

# Small Town *Comes Back to Life ... as a* Golf Course

Partners attain their dream with a low-budget jewel — Old English GC

BY BRUCE ALLAR

**T**he dream that sustained partners Mark Megenity and Cary Hammond since the mid-1990s — the enthusiasm that had peaked with a groundbreaking ceremony in November 1998 — was suddenly in jeopardy. It was spring 2000, and the would-be developers of the Old English GC in rural southern Indiana were finally clear of some time-consuming snags with governmental permits and approvals. Now they were behind schedule, out of cash and badly in need of financing.

“There was no way for us to get equity from remote investors without turning some dirt, and we needed money to turn the dirt,” Megenity recalls.

Having come this far — having obtained the blessings of the town of English and put together a course design, having slogged through four different flood-plain construction permits and won approval from seven separate funding agencies (including FEMA, HUD and the Army Corps of Engineers) — the partners, both English natives, went begging for money.

Megenity, an elementary school teacher, eventually took out a private \$104,000 loan, which he’s still paying off. Three short holes, now part of The First Tee program, were constructed. Then, finally, financing came through

for a novel 18-hole course that is scheduled to open in June.

“It was for one simple purpose: to show potential investors [some construction], or we weren’t going to have a golf course,” Megenity says of the personal loan he assumed in those desperate days. “There wasn’t any choice.”

Now Megenity and Hammond, a salesman for a produce company, are able to stand with designer David Whelchel, of Columbus, Ohio-based Hurdzan-Fry Golf Course Design, and look out over a low-budget jewel in an under-served golf market. Crawford County is among Indiana’s poorest, with a per-capita income of \$10,828. Old English will be the first full-length golf course inside its borders. The facility, built for less than \$2 million, features the three First Tee holes, an extensive practice range and a scenic 18 holes that play at more than 6,800 yards from the tips.

Old English offers several stunning vistas, and the 18th hole provides a truly memorable finishing look. From a tee elevated along one of the tightly packed ridges that contain the back nine, it steps down in natural contours to the fairway below, creating a sweeping panorama of much of the facility’s 250-acre property.

“Other courses would kill for this, but it



WADE BELL

would cost them a million dollars to create it," Megenity says.

Whelchel recalls making an initial site visit with firm partner Michael Hurdzan and taking a walk up to the wooded ridge tops, where holes 14 through 18 would be laid out. "How the hell do we get it done?" Whelchel remembers asking. But much of the terrain, including the area for the finishing hole, offered a gift in natural landscapes. It just took awhile to recognize the possibilities.

At 18, for example, once trees were cut between the ridge-side tee and flat, river-bottom fairway below, the designers could back off and admire the view. "We didn't know how good it looked until we got the trees off of it," Whelchel says. "Then we said, 'Just leave it.'"

Hurdzan/Fry Golf Course Design has earned notice for laying out low-cost courses, often using novel money-saving techniques. The Indiana developers' commitment to affordable golf and The First Tee made Old English attractive to the firm, which waived its normal design fees and did the project for "cost," which included materials, travel and other incidentals.

"Once Hurdzan/Fry agreed to donate its services — a half-million dollars worth of design services — that changed the whole works," Megenity says.

The struggling project was a go, but Whelchel felt pressure.

"The luxury of having \$5 million or \$10 million to build a golf course is that you can screw up," Whelchel says. "When you have \$3 million, you can't. But this was an excellent natural site and not a great deal needed to be done."

English, Ind., built on the banks of the Blue River, is the Crawford County seat and has an illustrious history. Its namesake, William H. English, ran for U.S. vice president in 1880 and was Indiana's speaker of the house, as well as a U.S. representative during the 1850s. His namesake town became regionally famous in the 1970s and '80s for another reason — flooding.

In 1976, Megenity wrote a paper for an environmental law class he was taking at Indiana University on the effects of stream channelization in his hometown. He attributed much of the flood-causing stream routing to actions of the Army Corps of Engineers and outlined some necessary steps for reducing the high water. His paper concluded with this prophetic remark, "If these steps aren't taken, the town of English will be a park someday — or, better yet, a golf course."

Disastrous floods in 1979 and 1990

*Continued on page 48*

**Partners Cary Hammond (far right) and Mark Megenity (third from right) discuss the course's design with architects Mike Hurdzan (middle right), David Whelchel (middle left), and others.**

## Old English Golf Course



**Drainage at Old English is a low-cost endeavor. It's accomplished by 1-foot-wide and 1-inch-thick flat pipe laid out in a herringbone design on each green. With the flat pipe there's no need for trench-digging.**

*Continued from page 47*

prompted an unusual remedy. With federal funding paying the way, the entire town of English, population 673, was picked up and moved to higher ground, leaving "old English" vacated on the flood plain. A statue of William H. English and a few street signs are about all that remain of the town on the grounds of the new golf course, serving as reminders of the property's past.

Along came determined developers Hammond and Megenity. With no previous experience, they drew up some preliminary routing plans, sought financing and sold the dream to officials in English. Like most small towns, English has been shriveling up, its population shrinking and aging. The partners offered a plan to reverse that fate.

"We intended to knock down all the hurdles, prepare everything and hand it off to a golf course development company," Megenity says. "We didn't realize that (golf course development companies) get property given to them outside metropolitan areas all the time so that real estate developers can build homes around it. We were too small of a fish for them.

"So we told the town — if it would agree to do this course — that we would give free access to the course on Mondays through Thursdays after 1 p.m. You can't make a reservation; you have to walk up and wait for an opening. But anybody who lives in the town of English can come play golf for free. That's not being done anywhere, especially on a good course."

Megenity's marketing plan is simple. He wants the course to attract people who have worked 30 years at General Electric or Ford Motor Co. (in nearby Louisville), are eligible for retirement and are golf fanatics. "They can sell their homes where they raised three kids, come to English and build modest homes," he says. Of course, they can also play golf.

Hammond says green fees, normally set at about \$10 per \$1 million in course development, will be in the \$30 to \$35 range for a weekend round with cart. The entire investment to get Old English open cost about \$3 million. It was fronted by 114 small investors.

"We get to change the history of English

*Continued on page 50*

## Old English Golf Course



A view of the 17th green. The California-style greens are a huge money-saver, costing only \$1 per square foot to build.

*Continued from page 48*  
from where we're flooded out and dead to being back alive," Hammond says.

The portions of the 250 acres that aren't being leased from the city were purchased from five local farmers for a total of \$300,000. The

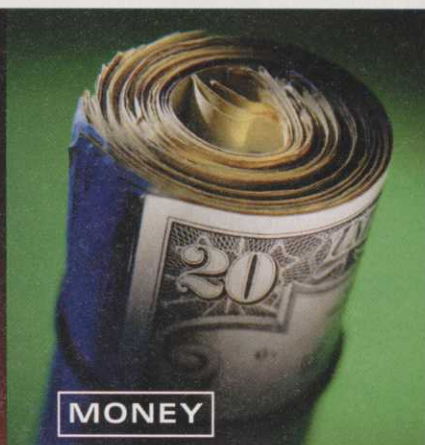
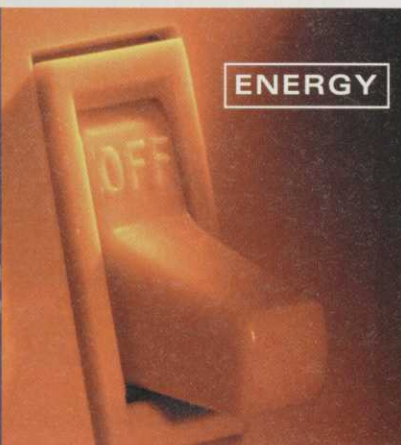
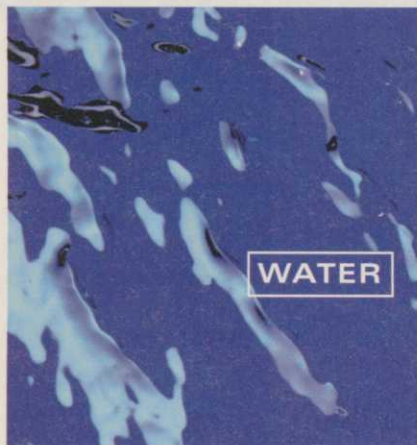
landowners bought into the dream. One sold for just \$1,000 per acre; another offered to donate the land after he heard about the town revitalization plan (he was paid a modest sum anyway).

The designers and developers took several steps to keep construction costs under \$2 million. Megenity credits Wayne Linette, owner of Linette Excavating, for his "very efficient and inexpensive" earthmoving. It was Linette's first job as a golf course builder. "There's no way we can pay him back," Megenity says.

The California-style greens are a huge money-saver, costing only \$1 per square foot to build. This has allowed the Old English developers to put in well-proportioned putting surfaces without breaking the bank. Green surfaces average 6,500 square feet.

The Hurdzan/Fry firm has done about a dozen courses now with the California greens, perfecting a low-cost drainage technique in the process. It eliminates the expensive layer of Canadian peat and builds with a 100 per-

*Continued on page 55*



# Save Big.

## Hire a Professional Irrigation Consultant

Independent irrigation consultants can help you save water, energy and money by applying their knowledge and experience to the efficient and effective design of irrigation systems.

Find out how much by contacting a member of the American Society of Irrigation Consultants.



**American Society of  
Irrigation Consultants**

221 NORTH LASALLE ST.  
CHICAGO, IL 60601  
312.372.7090  
FAX: 312.372.6160  
WWW.ASIC.ORG

## Old English Golf Course

Continued from page 50

cent sand subsurface chosen for an ideal percolation rate, Whelchel says.

Drainage is accomplished by 1-foot-wide and 1-inch-thick flat pipe laid out in a heringbone design on each green. These Hurdzan-Fry greens follow the same pattern as more expensive ones, but with the flat pipe there is no need for trench-digging.

The pipe was developed for road construction. It is covered with landscape fabric to keep out mud and other particles, then pinned to the bottom of the green surface and covered by about a foot of sand. The pipes can be set by a skeleton crew in a relatively short period of time. The developers also saved by putting in only a few tiered greens.

Whelchel says that compromises between a designer's vision and the owners' pocket-books is necessary in these types of projects.

"You have to talk about what to do to fix things within the budget," he says. "It's the willingness to be flexible and to make changes



PHOTO COURTESY OF HURDZAN/FRY

in the field that don't really affect the course. You can't let your ego get in the way. Sixteen of the holes fit in pretty well. On the other two holes, I could've used more money, but I don't think the golfers will notice."

*Continued on page 56*

**A view from the 18th hole tee. It is one of several of the course's holes with a stunning vista.**

# it's here

The #1 industry magazine unveils the most valuable industry web site for golf course superintendents



# www.golfdom.com

For more information, contact publisher Pat Jones at 800-225-4569 • fax: 440-891-2675 • e-mail: [pjones@advanstar.com](mailto:pjones@advanstar.com)

## Old English Golf Course

Continued from page 55

The builders were blessed with excellent river-bottom soil on the flat first nine. Fears that they'd be building on rock on the back side were unfounded when they discovered 8 inches of soil on the slopes, negating the need to truck earth up the steep hills.

Time and money were saved on fair-

way drainage by using a large wheel-trencher that allowed them to set pipe more quickly and by bulldozing slopes for maximum run-off. Megenity expects that, despite its river valley location, the course will be open more quickly after big rains than others in the region.

Fairways were seeded with four cul-

tivars of fungus-resistant bluegrass. "We wanted to use zoysia, but sprigging zoysia before you can get a full stand takes about a year, and our budget is too tight," Megenity says.

The greens are L93 bentgrass and the rough areas in hard-to-mow hills have been seeded with fescue, which won't be irrigated or fertilized.

Though a teacher, Megenity also holds a law degree, which he put to use in permitting and incorporation tasks that normally would cost course developers big bucks in legal and consultant fees. The Old English project, particularly, with the involvement of so many governmental agencies due to its flood-plain status, was an expensive red-tape proposition. Megenity estimates that he did more than \$100,000 in legal work to get it off the ground.

When Old English opens, golfers will have the experience of playing in an isolated setting. There will be no homes or other developments adjoining the links. In addition, the spacious grounds assure that foursomes will seldom cross paths with other groups.

The pure golf experience promises the kinds of variations in terrain and shot-making challenges that bring golfers back time and again. The drive to English, at the intersection of U.S. 64 and Indiana 37 (two-lane country highways), is about one hour from Louisville and most other population centers, but many players will probably make the trek, especially for an under-\$40 round.

"Golf courses like this are a lot more fun," Whelchel says. "When you get \$10 million, you can do damn near anything you want to. This takes more patience.

"We tried to create a good golf course within the framework of what we were given. I think we've done it." ■

*Allar, a free-lance writer from nearby Floyds Knobs, Ind., can't wait to move his family to English, Ind — for the free golf.*

# A better bermuda. Count on it.

## 1 DARKER

Bull's-Eye has a deep blue-green color that's shades darker than other bermudas.

## 4 QUICKER

Bull's-Eye transitions from winter overseeding faster than other bermudas and recovers quicker from injury.

## 2 TOUGHER

Bull's-Eye resists scalping and stands up to wear and shade better than other bermudas.

## 5 SPORTIER

Bull's-Eye has a tight canopy of stiff leaves for better footing on sports fields and a better lie for golf.

## 3 EASIER

Bull's-Eye has no seedheads and slower vertical growth for less mowing. Takes a reel or rotary mower.



**BULL'S-EYE**  
Bermuda

For details, call 800/447-1840.  
www.westcoastturf.com.

**WEST COAST**  
**TURF**  
Life is Short. Sod it!

CIRCLE NO. 125