



GOURDS

For Rollin Clifford, there's more to a golf course than fairways and greens.

There are the gourds . . . the mice . . . and, of course, there is the music.

All these elements make an interesting medley at Easy Aces Golf Club on 59th St. east of Fairview near Downers Grove. And it's not as confusing as it may sound.

Easy Aces is what is known as an "executive course"—one that is short overall, but has a few par-4 holes. This 9-hole layout has two par-4's each for men and women, plus a par-5 for women.

It is one of 135 daily-fee courses listed in the just published "Selected Edition of Chicagoland Golf Courses." Described as a "preview edition to the most complete metropolitan area golf course guide ever published for Chicagoland" by its publisher, the "Selected Edition" furnishes the street address, map location, telephone number, owner's (or manager's) name, number of holes and yardage for every listed course. Additionally, it gives complete descriptions of 20 of the largest and/or most complete golfing facilities in a 2,500-square mile area surrounding Chicago.

Rollin Clifford was visited by "Selected Edition" publisher Allen S. Kerr, president of ASK Publishing Co., Park Ridge, for detailed information on his course. And that's where the gourds entered the picture. Rather, they filled the picture—for the Easy Aces clubhouse has numerous colorful gourds in evidence. They're colorful because of the painting talents of Clifford and his attractive wife, Valentina.

The gourds at Easy Aces aren't your common garden-variety gourds. They have not, for example, been grown in a garden. Until recently, they were grown as decorations on trellises alongside the tees on the course. During 1974, they'll come to life on a fence along one boundary of the course.

But it isn't the gourds themselves that are interesting—though their names have a certain charm: Hercules Club, Sugar Trough, Dipper. It's what Rollin Clifford does to them after the mice are finished.

A professional musician for all of his adult life, Clifford has also lived on the Easy Aces course all his life. Prior to 1964, it was farmland. Among the vegetables that grew on the property were gourds. And after Clifford set out to transform his farm into a daily-fee, 9-hole golf course, the gourds stayed on. Farmer Clifford was interested in the gourd as a form of plant life; Musician Clifford began to get ideas about the gourd as a form of instrument. In this respect, of course, he shared an interest that had appealed to music-makers down through the centuries.

Clifford found that by cutting a small hole in the freshly-picked gourd and emptying it of its pulp, he could then let it dry to a plastic-like hardness. The gourd could then be partially filled with BB shot for use as maracas (in pairs), or grooved with a file and rubbed with wires to produce a pulsing, susurrant rhythm.

"Have you ever tried emptying a large Hercules Club gourd or a long and narrow Dipper gourd of all its pulp?" asks Clifford, rhetorically. "I was on the verge of going into the specialty pulp-scraper tool business when someone told me about the appetite of the common field-mouse."

What Clifford learned was that mice will enter a small hole in the gourd's tough hide and devour the fibrous pulp in short order. Voila! A nearby farmer had mice a-plenty in his barn and Clifford's hands and wrists had had enough of odd-angled scraping. In no time, production of gourd instrument forms was organized on a virtual assembly-line basis.

Clifford produces his gourd instruments purely as a hobby. And the results of his leisure-time pleasure become gifts for friends, associates and regular customers.

"I give the gourds as Christmas gifts or for any appropriate occasion," says Clifford. Many have gone to musicians with whom he regularly plays in orchestras and combos. Describing himself as a "jobbing musician," Clifford works with groups that play for lodges, private parties, bowling banquets. "I even played in the Ringling Brothers circus band the past two years."

Musical fun and business aside, Rollin Clifford works hard at keeping the Easy Aces course in top-notch playing condition. The fairways are regularly watered, the grounds carefully maintained, and the clubhouse is a cozy delight.

As if these responsibilities weren't enough, Clifford also devotes a portion of each week to instruction for Hinsdale Junior High School students. Golf is the game, of course, and the Easy Aces owner offers film and textbook materials that are prepared and published by the National Golf Foundation for the students before taking them out on the tee.

Clifford strongly supports several organizations designed for the betterment of golf. Not only is Easy Aces Golf Club an associate member of the National Golf Foundation, the Illinois Turf Grass Foundation, but Clifford is also personally active in the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

"Getting across the interesting stories behind our area's many daily-fee golf courses is what our 'Selected Edition' and the big 'Chicagoland Golf Course Guide' upcoming in 1975 are all about," observes Allen Kerr of ASK Publishing. "People like Rollin Clifford are responsible, not only for golfing enjoyment for hundreds of thousands of Chicago-area buffs, but for a lot of worthwhile endeavors most of us aren't even aware of."

GOURDS OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS are used to form maracas and other novelty musical instruments for the enjoyment of Rollin Clifford, his wife, Valentina, and many of their friends. Clifford, who owns and manages Easy Aces Golf Club, grows the gourds and fashions them into usable noise-makers. His 9-hole Easy Aces layout is one of 135 area daily-fee courses listed in the new "Selected Edition-Chicagoland Golf Course Guide" (95¢). This brand new metropolitan golf guide, first of its kind, is on sale now at many book stores, sporting goods stores, newsstands and golf course pro shop.