

Pete Dye Golf Club Documentary - Story Outline

Pete Dye Golf Club Documentary

Story Outline for Producer

Working Title: *TBD*

Runtime: 30-40 minutes

Format: Documentary

LOGLINE

Pete Dye designed over 100 legendary golf courses. He put his name on one. Carved from an abandoned coal mine in West Virginia, alongside two miners who spent 18 years refusing to quit. This is the story of why.

THE STORY IN ONE PAGE

This is a story about perseverance, partnership, and pride.

James D. LaRosa was the son of Italian immigrants who came to work the coal mines of north-central West Virginia. His grandparents met at Cooks Mine in 1913 —on the very land where the golf course now sits. James D. worked the mines himself before building a successful business. He had a dream: to give something back to his community by building a golf course.

Pete Dye was the most influential golf course architect of his generation—the man behind TPC Sawgrass, Whistling Straits, and the Ocean Course at Kiawah Island. When James D. and his son Jimmy first showed Pete a different piece of land, Pete rejected it: “*Call it Miracle Mountain—because it’ll be a miracle if anyone comes to play it.*”

But when they showed him the abandoned strip mine—scarred, rusted, overlooked—Pete saw something no one else could see. He disappeared into the timber with a bundle of flags and emerged two hours later having already routed 18 holes in his head. He would design over 100 courses in his career. This is the only one he ever named after himself.

What followed was an **18-year journey** that tested everyone involved. Ice storms. Financial crises. Skeptics who said it would never happen. Pete's relentless perfectionism. Through it all, the LaRosa family and their team refused to quit.

On **July 4, 1995**, the Pete Dye Golf Club opened to the world. Pete rang a bell installed on the 12th hole in memory of his father. After 18 years, 18 holes were finally complete.

The club went on to earn national recognition—ranked among the best courses in America, hosting state championships and the PGA Nationwide Tour, attracting members from 27 states and 5 countries.

But this isn't just a golf story. It's a story about **West Virginia**—its coal heritage, its immigrant roots, its working-class values, and what happens when determination meets vision.

THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

ACT I: THE DREAM (8-10 min)

Setup: Introduce the LaRosa family heritage, Pete Dye, and the improbable partnership they formed.

- The LaRosa immigrant story—coal miners who built a life in West Virginia
- Pete Dye at the height of his career—legendary architect, known for impossible projects
- The rejected first site vs. the abandoned strip mine Pete chose instead
- Pete's commitment: *"If you give me total freedom, this could be one of the finest inland courses in the country."*

Tone: Aspirational, nostalgic, underdog setup

ACT II: THE STRUGGLE (10-15 min)

Journey: The years of obstacles, the relationships that formed, and what it took to keep going.

- The long road—18 years of setbacks, weather, financial pressure, skeptics
- Pete's perfectionism and the creative partnership with James D.
- The team that formed—superintendent, pros, staff who became family
- Near-misses and close calls that would have stopped most people

Tone: Gritty, determined, moments of humor and camaraderie

ACT III: THE ARRIVAL (10-15 min)

Payoff: The opening, national recognition, and the legacy that followed.

- July 4, 1995—the Grand Opening celebration after 18 years
- National recognition—Links Magazine, Golf Digest, USGA rankings
- The traditions that took root—tournaments, members, community
- What it means to West Virginia and to the next generation

Tone: Triumphant, emotional, reflective

KEY EMOTIONAL MOMENTS

These are the scenes worth building toward—the emotional anchors of the film:

1. Pete Names the Club (Late 1980s)

On the 6th fairway, after years of debating names, Pete asks Jimmy: “*Do we have a name yet?*” Jimmy says no. Pete: “*The hell with it. Let’s call it Pete Dye.*” A handshake. Then: “*I want you to know this will be the only club named after me.*”

Why it matters: This is when Pete stakes his legacy on this project. Of 100+ courses, he chose this one.

2. The Bell on #12 (July 4, 1995)

A bell was installed on the 12th hole in memory of Pete’s father—the man who built Pete’s first nine holes. On Grand Opening morning, Pete sees it for the first time and rings it. The emotion is visible. The bell remains there today.

Why it matters: This is the emotional climax. The father-son thread runs through the whole story—James D. and Jimmy, Pete and his father.

3. Opening Day (July 4, 1993 or 1995)

After 15-18 years of work, the course is finally real. Standing on the first tee with family. Bagpipes. Fireworks. The dream made tangible.

Why it matters: The payoff moment. Everything they endured was for this.

KEY THEMES

These should weave throughout the film:

1. **Perseverance** — 18 years of refusing to quit
2. **Partnership** — The bond between a coal mining family and a golf legend
3. **West Virginia Pride** — Putting an overlooked place on the map
4. **Heritage** — Coal mining past meets championship golf future

5. Legacy — What we build and what we leave behind

CENTRAL CHARACTERS

James D. LaRosa — Son of Italian immigrants, worked the coal mines, built a business. The dreamer who refused to give up. Pete called him “the toughest, most tenacious, never-give-up son of a gun I ever worked for.”

Jimmy LaRosa — James D.’s son. Worked alongside his father and Pete for 18 years. Managed the project, secured financing, carries the story forward. Primary narrator.

Pete Dye — The architect. One of golf’s greatest designers. Perfectionist, mentor, friend. Of 100+ courses, this is the only one he put his name on.

Alice Dye — Pete’s wife and collaborator. Pushed for the course to be welcoming to all players. Her influence shaped the final design.

AVAILABLE ASSETS

From the LaRosa Family Archives

- **Photos:** Coal era, construction phases (1978-1995), Pete Dye and crew on site, Grand Opening celebrations, family history
- **Video:** Louie and Nancy Ellis filmed the project for 20 years; construction, interviews (including with Pete), Grand Opening footage; Pete and James D. storytelling together.
- **Artifacts:** Pete’s original routing sketch on an air-sickness bag; the bell on #12.

From the Director’s Shoot

- Drone footage of the course
- New interviews with Jimmy and family
- Beauty shots of the property

Publications

- Links Magazine (August 1995, nine-page feature)
 - Golf Digest rankings
 - *Bury Me in a Pot Bunker* by Mark Shaw
-

SPONSOR ALIGNMENT

Partner	Themes to Emphasize
American Coal Association	Coal heritage, immigrant story, land transformation
WV Department of Tourism	West Virginia beauty, destination golf, state pride
Golf Channel	Pete Dye's legacy, world-class design, national rankings

VISUAL APPROACH

- **Drone footage** — The course at sunrise/sunset, the West Virginia hills, the scale of what was built
- **Archival materials** — Construction photos, family photos, Pete Dye footage
- **Interviews** — On location, intimate and conversational
- **The bell** — A recurring visual motif; ending with it being rung

CLOSING IMAGE

The sound of the bell ringing on #12. Drone pulling back at sunrise over the West Virginia hills—the full 18 holes visible.

Final title card:

“Pete Dye designed over 100 golf courses. He put his name on one.”

APPENDIX: Reference Materials

The following sections provide additional context and detail for the production team. These are resources to draw from, not requirements for the film.

NOTABLE QUOTES

“You don’t need me to build an average golf course on an average piece of land in central West Virginia. And if you do build it, you ought to call it Miracle Mountain—because it’ll be a miracle if anyone comes to play it.” — **Pete Dye** (on the rejected first site)

“There is nothing more dramatic than this piece of property. You can’t get 18 holes any better than this.” — **Pete Dye** (on the coal mine site)

“The hell with it. Let’s call it Pete Dye... I want you to know this will be the only club named after me.” — **Pete Dye**

“James D. was the toughest, most tenacious, never-give-up son of a gun I ever worked for.” — **Pete Dye**

“Pete, if this is designed to be a men’s club, you won’t finish the course.” — **Alice Dye**

“No charge—Louie signing off.” — **Louie Ellis** (family friend who filmed for 20 years)

TIMELINE

Year	Event
1913	James LaRosa Sr. meets Emilia Cava at Cooks Mine (on the property)
1978	Pete rejects first site; sees the coal mine site; routes 18 holes
Early 1980s	Land acquisition; Joe DiMaggio enters the story
Late 1980s	Club named on 6th fairway; Alice Dye’s first visit
1989	Gary Grandstaff joins as superintendent
1993	Front nine opens July 4
1994	Back nine opens
1995	Grand Opening July 4; Links Magazine feature
1998	WV State Amateur (first time in 60 years outside The Greenbrier)
2000	WV Open hosted
2026	Links Magazine ranks club #24 by Society of Architects

ADDITIONAL STORIES (For Reference)

These stories emerged from the Substack series. They may be useful if footage or interviews surface that support them:

- **The rejected first site** — Pete, James D., and Jimmy explore a different property and get trapped in an old railroad tunnel as a freight train thunders past
- **Pete’s first walk** — Disappearing with marking flags for two hours, returning with 18 holes in his head
- **Black damp** — James D. nearly dies from oxygen-depleted air in a mine shaft while shaping #13

- **The oaks on #2** — Pete burns down the oak trees James D. wanted to save; years later, #2 is ranked among the top 500 holes in the world
 - **The 18th hole debacle** — James D. moves the green while Pete is away; Pete returns and makes him move it back
 - **Pete's design fee** — Asked about payment, Pete says he “just needs a couple hundred dollars to get back to Florida”
 - **The Storm of the Century** — 1993 brings 30 inches of snow, delaying the back nine
-

SUPPORTING CAST (For Reference)

- **Gary Grandstaff** — Superintendent for 30 years
 - **Bill Stines** — Head Golf Professional from The Honors Course
 - **Jim Jamieson** — Director of Golf, former PGA Tour player
 - **Joe DiMaggio** — Baseball legend, regular visitor, attended both openings
 - **Louie and Nancy Ellis** — Documented the project for 20 years
-

Prepared for production team — February 1, 2026