



HE'S AT HOME, WITH A RANGE

'I smell the fresh cut of grass, and to me, it's just heaven.' **DOUG FIPPS**, head professional at Delaware Springs Golf Course in Burnet

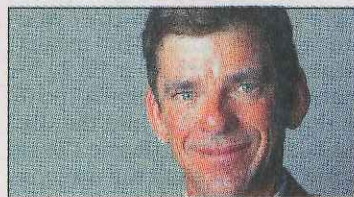


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Doug Fipps, left, the Head Golf Professional at Delaware Springs Golf Course in Burnet, has been at the course for nearly 20 years and has helped create an enjoyable environment for any golfer, including preparing for a

tournament for the Texas Game Warden Association. But his job doesn't stop there. He also has to meet payroll, tend to the golf course and its employees and even help golfers choose the right golf ball, at top.

As head golf pro, Delaware Springs' Fipps carries more than just his clubs



KEVIN ROBBINS

BURNET — Low clouds skimmed the Hill Country as Doug Fipps braked his truck on familiar gravel. A thousand miles east, men worth millions of dollars prepared to start the last major championship of the golf season,

dream of one day reporting to the first tee at the PGA Championship — just to say that he had, just once.

But Fipps was needed elsewhere Thursday. So he parked at the tidy municipal course in the

reigns.

Delaware Springs Golf Course hired Fipps in 1992. He came as a 26-year-old assistant to the first golf professional, a man named Al Pryor. On his first day, Fipps paused to absorb what he saw from his window as he turned from U.S. 281 into the property where he would make his life.

He still enjoys that tender ritual.

"When I drive up, I spot the No. 7 green," Fipps said Thursday, before his course got busy. "I see how good it looks. Then I look at No. 3. You see No. 2. You look

where Fipps examines the sky, hopes for rain and inhales before he unlocks the golf shop.

"I smell the fresh cut of grass," he said. "And to me, it's just heaven."

A broad-shouldered man with cheeks that go ruddy in the sun, Fipps has been a Class A PGA golf professional since his eligibility expired on the golf team at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, La. He's accumulated the knowledge required for a career in his chosen game. He knows, for instance, how to teach

ROBBINS: Fipps in 'heaven

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golf, forecast an annual budget, meet a payroll, grow turf, buy golf shirts, fold them and sell them, recommend the right golf ball, schedule his 18 full-time employees, organize a charity outing, script a leaderboard, grill a cheeseburger, install a shaft, display equipment, swipe a MasterCard and calculate handicaps in his head.

His membership in the PGA of America allows him to enter tournaments with other professionals in the Southern Texas Section. If he were to play his way into the national championship for club pros, and somehow finish inside the top 20 there, Fipps could someday find himself in a place like the posh Atlanta Athletic Club, where the 93rd PGA Championship opened the morning he parked his truck at Delaware Springs and paused, as it always does, for the scent of mown Bermuda.

Fipps and his assistant, a former Burnet Bulldog named Larry Courtney, processed the flow of players trying to finish their rounds before the clouds broke. At mid-morning, Fipps opened the building near the 13th tee to check the beer inventory. He then walked to the maintenance building, examined the fleet of 80 electric carts and filtered a handful of sand stored nearby. He liked what he felt through his fingers.

In suburban Atlanta, Steve Stricker (career earnings: \$32.8 million) built his lead at the PGA Championship. Meanwhile, Fipps wondered how his projected 2012 revenues of \$1.4 million would reckon with \$1.8-million budget he explained the night before to the Burnet City Council. Delaware Springs typically sees 45,000 to 49,000 rounds a year. Like many of his 27,000 club-professional colleagues in the PGA of America, Fipps needs more people to rattle down his fairways.

As the head professional and general manager of



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See more photos of Fipps and of the golf course with this story online.

Delaware Springs, he worries about the future of a game in which he has very little control. His course is a model municipal facility — interesting design, new grass on the greens, a stable and enthusiastic membership and a cult following from out-of-

towners. But the relentless drought and 100-degree heat discourage potential players, even at a green fee that never exceeds \$45.

Delaware Springs survives in some part through tournaments and outings. Fipps schedules between 80 and 100 of them a year, and it's a part of his job he enjoys. On Thursday, more than 150 players were expected for a 1 p.m. event benefiting the Texas Game Wardens Association. As a rare treat, Fipps would get to play.

' as Delaware Springs pro



Far left: Doug Fipps helps read a putt for playing partners Rob Wilkerson, putting, and Russell Tippie, behind, as they participate in a three-man scramble at Delaware Springs.

Above: Fipps' office has some memorabilia on the walls like his high school golf team picture and also doubles as a storage facility for all things golf.

At left: Fipps watches his drive with fellow playing competitors Larry Courtney, left, an assistant pro at the course, and Stayton Lindeman, right.

Ralph Barrera photos
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He sweated through the afternoon, needling his brother-in-law, who played in his group, and speculating about the future of Tiger Woods. The outing concluded late in the day.

Fipps had another outing Friday. The Burnet Police Department sponsored it. Proceeds went to needy children in Burnet County. What they could do with \$1.445 million is beyond question. What a handsome municipal golf course in the oaks of Burnet could do with just 156

more players a month — the starting field Thursday at the PGA Championship — is beyond question.

By 8 p.m., the big pickups had left the Delaware Springs parking lot. Fipps finished an invoice in his office. It had been another day of no rain.

It was time to go home, to see his wife and daughter. Fipps walked under the moose mount that hangs in the rough-paneled clubhouse to make his way to his truck, passing the 10th tee. He'd be there again in less than 12

hours. He'd imagine playing those hard finishing holes at the PGA. He'd remember, as he crossed the 10th tee and unlocked his shop, that he was a lucky man, getting to sell shirts and check cards for math and recommend balls to people he's known and long time and people he's never met.

He'd inhale. Cut grass: A golf course in the morning.

His course.
"There's just nothing like it."

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