

**F**red Slagle gazes at the rolling hills and the verdant turf of the Little Thunder GC in Madison, Ohio. He eyes the course from right to left and back again. A cool rain has left the fairways and greens glistening in the setting sun, like tinsel sparkling on a lighted Christmas tree.

Slagle envisions Little Thunder packed with children ages 6 to 12 from all walks of life. Little Thunder, which opened in June, is Slagle's gift to the kids, whom he says badly need a place of their own to experience golf.

Slagle, owner and designer of the nearby Reserve at Thunder Hill GC, known as one of the most difficult courses in the state, is on a mission to get more kids to play golf and, more importantly, to get them to learn and heed the etiquette of the sport.

"Where can kids play golf today?" Slagle asks before quickly answering his own question. "The unanimous answer is nowhere."

Even golf's marketers say the game needs more kids' courses to grow interest in the sport, which is dominated by white adult males and not exploding with new golfers. The National Golf Foundation stresses that golf needs to be more "comfortable" and "exciting" for kids.

A 10-year-old kid, unless he or she is a budding Tiger Woods, is going to feel out of place and intimidated playing a course that's 7,000 yards long. Slagle's 9-year-old son, Darian, encountered such humbling feelings when his father let him play at the Reserve at Thunder Hill, a long and formidable course. Darian realized quickly that kids need their own courses.

So Darian began lobbying his father about three years ago to build a course on the tree-filled land near the Reserve at Thunder Hill that Slagle had purchased for his three young boys as a trust fund. Slagle chuckled at the thought, but Darian was impassioned about his request.

Darian told his dad that regular golf courses, such as the Reserve at Thunder Hill, were too big for kid golfers. Besides, adults don't want kids on such courses, Darian said, because they take too long to play. Darian

## A Little Thunder, A Lot of Impact

BY LARRY AYLWARD



OWNER/DESIGNER

FRED SLAGLE

SCORES AN ACE

WITH A GOLF

COURSE FOR KIDS

also made it clear that he wasn't talking about miniature golf or a pitch-and-putt course.

"He wanted a real golf course like the Reserve at Thunder Hill," Fred says. "He just wanted to make it a little shorter."

Slagle's other son, then 5-year-old Damon, chimed in that it was a great idea. He told his dad that they could name the small course, Little Thunder. Slagle still thought it was a wacky idea, but he agreed to research the possibility of building a golf course for kids.

Slagle discovered there were plenty of three-hole, nine-hole and par-three courses for children to play, but no scaled-down, 18-hole courses with bunkers, ponds, multiple tees and other components that characterize full-scale courses.

If he was going to build a course for kids, Slagle wanted to provide them with a full-fledged golf experience — from making them think about strategies involved with certain shots to teaching them how to repair divots.

The more Slagle began thinking about the project and its benefits, the more he wanted to build the course. And he had the 65-acre site, which he says was a perfect spot for the project. "It's almost like God said, 'If you're going to build a golf course for kids, this is where it should be,'" Slagle says.

To date, more than 40 businesses have donated nearly \$1 million in supplies, equipment and labor to the cause. Slagle says most everyone he asked agreed to help as soon as he mentioned kids and a golf course.

It's a challenging course, but that was Slagle's intention. While it's billed as a kids' course, it's difficult for some adults, who are encouraged to play the course with their kids. The greens pose a tough putting test, with undulations that would challenge Arnold Palmer in his hey-day. There are plenty of hazards,

*Continued on page 58*

## Money Shot

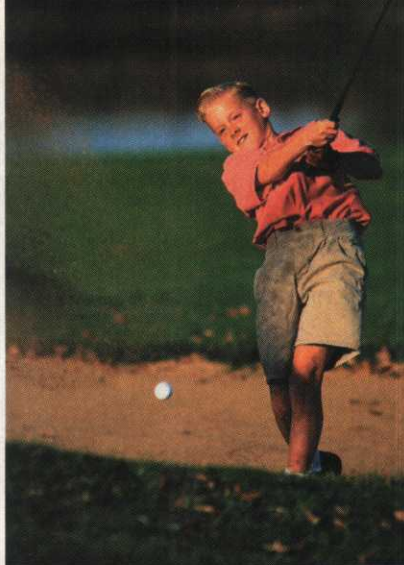
Continued from page 56

too, as in 64 bunkers and four ponds.

Slagle realizes that a 7-year-old kid may not have the patience or desire to play 18 holes. So he designed the course with that in mind, along with skill levels. While kids can play 18 holes, they can also play six at a time. The first six holes on the course are the easiest, the second six holes are harder and the third six holes are the most difficult. "We needed to make the course flexible," Slagle says.

While golf is about strategy, it's also about etiquette perhaps more than any other sport. Slagle believes golf is the only sport that teaches kids respect for fellow players and the environment.

He did not build Little Thunder to teach kids how to drive a golf ball 250 yards as much as he did to teach them about social grace. "It's a sport that teaches you to be a gentleman," he says.



DIGITAL STOCK

**Kids will feel out of place and intimidated playing courses that are 7,000 yards long.**

When Slagle began plans for Little Thunder, he envisioned a place where kids could learn and play golf for free. He wants to stay true to that concept, but he realizes Little Thunder must have big money to make it happen.

Little Thunder is incorporated as a non-profit organization, and a major fundraising effort to obtain \$5 million is under way to offset playing fees. Sla-

gle wants to invest the money as an endowment so the course can function off annual interest revenues of about \$500,000.

Standing on the fairway of the 9th hole, Slagle pauses to view the landscape, dotted with maple, dogwood, beech and tulip trees. He jokes that he wanted to please his kids, but this time he may have gone too far. Then he dwells upon what he has created.

"We're not doing this to see what kids can bring to golf," Slagle says. "We're doing it for what golf can bring to kids. We want to give kids the chance to be introduced to a sport of gentleness, honesty and consideration for others."

It's an understatement to say that Fred Slagle is on to something.

*Larry Aylward, editor of Golfdom, can be reached at 440-891-2770 or larryward@advanstar.com.*

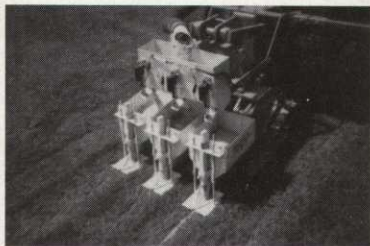
## WaterWick®

IMPROVES DRAINAGE!



IMPROVES AERATION!

Patented non-invasive process that inserts gravel into the soil without removing any existing material.



(888) 287-1644

[www.waterwick.com](http://www.waterwick.com)

Water Wick, Inc.  
491 North Main Street  
Southampton, New York 11968

Circle No. 130

# WHERE DO YOU STORE YOUR PESTICIDES?



SECURALL offers a complete line of safety storage buildings specifically designed for storing your turf chemicals safely and securely. All buildings are designed to help you comply with prevailing EPA and OSHA codes. Constructed of 12 or 16 gauge galvanized steel. Standard buildings come with many features or choose from several options.

### Features

- High Security Lock
- Fiberglass Insulated Walls
- Fluorescent Interior Lights
- Corrosion Resistant Enamel Finish
- Steel Shelves With Raised Edges
- GFCI Protected Electrical Wiring

### Options

- Heating / cooling / ventilation
- Dry chemical fire extinguisher
- Fiberglass floor grating
- Liquid level detectors
- Water sprinkler system
- Ramps

## SECURALL®

5122 North State Road 39 LaPorte, IN 46350  
1-888-326-7890 FAX: 1-888-324-3780  
Email: [securallsales@csinet.net](mailto:securallsales@csinet.net)  
[www.securallproducts.com](http://www.securallproducts.com)

CIRCLE NO. 129