**GLENMORE FROM 1955 TO 1992**

FRANK KESSLER BEGINS THE GLENMORE DEVELOPMENT

*This article includes a brief review of the history of the Glenmore property from 1955 to 1992, following the 100-plus years of the Magruder family, and prior to the beginning of the community we know today. The experiences of owners during this period will be covered, with a focus on how Frank and Peggy Kessler acquired and developed the Glenmore community. (Information about the “Manor House” and the ghosts of Glenmore will be introduced in future articles.)*

As described in previous articles, the Magruder family owned and lived at Glenmore for about 114 years, until the last member of that family sold the property in 1955 for $82,500 to Kirtley Farm, Incorporated. Charles Kirtley, owner of Kirtley Farm, Incorporated, a land speculation company, moved in to the manor house one or two years after buying the property, and lived alone in the manor house on the property until it was sold in 1958 to Clay and Barbara Camp, who had been in the cattle business with Kirtley. At the time the Camps lived in Goochland County.

CLAY AND BARBARA CAMP – After purchasing the Glenmore property, the Camps made major changes to the manor house before finally occupying it in 1959. They remodeled the kitchen, the living room, the dining room, the hallways, the bedrooms, and had added a small porch and patio behind the manor house. They even built a swimming pool on one side of the house, between the Magruder gravesite and the garden. Clay and Barbara Camp trained yearling horses and sold them at various racetracks including Saratoga and Kentucky. They immediately began calling the property Glenmore Farms. A small problem arose early when they learned that a couple of lots important to their plans were not included in the sale price. As a result, they negotiated a deal for the lots to proceed with their plans for their horse training enterprise.

The Camps built a half-mile training track on the property where Rivanna Village is now located. Clay said the entrance to the training track was where the Fire House now stands. And, because they had brought horses with them to Glenmore, they built a barn that houses the Equestrian Center operations today. Clay said that with the barn, the half-mile training track, and the overall pasture and riding areas, Glenmore Farms was one of the largest trainers of yearlings in the world. He said that people would come from all over to see the horses, the Glenmore Farms facility, and the shows that were held to exhibit the horses. He pointed out that riding trails were built throughout the property, and steeplechase races were held from time to time.

The Camps reported the people at the Kentucky tracks looked forward to their visits each year, since they always brought and shared some of the moonshine brewed on the Glenmore property. Apparently, the bartender at the Keswick Club built a still to produce “white lighting” on Glenmore property, near where the Clubhouse of Club at Glenmore now stands. The Camps reported that one year a problem occurred when their farm manager reported that a still on the property had been discovered by Virginia lawmen and was being taken down. When Clay expressed concern about the discovery of the still, the manager told him not to worry that this was only one of two stills, and there was a second one whose location Clay remained unaware. Another incident reported by Clay and Barbara involved one of the workers informing them that Virginia National Guard troops were conducting maneuvers on parts of the Glenmore property adjacent to the Rivanna River. (*This was probably the area now covered by golf holes 1, 2, 16, 17, and 18.)* When Clay learned of this, he hurried down to confront the Major in charge of the troops and asked why the National Guard was on his land without permission. The Major replied, “isn’t this Limestone Farm?” Clay immediately told them that Limestone Farm was a couple of miles to the east, so the troops departed. In 1080, Glenmore Farms was sold by the Camps to Walter and Laura Jean Casati who had moved from Germany. The transaction was reported to have been a transfer resulted in several problems and controversies between the Camps and the Casati family.

THE CASATI’S TO THURBER FOREMAN TO FRANK AND PEGGY KESSLER – To purchase Glenmore, the Casati’s formed the Glenmore Land Trust, which was administered by James B. Murray, Jr. of Charlottesville. Among their other activities, the Casati’s hosted hunting parties at Glenmore. Not much more is known about the Casati’s until they sold the property in December 1986 to Thurber M. Foreman.

Foreman resided in the manor house until 1989, when he was approached by Frank Kessler who knocked on his door and offered to buy the Glenmore property. Foreman told him he would have to pay the full price for the property, since the realtor had not been informed of Frank’s interest. Frank, who had already inspected the property, agreed to pay the full price, and called the realtor friend of his who had listed the property and told him that he would receive his full commission on the sale. The deal was completed on October 17, 1989.

FRANK AND PEGGY KESSLER – When Thurber M. Foreman sold Glenmore to Frank and Peggy Kessler, major changes took place in the history of Glenmore. Although Frank and Peggy knew the property had rich history, it was the vision that Glenmore was the perfect place for a golf and recreational community in the Charlottesville area that inspired them to develop the property that has now become home to over 900 families.

The idea that led to the birth of the Glenmore golf and country club community was formed during the 1980s, when Frank traveled with his daughter Kandi to amateur golf tournaments, many of which were in private communities around the country. While on the road with Kandi and her golf events and tournaments, Frank spoke with club managers, course superintendents and others, further educating himself about each of their clubs. From his real estate experience, he knew that gated, planned communities were appreciating from 18% to 20% per year. Frank, an established realtor and owner of Real Estate III, simultaneously continued to expand his knowledge of the business by attending seminars about real estate. It did not take long for him to formulate a plan, as he stated it *“to acquire property for a large community, and to have a golf course, kind of like what Glenmore is now.”* However, at that time, appraisers in the area did not understand much about this concept since Farmington was the only major golf community in or close to Charlottesville.

Frank approached the chairman of local a savings and loan company, who had shown an interest in and encouraged Frank regarding land development in the area. When Frank told him about his ideas for a community that included a golf course, and that there was a piece of land that could be bought, the initial response was not hopeful. The chairman said *“Frank, although you have a golf course in mind, our feasibility studies tell me that we wouldn’t sell a house for $200,000 for about seven years. The average sales would be about $30,000 to $35,000.”*  But, he added, *“let me send somebody in to do another feasibility study.”*  Frank was also advised to *“take the golf course out and put in a real nice tennis and swim facility and make it more of a family community.”* Frank also was urged visit other golf communities and Richmond and beyond to look at similar developments. *“As soon as you have done that,”* the chairman said, *“we will do a joint venture for a country club, because I think you are right on this.”*  Frank did as counseled, and a loan was approved for purchase of the Glenmore property.

To follow up on the chairman’s suggestion, Frank explored similar communities up and down the East Coast, including several in Richmond, in Florida and in South Carolina. Developments in Florida, such as Palm Beach Polo, were somewhat like what he had in mind, but they had palm trees, white wooden fences, and small houses. Frank wanted to find something that would fit Charlottesville, Virginia.

On one of his trips to Williamsburg, Frank spoke to a salesman at Ford’s Colony. The salesman gave him a list of things that are most important in a community. He said the list is based on a survey of the members and emphasized that surveying members about ‘what is important to them’ is vital in a development of this type. The salesman then asked Frank what he thought most people felt were important. Frank responded, *“golf course*”. The salesman replied *“gatehouse”.* This brought a chuckle from both. The salesman said a golf course costs more than $4 million and a gatehouse costs $50,000. Yet residents consider the gatehouse to be most important. This exchange prompted Frank to explore the intricacies of gatehouses as he continued to visit golf communities. He even took pictures of gatehouses.

From these visits he learned many things about gatehouses, including the importance of being able to screen people coming in and provide a box for people to deposit permits when leaving the community. In addition to looking more closely at gatehouses, Frank also learned from fine clubs, such as Fox Chapel in Pittsburgh, that clubs must be kept as private as possible. In fact, he found that the issue of privacy is paramount in most clubs. He also learned that private roads were highly valued and an important amenity to keep the community from getting a “resort feel”. A “resort feel”, he learned, is one in which non-residents take up all or most of the housing and pay for a major share of the upkeep, thus management must cater to them. In resorts, for example, people come from all over for brief stays and are usually strangers to one another. He was told over and over that when a community responds more to non-residents than to residents, and when most of the people who visit are strangers to one another, it takes on the “feel” of a resort. Frank decided then and there that he wanted to develop a Glenmore as a residential community that would have the best country club as its center piece.

Armed with a wealth of information and observations, Frank decided began conversations with Albemarle County planners about a planned residential community that would be gated and include a golf course and a full country club. He used some of the pictures he had taken at other developments. The planners agreed with Frank’s assessment that new homes would have to be built in the rural areas of the County unless building could be attractive to a country club development. A few days after his visit to the County planners, Frank received a call from a friend, who had known about Frank’s interests in a country club community, and who said, *“I want you to look at something, Frank.”* They drove out to Glenmore. It was all pasture and fences, and they stopped just about where the clubhouse is today. Frank said, *“I am going to put the clubhouse right here on this spot.”* And that is almost exactly where it was built!

Shortly thereafter the County planners, not knowing about Frank’s visit to Glenmore, called and said they would like him to look east of town. They said they had just abolished the Milton and the Stoney Point growth areas, because, as they said, neither of them would work quite as well as the County would like. But they advised Frank that there would be two big obstacles east of town – water and septic. During the conversation Frank said, *“what if I run the water out to the area from Pantops, and what if I build a tertiary plant and gave it to the County?”* They said it would be expensive, but such a decision would be up to Frank. Frank continued work on determining the specific features of such a gated, golf course, residential community even before he had the land.

Another hurdle confronted Frank when the Albemarle County Board Supervisor who represented the Keswick area telephoned Frank and indicated he could not support Board approval of the development Frank had in mind. Although disappointed, Frank had learned from discussions with area residents that the Volunteer Fire Department was seeking a larger station than the one that was housed in a single barn adjacent to the Keswick Post Office. After looking into what was needed, Frank immediately promised the head of the Volunteer Fire Department that he would include (and build) a new fire station in the plan for the Glenmore development. A few days later Frank received a call from the Supervisor saying that he had changed his mind and he could now support approval of the Glenmore development that Frank had in mind, partly because his phone was “ringing off the hook” taking calls from volunteer firemen who had heard about Frank’s offer.

The Glenmore development was back on track. Frank used the pictures he had taken of other clubs to put together a presentation showing what Glenmore would look like with the golf course, a clubhouse, a tennis facility, private roads, and, of course, a gatehouse. He hired Sally Welsh, daughter of George Welsh, the coach of the University of Virginia football team, to visit various organizations in the Charlottesville area to describe what was being proposed for Glenmore. The purpose was also to sign up people who might be interested in buying lots in the new development. Frank also began to build a sales staff to conduct tours of the property for people who expressed interest. One of the requirements for his sales team was that they would not apply pressure to potential buyers. Their training occurred in the Glenmore manor house, where Frank was living by this time, but soon became the main sales office. This low key, personal marketing effort resulted in more than 800 names of people showing interest in the project. As a result, eighty lots were sold on the first day, enough to pay off the loan that had been taken to buy the property. The date of the lot sales was October 15, 1992, which is now the date we are celebrating as Glenmore’s 30th birthday.

With the purchase of the land, the approval of the county, the financial arrangements falling into place, and people signing up to purchase lots and build homes, the next set of issues dealt with laying out the golf course, the streets, the gatehouse, the lots, and beginning the movement of land. A company experienced in golf course construction, based on the recommendations of some of the golf courses Frank had visited in Florida, was hired to take on the golf course. Local contractors were hired to develop the streets and lots for housing, and area homebuilders were encouraged to offer to build homes for people who had purchased lots. While all of this was taking place, another problem arose – the “Savings and Loan Crisis” hit the financing of building projects nationwide, and the financial institution Frank had been dealing with was caught up in it. At this juncture, Frank’s partner, Steve Runkle, was tasked with finding out who had taken over the loan application that he and Frank had submitted to the now out-of-business lending institution. When Steve was told by the federal agency handling the “crisis” that they could not reveal who now held the loan application, he informed them that he and Frank had sufficient commitments from people interested in purchasing Glenmore lots, and could easily pay off the loan application, and that he would take this to a higher authority if necessary. Upon hearing this, the agency informed Steve that a savings and loan company in Texas had acquired the loan application. Steve and Frank got in touch with the holders of the loan application and settled it within a few days.

The path to developing Glenmore was not easy from Frank. He had to overcome opposition of the County Supervisor, navigate the savings and loan crisis, and design and build a golf course, country club facility, survey and construct miles of roads, and plat, record and market over 650 lots on 2000 acres of land. However, Frank not only had a dream, but he also had the talent and ability to achieve his goal of developing Glenmore into a true golf and country club residential community. With much of the infrastructure was under way, Frank turned his attention to the Glenmore Country Club. This will be covered in future articles.

