

GOLF

Success is in site for Internet entrepreneur

Former Dunlop exec turns love of the game into profitable venture

A lost bet has turned into a new career opportunity for Woody Arnold.

Arnold is a Park Country Club member and one of the top 30 amateur golfers in Western New York. He has started a business selling customized golf balls on the Internet.

All you do is click on his web site, pick the kind of ball you want to buy, choose whatever words or graphics you want on the ball, and within a few minutes you've placed an order that gets delivered in one week.

It's a great idea that came about after he lost a stock market contest with his brother last year.

"We both picked four stocks, started with a simulated \$100,000 and whoever wound up with the most money at the end of the year had to pay the winner two dozen personalized golf balls," Arnold



MARK GAUGHAN

said.

When Arnold went looking to get the balls, however, he ran into stumbling blocks. Mail-order houses require you to buy six or 12 dozen if you want a logo on the side. And while there are a few Internet sites for customized balls, there weren't any easy, do-it-yourself sites.

"The thought was to take a fairly simple concept that is not happening right now," Arnold said. "People don't personalize their golf balls much. It's too much of a hassle. It takes too long. It costs too much. You can't do it simply and easily."

Until now, Arnold's site, called Zipline Golf (www.ziplinegolf.com), is up and running. You can put whatever name or words you want on the ball, and there are more than 200 graphics on the site that you can click onto the ball. You see exactly what the ball looks like on the computer screen. If you want to draw your own logo, you can do that, too.

The balls cost between \$5 and \$10 more per dozen than at a retail outlet. That doesn't count a one-time, \$10 design set-up fee. Top-Flite Aero balls, for instance, sell for \$24 in retail stores and \$32 with your name on it via Zipline Golf. Titleist Tour Distance balls retail for \$30 and cost \$36 via Zipline.

The idea for the business came at an ideal time for the 50-year-old Arnold.

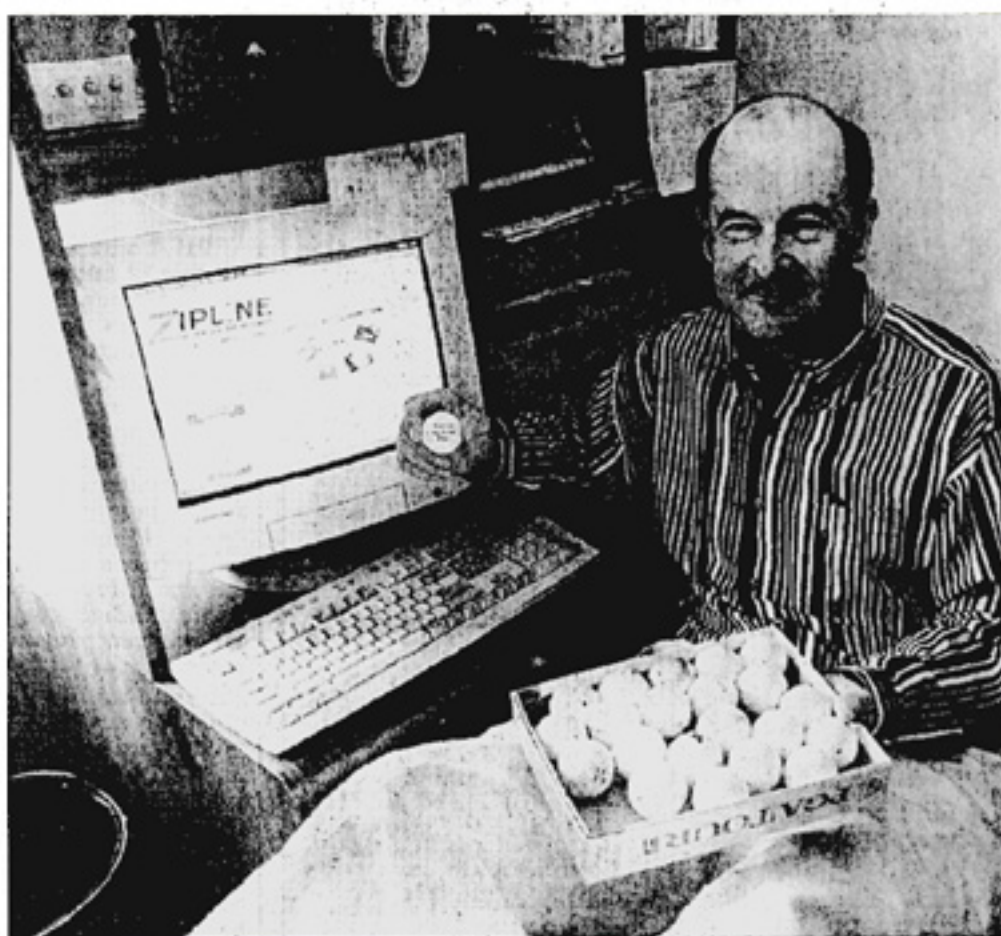
Last August, after 25 years in the marketing business, he quit his job as vice president for marketing at Dunlop Tire Co.

"My three-pronged plan was to do consulting work, stock market work, and work on my golf game," Arnold said. "I was 50 years old and had, for lack of a better term, a mid-life crisis. I thought, let's see if I can take Woody Arnold in a different direction."

The fact he has found a new business related to golf couldn't suit him better. Arnold (whose first name is DeWitt) is a golf nut.

He's a five-time club champion at Park and has received a few votes in The News' top 10 ranking of amateurs in recent years. He almost won the Buffalo District title in 1993. He was three ahead with two holes to go but finished double bogey-bogey and lost in a playoff to Bob Rosen. ("That still sticks in my craw," he said.)

He has played about 20 of the top 100 courses in the world, including No. 1 Pine Valley numerous times. A tire dealer invites him



MIKE GROLLA

Customized golf balls are a click away when you use Woody Arnold's service.

to the famed New Jersey club. ("It's head and shoulders above every other golf course in the world," he said.)

He's also a practice fanatic who refuses to let bad weather interfere with his regimen.

During the winter, he hits balls outside into a practice net in front of his garage. He also practices 40-yard wedge shots in his backyard once a week, all winter long.

"I have a trash can full of balls that I use," he said. "I hit 'em and leave 'em there. When the snow melts, all of the balls appear in the corner of my yard. It helps keep the feel."

Arnold was born in South Korea and moved every four years as a child because his father was a U.S. Army colonel. That may help explain his disciplined approach to practice.

Every day, all winter long, Arnold takes swings with a weighted club and also practices on an indoor putting machine. It's one of the high-tech models that changes contour.

"I work very hard at it," he said. "Actually, I should be much better than I am considering how hard I work."

But that's what Arnold loves about the game.

"There's no fooling yourself in golf," he said. "You get what you put into it. I had a tough job, and the course was a place where I could go and really free myself up. I love to hit the golf ball."

Now that he's in business on his own, Arnold will be doing more of that this summer. And, of course, the balls will have his name on them.