becoming part of the community in some integral way," Hamilton told GOLFDOM.

Hamilton said in the construction of the original 18-hole golf course, great care was taken to preserve and enhance the natural beauty of the terrain and to capitalize on the picturesque Snapfinger Creek

## *Carving a golf course development out of nature in Atlanta*

which winds north-south through the approximate center of the property. "Our initial design intent for the golf course was to leave as much natural growth and limited fairway width at crossings," Hamilton said. "When the course and clubhouse were finished, we had one of the most beautiful golf facilities in the city, but there were still some major problems to be solved before we could be satisfied with the quality of the entire operation."

A portion of the first 18-hole course was laid out along the lowlands of the creek. In the first two years of its operation, the course was closed an average of 30 days a year when heavy rains caused the creek to overflow and inundate the flood plain. "In fact, the course was flooded the day after it opened," Hamilton said.

Modest corrections were made at the time to facilitate the flow of water. Trees were removed from the creek bed and additional landscaping was undertaken to prevent erosion along the banks of the creek. However, during those first two years there was a steady increase in demand for golf. "In fact," Hamilton said, "the demand for golf exceeded the supply within the first 18 months. We had originally forecast a gross income of \$264,000 during the first year of operation of the initial 18-hole course. By the end of the first year we had actually grossed \$560,000. The golf course operation was obviously too important to us as developers and to the project itself to simply write off those flood days to experience."

**Downstream study.** That was when Phipps decided to let its engineers and golf course architects attack the problem more analytically. Thorough studies were made down-

stream as well as north of the course to determine what impediments might be causing the creek to flood on the Snapfinger Woods property and to determine what measures might be taken to control the forces of nature without sacrificing the natural beauty of the creek's flood plain.

At the conclusion of the preliminary study, three basic problems were identified. A large mass of rock several hundred yards south of the property was keeping the water level immediately upstream artificially high. Further interruption of the natural water flow was being caused by sedimentation under the expressway bridge at the southern boundary of Snapfinger Woods. Together these had created a third problem of increased sedimentation along the golf course, the net result of which was a very shallow creek bed. The shallowness of the creek bed, which allowed none of the regular scouring action of normal water flow, was a self-perpetuating problem. The shallower the creek, the less scouring took place. The less scouring, the more sediment continued to settle in the creek bed.

There were also other factors. The area two miles north of the property in the same watershed was also being developed as a golf course and erosion from that project deposited silt downstream. South of the property the elevation change for a distance of 2,000 feet was only two feet, and the irrigation supply lines crossing the creek caught debris and actually impeded the flow. Engineers also noted the storm drains feeding into the creek were not only blocked at high water times, but actually had water forced back through them.

The most obvious and immediate solution was to remove the rock impediments downstream. During the next four months of the flood control project, easements were obtained from several property owners. Contractors employed by Phipps removed the large mass of rock and redressed the land to pre-

The clubhouse at Snapfinger Woods in Atlanta is of a rustic contemporary design constructed of rough-hewn cedar siding and glass on a hill overlooking the first 18-hole course. Its semi-circular design affords numerous views of many areas of the course and community.

# Snapfinger Woods continued

vent erosion. While this allowed considerable improvement in the flow of water through the development, other measures were still needed to prevent future flooding.

**Riprap and gabions.** On the property itself, engineers graded the banks of the streams to funnel the water more efficiently and stabilized the banks with riprap and gabions and wire cages filled with small rocks. These not only control erosion but also collect silt and sedimentation to eventually support the growth of grass and other plants. The few impediments created in the development of the golf course and surrounding community, such as irrigation supply lines, were removed from the creek bed and placed immediately underneath the creek crossings. Flap valves were installed on storm drains. The bridge abutments, which had been undermined by flooding, were riprapped.

Acute curves were either riprapped or channelized and in some cases floodways were built to connect straight sections of the creek and to avoid the impediment caused by the curves during flood conditions.

The creek at the southern end of the course was dredged to increase its volume and velocity. To correct the sedimentation problems in the flat portions of the course itself, gen-

The business of running the development demands keeping the members involved. A women's golfing clinic is one of several special activities at Snapfinger Woods.

tle swells were built to create the undercurrents necessary for normal scouring without significantly changing the terrain of the course. All flood control measures, however, were in line with the developer's primary consideration — to maintain the aesthetic value of the entire flood plain area and to disturb the natural ecology of the stream as little as possible.

The extra landscaping that was an integral part of the flood control improvements was augmented by the planting of an annual winter grass on the new golf course upstream, a step which considerably lessened erosion during the flooding season.

The total cost of the improvement project was more than \$74,000. The results have proven very worthwhile, Hamilton told GOLFDOM, and the club is now able to keep the course open in rainy and dry season alike.

**Nine new holes.** The flood control project was completed in late fall of 1973. But it still did not satisfy the steadily increasing demand for golf and it certainly would not continue to meet the needs of the community's residential population as development progressed. Already a 150-apartment complex and two condominium complexes of 61 and 47 units were complete and a third condominium project would open a year later. The community's 500-acre industrial park was in its second phase of development and nearly 60 firms had located offices or

manufacturing and distribution facilities there.

Thus, at the same time the flood project was underway along the creek, plans were being finalized to construct nine new holes on 52 acres of higher, more rolling land adjacent to the original 18 holes.

Completed and opened for play last fall, the new course represents a radical change in character from the original one, an advantage which offers the individual golfer an additional and more varied range of challenges. The layout of the new course, designed by golf course architect Joseph Lee, features a trio each of par three, par four and par five holes in contrast to the standard course layout.

The benefits from these improvements to the golfing club member were immediate. The benefits to the developer and club manager were just as significant, but perhaps less obvious. The nine-hole addition afforded more thorough and efficient maintenance of the entire course. If necessary, one of the nine-hole courses can be completely closed for extensive maintenance work without interrupting normal 18-hole play. In such a way, the entire course can be completely serviced in only three days. In addition, the availability of three nine-hole courses allows club tournament play to proceed simultaneously with regular individual play on separate courses. Since the new nine has opened, the golf operation has already realized more tournament play, more participation in golf clinics and more organized golf-



ing activities by women and juniors as well as men.

From the developer's point of view, Hamilton said, the efficiencies gained from the new nine-hole course more than justified its development cost of approximately \$325,000. Naturally, the same pro and superintendent and maintenance equipment would be utilized for all 27 holes and the enlarged facilities increased the membership capacity of the golf club itself. These factors have allowed Phipps Land Co. to estimate that its gross revenues would increase 45 percent while its expenses would only increase by about 28 percent.

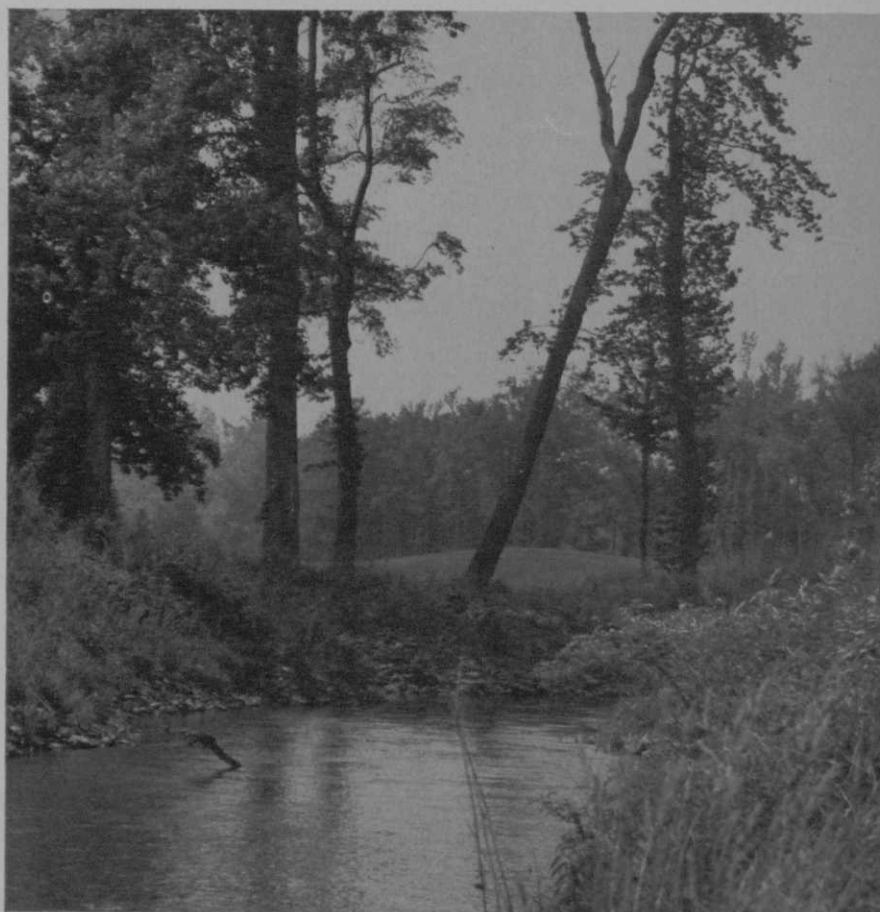
**Club sold to manager.** By the end of last year, the course supported an almost continuous play on 27 dry holes and enthusiasm for the operation was continuing to grow. With its improvement program fully implemented and the golf operation well-postured at that point, the developer took one final step to insure the high quality of the club operation would be consistently maintained while it continued to pursue other land development projects. At the beginning of this year, Phipps sold the course and clubhouse to William Roquemore of Lakeland, Ga., so that it could direct more of its energies toward those areas in which it has the most expertise and turn over the day-to-day operation of the golf facility to specialists in that field. The property was sold with full operating covenants to protect the integrity of the community. Phipps will remain active in the development of Snapfinger Woods through its completion.

When "Rocky" Roquemore took over the management of the club after the sale, he immediately outlined his own improvement program to augment that already completed by Phipps. He is devoting attention toward better grooming of the course, additional landscaping, complete revamping of the sand traps, the purchase of an entire fleet of new golf cars and expanding other club services for the golfing and general membership.

One hundred new Melex golf cars were purchased to replace and expand the previous fleet and a vigorous and innovative five-year landscaping plan was carefully out-



Rip rap and gabions line the banks of Snapfinger Creek in many places along the course to stabilize the banks and prevent erosion. Eventually the rocks will collect silt and support the growth of grass and small shrubs.



Tall trees and high grasses add to the natural beauty of the golf course bordering Snapfinger Creek.

# Snapfinger Woods continued

lined. All the greens will be converted this fall from the current Bermudagrass to Penncross bentgrass for a better year-round putting surface. Thousands of trees, shrubs and flowers will be planted along the course to improve its aesthetic appeal and heighten the challenge of the game.

Roquemore is organizing his landscaping program according to a seasonal theme. Each of the three



William Roquemore

nine-hole sections of the course has been designated for either spring, summer or fall blooming plants and will be landscaped accordingly. Azaleas, dogwood and flowering fruit trees, for instance, are being planted on the east course along the stream for spring color. A summer theme has been assigned the southern tip of the course where crepe myrtle, pampas grass and other summer blooming plants will be added. Pyracantha, purple maple and similar shrubs will provide fall color for the new nine holes.

"Our objective is to have at least one nine-hole course in bloom most of the time," Roquemore told GOLFDOM. He added that he also intends to plant pines and other evergreens uniformly throughout the course along with beds of annuals and perennials.

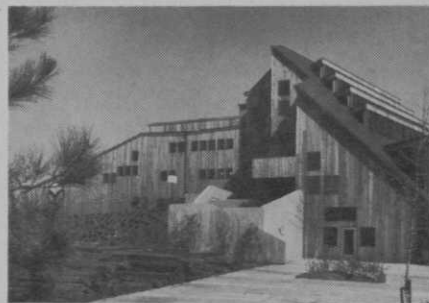
**Total club program.** Improvements such as these are all part of Roquemore's primary intention of making the club the best value in golf in his area, he said. He said the club has traditionally offered some of the lowest membership and dues fees in the city for a facility of its kind, and both Phipps and he are convinced that with the additional improvements already underway, value is

even further enhanced.

Membership initiation fees for the golf club are \$300 although no fee is charged for a "clubhouse only" membership. A social membership, which excludes golf, is offered for \$10 monthly or an annual fee of \$110. An associate membership affords the member use of all facilities but he must pay a greens fee for golf. That can be obtained for \$20 monthly or \$225 annually. Cost for a full membership which includes all club facilities and no greens fee is \$45 monthly or \$490 annually.

While the golf facilities are definitely the nucleus of the Snapfinger operation, they are not the only feature. The course functions as an important part of the total club program which in turn is only one of several recreational opportunities available to the community.

For club members who prefer other activities, the club offers tennis and swimming programs and a complete food and beverage service. The 27,000-square-foot clubhouse includes a general dining room and annex for private dining, a spacious lobby and fireplace lounge, an outdoor balcony overlooking the golf



The recently completed village center houses the community's information and sales center and is currently being leased to specialty shops, offices and studios.

course, a bar and pro shop and sauna and locker room facilities for men and women.

Roquemore is anxious to see the members become more actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the club. Since he took over as manager, a completely independent men's golf association has been organizing many of its own programs, and plans are underway to do the same for tennis and swimming. A competitive swimming team among the juniors is currently being organized and a newly formed tennis association is outlining a summer program.

Pat Alford, food and beverage manager for the club, has to page 42



Careful blending of building and site is an important development guideline at Snapfinger Woods, as evidenced by The Terraces condominiums. These homes, which border the seventh fairway of the course, are constructed of cedar siding and shingles and are arranged in a cluster fashion among large stands of trees.

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## Snapfinger Woods from page 18

expanded and improved his services to both maintain a consistent high quality in his product and to offer the most convenience to the members. Especially geared for

golfers is a sandwich bar near the pro shop and a menu of hot and cold sandwiches in the lounge. A golfers' breakfast is served every Saturday and Sunday morning at 8 a.m. and a snack and sandwich cart is becoming a more familiar site on the golf course.

The club continues to offer a happy hour Monday through Friday from 5 to 7 p.m., a Friday night buffet, a candlelight dinner on Saturday evenings and family brunch on Sundays. Lunch is available in the dining room Monday through Friday, with a hot buffet special that changes daily.

Club membership is open at the present time to the general public as well as residents of Snapfinger Woods, Roquemore said, but as the residential population continues to grow the percentage of non-resident

members will decrease. Eventually, when development of the community is complete around 1982, it is planned that the club operation will be supported entirely by resident members.

The golf club and course as a whole fulfill a vital role in the planned unit development concept of Snapfinger Woods. As part of the total balance among residential, recreational, commercial and industrial land uses, the course also serves as a visual amenity to golfers and non-golfers alike. Already a portion of the apartment units and two of the three condominium projects are built either directly adjacent to or within sight of the course.

Because of its geographical position within Snapfinger Woods, the course is also a wide green belt

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# Snapfinger Woods from page 42

which vertically divides the property, helping both to maintain a more rural atmosphere in the residential community and to further protect homeowners against encroachment.

**Master plan.** Within easy access of the course are several other recreation facilities including a 16-acre lake, stable and riding club, fishing pond, community garden, athletic field, picnic park and children's playground. A stable economic base is provided by the more than 60 industrial firms which are located in the 500-acre industrial park and which employ over 1,700 persons. Commercial activity within the community thus far includes a village center for retail goods and services, a 25,000-square-foot medical center, a child day care center and two branch banks.

The apartments and first three condominium villages completed to date represent only a fraction of the total 400 acres planned for residential use. There will ultimately be about 3,100 residential units when the phase of development is completed in about seven years. The master plan of the community calls for the generous spacing of numerous clusters of residences with each overlooking garden courtyards, wooded areas, the lake or the golf course. Each group of homes will be separated by green belts laced with walking paths and bicycle trails. In addition, each residential community will have its own swimming pool and playground area and some will include tennis courts.

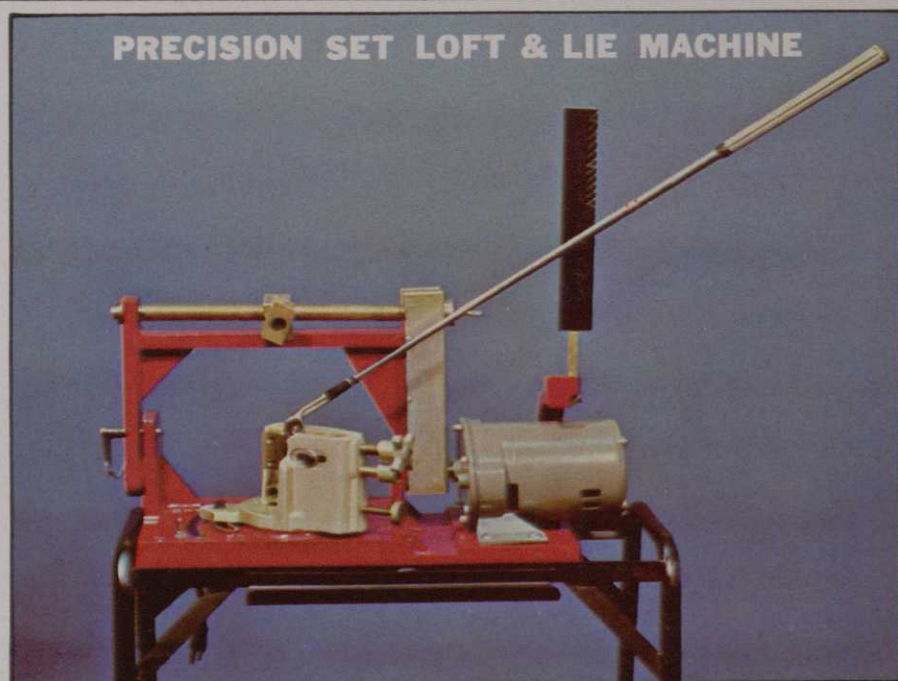
Snapfinger Woods' master plan has been laden with a heavy emphasis on preserving and enhancing as much as possible the natural wooded environment. Considering such criteria as the natural contours, soils, vegetation and hydrology, land uses have been designated for those sites determined to be most capable of absorbing and supporting the impact of each particular kind of development.

Such a balance was called for and stressed in the original master plan drawn up by the California architectural and planning firm of Callister, Payne & Bischoff. Support for the plan along with further

land use specifications and development guidelines were derived from an intensive land management study of the entire acreage completed in late 1973 by HOL Associates of St. Louis, Mo.

The long-range planning and land use balance are intended to provide a sound tax and economic

base, both for the community itself and for South DeKalb County, where the development is located. Such a base will depend on a projected total resident population of 9,000 and an employment base of 15,000 at the end of the community's 10-year development period. □



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