

Flyboy Aviation Disc Golf Field of Dreams

“If I build it, will they come?”

By Kelly Leggette

I've always loved flinging flying projectiles at targets. Whether throwing a boomerang at myself, firing a Maverick missile at an enemy tank, or ripping a disc golf drive off the tee to land in my putting strike zone, to me, the sensation is exactly the same: mesmerizing...therapeutic in fact! I think this thrill comes from executing a precise delivery, anticipating the outcome as the projectile sails towards the target, and the immediate gratification of scoring a hit. I haven't strapped on a fighter jet in 20 years, and I do miss that particular thrill, but trust me, disc golf provides that same exhilaration...if not more so, honest!

I bought a disc golf basket about four years ago, and placed it in the yard of my half finished aircraft hangar/house in West Georgia, which I affectionately call Flyboy Aviation. Shooting at one basket all the time got a little old, so I purchased two more and placed the three baskets here and there around my 5-acre property. Approaching the baskets from different directions resulted in nine unique disc golf holes. Why stop there? Adding just a few more baskets in the (very accommodating) neighbors' yards yielded a full 18-hole par 3 course. Sweet! Shared baskets, crossing fairways, who cares? Many of the holes were actually quite unique, if not spectacular...I thought so anyway!

Not knowing a single Atlanta disc golfer at that time, I played solo on my little private course for almost a year, until a chance meeting one errant Tuesday at Deerlick park changed my life. Justin Drange and Chris Millay, two of Atlanta's best disc golfers, (and ironically, founding members of AceRunners) were teeing off on #1 at Deerlick when I showed up. They agreed to let me join them for a round of golf. I imagine they figured this old dude would just slow them down, but I happened to be on my game that day and hung in there with these two young pros. I mentioned my 18-hole private course and invited them to come check it out. Admittedly skeptical, Justin and Chris showed up at Flyboy Aviation two weeks later with Drew Price (head guy at AceRunners.com), “2-Disc Dan,” and “Chilly Will,” three more of Atlanta's best disc golfers.

My folks and I rolled out the red carpet for these guys. My Mom, Lillian, had lunch ready when they arrived, and after the round of disc golf, we feasted on fresh veggies from Wayne's (my dad's) garden. After dinner we threw some boomerangs and later rolled the Piper Cub out of the hangar and did some evening flying. The guys enjoyed playing my disc golf course, sure enough, but what struck me was that they seemed to enjoy the airplanes, boomerangs, and socializing with me and my folks just as much as the golf. They hung out at Flyboy until late in the evening, and vowed to come back soon with more of their disc golf buddies. This was my Ah Ha moment: It was the whole *experience* of a day at Flyboy Aviation that made it so enjoyable and memorable for them, not just playing a fun disc golf course. The idea of building a disc golf “field of dreams” was born, but if I built it, would they come?

There are some wonderful public disc golf courses around town, which will challenge your skills and provide that exhilaration and excitement we disc golfers all crave.... while you're actually playing the course. But the experience usually ends soon after the putt on #18, in a parking lot, no facilities, no food, just a drive home to look forward to, often resulting in a forgettable day of golf. I decided that Flyboy would offer much more than that to the disc golfers who made the effort to travel way out to Whitesburg Georgia to play my course. The course design would have to be leading edge, championship caliber, not only offering a great challenge but rewarding the players with unique one-of-a-kind holes, scenic beauty, and interesting peripheral features, with first rate facilities available to support the course. Accomplishing all this was a far cry from the 18-hole, pitch and putt course I had set up in my yard, and a half-built hangar/house! After pondering the possibility of the ultimate disc golf venue for a few weeks, I wrote out my requirements, and launched into building my disc golf "field of dreams."

I identified three "critical cornerstones" required to build the ultimate disc golf venue: An awesome tract of land on which to build a championship caliber course, a comfortable, inviting clubhouse with a pro-shop, dinning, and maybe even lodging facilities, and finally, the right people to run the operation and make it fun. As if I had coincidentally been on the correct path all along, the light bulb flickered on in my noggin, and I discovered that I already had all three "critical cornerstones," right in front of me! The land for the course? The airpark community property I lived on, right out my hangar door! The clubhouse? My half-completed airplane hangar/house, just waiting for the final defining features. The right people to operate it? My retired parents whom I'd just recently moved into the hangar/house could handle day-to-day operations; my new fiancé (now wife) could run the business end; and my new carpenter at the time, Brad Orman was the perfect fit for course pro. As it turned out, I had effectively been building my disc golf "field of dreams" for quite some time, without even knowing it, starting way back before I'd ever heard of disc golf! I just got a chill.

The course: I had bought my airplane hangar in a community airpark encompassing hundreds of beautiful acres: hills, lakes, woods, manicured grass taxiways, and a plush ½ mile long Bermuda grass runway stretching right through the middle of the property. Little did I know it was disc golf Nirvana, just begging to become a world-class course! Once I finally set about designing the course in earnest, it took several months of flinging discs all over the airpark, circling over the property in airplanes, and countless hours staring at it on Goggle Earth, to yield 18 new holes, in addition to some serious tweaking to the holes I'd already set up around my yard. I began inviting my new disc golf friends out to play the new layouts, which I regularly adjusted, largely based on input from the disc golfers themselves, who were now showing up at the monthly "Flyboy Action" in increasing numbers...15, 20, 30 at a time! Wow, they really *were* coming! Maybe it was mostly Lillian's cooking that attracted them, but the course was starting to make a real name for itself too. Before long, some of the touring pros caught wind of Flyboy Disc Golf. Tom Monroe and Phil Arthur showed up early on, followed later by Liz Carr, Avery and Valerie Jenkins, Nate Doss, Cameron Todd, Leslie Herndon, Dave Feldberg, and "The Champ," Ken Climo himself...world champions, hanging out at Flyboy! All

these world-class players have been extremely encouraging to me, and provided invaluable feedback on how to improve the course. The days of shared baskets and crossing fairways were long gone, and by now the flow of the course could accommodate a full-blown disc golf tournament. The layout had evolved from 9 to 18 to 27 holes, and at one time there were 36...two full 18-hole courses! The available land out here is so vast and suitable for disc golf that I could continue carving out excellent golf holes, but hey, you gotta stop somewhere! Now that the dust has settled, the layout has matured into a 27-hole, 14,000-foot, championship caliber course playing a par 101, with some of the most spectacular holes in the game, including the longest known disc golf hole in the world at 1600 feet playing down the manicured Bermuda grass runway. The course can also be played as an 18-hole "Signature" par 72 layout, in line with the layout of a ball golf PGA tournament course. Most golfers want to play the entire 27 holes though, assuming they have the required 4 to 5 hours to kill! My "field of dreams" disc golf course is finally a reality, and has truly exceeded even my greatest expectations. One excited player reviewed the course this way: "If God had a disc golf course, he might have concrete pads, but I bet he would copy Flyboy on several holes!" That comment put a tear in my eye...and we're working on the tee pads!

The clubhouse: Back when I bought my airplane hangar, there were no living quarters inside. A divorce created the need for a place to live, and I set about building my house inside the hangar itself, a hangar/house, which is what I'd always dreamed of living in anyway! What bachelor wouldn't want a gigantic living room filled with airplanes, ping-pong and pool tables, comfy old couches, and a 24-foot wide movie screen? Unfortunately, having never built a project of this magnitude before, I was totally winging it, and the progress dragged on slowly for a few years. Then...I was introduced to disc golf by my friend "Riz," and my hangar/house project practically ground to a halt as I found myself playing disc golf every chance I got! Miraculously, some of the living space eventually became livable and I moved in, vowing to complete the project around me at my own pace...yeah, right. My saving grace finally came when I fell in love with an incredible woman who knew much more about creating unique spaces to live in than I ever will. She gave me the inspiration and confidence to push through and complete the remaining 30% of my hangar/house project, which now reflects both our design tastes. Believe it or not, many women do not want to live in "the ultimate bachelor pad" with their in-laws (how could she not love my coffee table made out of an old aircraft radial engine?) and alas, our subsequent marriage resulted in me moving back out of the hangar/house and into her beautiful house in Midtown Atlanta, leaving my folks and our two dogs to hold down the Flyboy Aviation fort. Funny the hyzers life throws at you! It's all good though, and my ultimate bachelor pad has morphed into the ultimate disc golf clubhouse, complete with a pro-shop, Mom's southern cooking, bunkroom, and big screen in the giant living room for tournament briefings via power point and laser pointer. Who would have thunk it?

The people: My final cornerstone requirement, the right people to run the place, has turned out to be the most important of all. Without Wayne and Lillian living there to add that wonderful southern hospitality, Flyboy wouldn't have the warmth and inviting feel it does. My folks enjoy getting to know the golfers, and during garden season, Wayne

(undisputed “guru of sweet-corn”) usually sends them home with a bag or two of fresh picked veggies. Lillian has fed many a disc golfer at the break between hole 18 and 19, and keeps the place looking spotless. My course pro, Brad Orman, more passionate about the sport than anyone I know, has become a regular feature here for the last year or so, contributing his own flavor to the texture of Flyboy Aviation. Not only is he always up for a round to escort disc golfers on the private course, but he performs a myriad of other functions including prepping for events, never-ending course maintenance, disc retrieval from the three lakes (a big job), building walkways and docks, and whatever else needs to be done. Our two dogs, Max and Morgan, our Flyboy Aviation “greeters,” add to the homey atmosphere of the place, although Morgan does tend to work the disc golfers pretty hard for power bars, and ham sandwiches...you’ve been forewarned! My lovely supportive wife Suellyn, not particularly interested in the sport itself, works in the background on the business side, mostly figuring out how to keep us all out of jail (kidding...mostly). I retain the title of CEO, or something like that...”It’s good to be da King!”

I’ve always dreamed Flyboy Aviation would someday amount to something, become a really special, unique place for folks to visit. I think I was supposed to build it, as if it were meant to be, and somehow it all fell into place. I’m sure I’ll never feel like Flyboy is completely finished, as we continually strive to improve...better baskets and tee pads, improved camping facilities, killer website...the list goes on and on. Heck, we’ve come this far, might as well shoot for “best disc golf venue on the planet” award! Of course owning and operating your own private disc golf course is not without its trials and tribulations, but that sounds like a future article for AceRunners.com. The years of grunt work, setbacks, and dwindling bank accounts, have all been well worth it. The payoff for me now is seeing folks thoroughly enjoying themselves here, and leaving with a huge smile on their faces and some lasting memories of a day at Flyboy Aviation Disc Golf, my “field of dreams.”