

SuperFocus

# Joe 'Alger' Lightkep beats the odds — and tradition — at his Fairways G&CC

By HAL PHILLIPS

**T**he tale of Joe Lightkep has enough inspiring story lines to impress even Horatio Alger.

**Beating the Odds** — This 32-year-old superintendent almost single-handedly transformed an overgrown golf course, Fairways Golf and Country Club in

Warrington Township, Pa., into a viable public facility which handled 42,000 rounds in 1993.

**Local Boy Makes Good** — Born in nearby Horsham, Lightkep used to work at the course as a kid, picking sticks off the fairways. He took over superintendent duties in 1980 and now he owns the place.

**A Penny Saved...** — Lightkep purchased Fairways G&CC last Aug. 30. This changed his outlook forever: "It's hard to be a superintendent and spend your own money!"

In 1980, Fairways was literally a pasture, located 26 miles north of Philadelphia, just south of Doyleston in Bucks County. The course had opened in 1965 as part of a housing development. The shortish, 18-hole course was designed and built by William Gordon, architect of famed Saucon Valley in Bethlehem.

Shortly after the first 17 homes were built, the entire venture went under, though the course remained open in various states of disarray — until Lightkep showed up.

He arrived after stints at Limekiln Golf Course in Prospectville and Hidden Springs Golf and Country Club in Horsham. The young Lightkep was hired as course manager by owner Perch Hankin, who possessed a decidedly hands-off management style.

"Perch always told me to treat the course as if it were my own," Lightkep explained. "I didn't have much choice. In the first four years I was here, I saw the owner twice: The day he hired me and two days later when we went down to the bank to open a checking account.

"But there was a problem," Lightkep continued. "I was only 18 years old. I wasn't old



*'It's mine,' says Joe Lightkep at Fairways G&CC.*

THE UNIVERSAL SPORTS LAW INSTITUTE  
A Division of Universal Publishing Company, Inc.

PRESENTS

## PROFITABILITY in a Changing Legal Environment

### A Golf Course Management SEMINAR



**MARCH 17 AND 18, 1994**  
**Chicago Hilton and Towers**

The Universal Sports Law Institute is proud to present an outstanding line-up of professionals from the golf and legal community, assembled for the first time to lecture on the growing legal concerns of operating a golf course.

Our unique seminar is designed for golf course owners, managers, developers and architects.

- ADA Compliance • Designer Copycats • Insurance
- Discrimination Liability • Employment Disputes
- Workout Solutions • Taxation • and More!

Seminar Fee and Course Materials .....\$395  
and/or

Audio Tapes and Course Materials.....\$245

To register by phone or for more details, call

**1-800-735-4647**

Ask about our special hotel discounts!

*As an owner, 'you also spend money more wisely.*

*You pay a lot closer attention to pricing and financing matters.'*

— Joe Lightkep

enough to sign a payroll check. So I had to get my dad to sign all the papers."

The first few years were beyond lean. Because the course needed so much work, Lightkep didn't charge any green fees the first 18 months. He borrowed equipment from neighboring courses and made good use of his co-signer father, an equipment salesman.

During the 1980s, Lightkep

earned his bachelor's degree in agronomy from Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture. He installed an irrigation system. He also finished the access road, restored water and electric services, then watched the development fill up with housing.

"Open fields are nice, but the houses make the whole place feel more like a neighborhood," he said.

In 1990, Perch Hankin died, leaving the course to his son and daughter, whose father had advised them to consider a sale to Lightkep. After three more years of absentee ownership, the son and daughter followed their father's advice.

The deal went through on Aug. 30, 1993, and life hasn't been the same since.

"Too much paperwork!" said Lightkep with a laugh. "A lot of paperwork... You also spend money more wisely. You pay a lot closer attention to pricing and financing matters.

"Our biggest problem is, we're hidden off the main road. A lot of people who live in the Township didn't even know we were here until there was a story about us in the local paper.

"Of course, because we're a flat, short course, we get a lot of senior play. And they would like to keep it a secret."

Some things haven't changed. Lightkep said he plans to continue the long-term maintenance plan he started three years ago, which includes switching all 18 fairways over to bentgrass and developing a good Integrated Pest Management program.

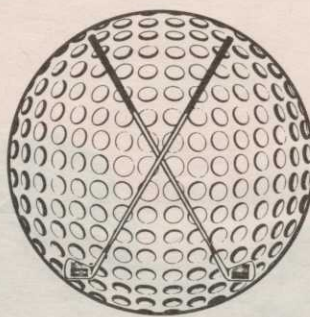
He also plans to continue charging green fees, \$10 to \$22.

And yes, Lightkep does have some solid advice for any superintendent thinking of buying his or her own golf course:

"Get a good lawyer and a good accountant. That made it all possible."

## Formost Construction Co.

*Serving the nation for over 30 years.*



### IRRIGATION SPECIALISTS

*"Doing One Thing Well"*

STATE LIC. #267960

P.O. BOX 559

TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA 92593

(909) 698-7270

FAX (909) 698-6170