

It's the antithesis of Augusta National GC. What Augusta is — historic, hallowed and high-falutin' — Golf Plus is not. If Augusta is the glamorous Rolls Royce of golf courses, then Golf Plus is the humble Pinto with 152,832 miles — and counting.

Golf Plus is a par-three executive nine-hole course and driving range located about five miles from Augusta National. The two courses are located on the same famed Washington Road. But the similarities stop there. Cold.

Regis Costabile is the owner/general manager/superintendent/teaching professional/cash register clerk/phone attendant of Golf Plus. You might think he'd resent the club down the road and all that it stands for — power, money and prestige — but that's not the case at all.

The prodigious Augusta machine helps Costabile's itty-bitty business, especially during Masters week. "Augusta is absolutely *great* for my business," Costabile announces.

Except on this ugly April day. It's Monday of Master's week and what looks like the beginning of monsoon season in Georgia. A steady, hard and chilly rain refuses to let up. And for the first time in 20 years, Augusta cancels the day's practice round and closes the course to spectators.

It's a sad say for the thousands of spectators who showed up to watch some golf. Many drove several hours from Northern states, but were left pimento cheese sandwichless and holding bags from Burger King. "When Augusta closes during Masters week, you know the weather has to be bad," Costabile says.

It's one of those dreary days where everything looks like it's colored in black and white, except Costabile's untucked bright-yellow polo shirt. He sits at a small table in the center of his cluttered, pint-sized pro shop watching the Iraqi war on CNN. A cat naps peacefully on a chair nearby. They are the only souls in the place.

Costabile says Golf Plus, located a pitching wedge down the street from Club Car, would be packed if the weather was as half as sunny as his shirt. There would be a line of people waiting to get on the driving range, and each of the nine holes on the executive course would be four-deep with golfers.

Instead, his business for the day has gone

At Opposite Ends of the Spectrum

BY LARRY AYLWARD



THE TWO COURSES
ARE LOCATED ON
THE SAME FAMED
WASHINGTON
ROAD. BUT THE
SIMILARITIES STOP
THERE

down the drain with the rain. But Costabile, a tall and friendly man who sports silver hair, a well-trimmed mustache, a George Hamilton-like tan and a Jimmy Buffett-type attitude, doesn't seem too miffed about the day's lost business and the weatherman's forecast of rain for the week's remainder.

Costabile, who has owned Golf Plus for 13 years, says the business will eventually kick in, even after Masters week. That's when the locals, who normally lay low until the tournament is over, dust off their drivers and head to his range.

"We had a good year last year," Costabile says. "They absolutely beat the grass off the ground. You can always tell how good a year you had by how much grass is left at the end of it."

Although he enjoys wearing his turf maintenance hat, he admits it's no fun fixing the army of divots left on the driving range after a busy day. "The only way to realize how much work it is, is to let 10 people with 100 golf balls each stand on your front lawn and hit them," he says. "Then when they leave you have to repair the turf."

Oh, the pain of running your own business and having to be the jack of all trades. Would Costabile trade in Golf Plus for a gig at the "other" course down the road that's literally located on the other side of the railroad tracks?

Not a chance.

While Costabile agrees with the throngs that say Augusta is one of the greatest courses in the universe, he's content to make his living mowing the turf, keeping the books and doing just about everything else at Golf Plus. There are plenty of miles left on the business.

Costabile is perfectly happy working in the shadow of the giant.

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