

GOLF 'SCAPING

An open space forever & ever

■ The Merit Club in Gurnee, Ill. has received a singular honor: its 320 acres have been granted a government easement, preserving it as open space for perpetuity.

The gently rolling course, owned by Bert Getz, includes 30 acres of wetlands, a 30-acre savannah and a two-acre tree nursery. One thousand, four hundred of the course's 2,200 trees are holdovers from the original site.

"When I decided to convert our family farm into the Merit Club, the goal all along was to save the scenic and natural character of the land," says Getz. "I've owned the property for 25 years and didn't want to see it paved or roofed over. Granting a conservation easement completes my efforts to save the site's beauty for future generations."

Developers had originally approached Getz about building an 1,800-home luxury golf course community on his property.

He decided to keep just 100 acres and to allow a small subdivision to be built on another 100 acres.

"I wanted to do something right," Getz told a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* last year, "and not let the almighty dollar make the decision."

Getz began working with GorLands, a corporation for open lands and an affiliate of Open Lands Project, to establish the easement in 1991. Details were finalized



Developing a 'unique piece of property' attracted veteran superintendent Oscar Miles to the project.

last fall. "The Merit Club is a particularly exciting project for CorLands," says director Tom Hahn. "Not only is it a model in environmentally-sensitive golf course design, but it also sets an example for other owners who realize that the open space their courses provide in areas of rapid growth is invaluable."

The easement eliminates any commercial office or residential development on the site. Buildings may only be constructed in two designated "maintenance" and "club house facility" zones (totaling 15 acres) and must be directly related to operation of the golf course. If golf course operation ceases for any reason, the land must remain open and be allowed to revert back to its natural state. These restrictions apply even if the land is sold.

▲ The Merit Club land contains 2,200 trees, 1,400 of which are native to the area.

Photo by Henry C. Schwenk

A 'super' challenge—Course superintendent, Oscar Miles—a superintendent for 32 years—says he accepted the position at CorLands after he realized that here was an opportunity that doesn't come along often: a chance to develop "a unique piece of property." Miles was involved the project from the planning stages, and he and his men did the landscaping finish work.

"Each hole is a corridor," says Miles. "We think in terms of one hole at a time, from tee to green."

Pennlinks, Penneagle and Penncross varieties are used at CorLands. The turf from tee to green grows from two inches to six inches, to one-foot high roughs. Natural grasslands grow as high as four feet.

The course includes a sod nursery, and Miles recently began a native tree nursery.

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