Building Pulpit no frivolous venture for Hurdzan Group

BY MARK LESLIE

There's nothing trivial about Chris Haney's latest pursuit, a 315-acre golf course 35 miles northwest of Toronto.

The co-developer of the popular board game "Trivial Pursuit" has teamed with architect Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio, to create a course that Hurdzan says elevates him from "plain vanilla" golf course designs to the "take-your-breath-away" variety.

"You kind of gasp when you get to the first tee," said Andy Banfield, a senior designer for architect Tom Fazio, in recreating his visit to the Haney-Hurdzan creation, Devil's Pulpit.

Set on a "spectacular" piece of land and built with Haney's "well, we had a budget in mind when we started" attitude, Devil's Pulpit will open July 1. And you're not going to play it has already formed — with 400 memberships bought and paid for at prices ranging from the early $17,000 figure to $55,000.

"I know golf courses around the world, and I'm hard-pressed to think of a better one," said a proud Haney, whose main partner in the venture is Trivial Pursuit co-inventor Scott Abbott.

And the course was not even complete when he spoke. The $2 million first hole was nearing the end of its 17-month construction cycle; and No. 13, a "weak sister" in Haney's words, was being built by three scrapers and four bulldozers in May.

Hurdzan: "I think Devil's Pulpit probably has 14 unforgettable holes. They have such strong personalities that you just cannot forget them; and the other four holes pale by comparison simply because they are up against such strong competitors.

"You could take those four holes and put them on another course and they'd be superstars. That's the kind of golf course it is."

Fry said, "It's not as difficult as people might think by looking at it. It's a psychological golf course in that it looks hard, but it has very large landing areas."

Hany's goal was to build the best golf course in Canada, supplanting No. 1-ranked National Golf Club in Woodbridge, Ontario, designed by George and Tom Fazio.

Now the goal is to have the best sister courses, with a second — Devil's Links — under construction on a nearby mountain top. But to some he's toned the Pulpit course is the best, saying, "You have to play a course to judge it." But he added: "It is a tremendous golf course, a great setting. It has spectacular holes from the first tee and a lot of dramatic golf."

"Whatever it takes" became the motto for the project, Fry said. That became obvious when Haney declared the course would fulfill the entire 315 acres — twice the usual land for a championship 18-hole design.

"We weren't fettered by budget or by the constraint to build houses," Hurdzan said. "I mean, here's a 315-acre piece of ground with zero houses on it. Chris said, 'I don't want houses. I want the best golf course in Canada..."

"Those guys have tasted success with 'Trivial Pursuit'... and they recognize that in order to have something successful you have to go that extra bit. They are willing to do that, and if it means digging down into their pockets, by God they'll do it."

"Digging down" started on the first hole, called the Tower Hole because you tee off aiming at the CN Tower in Toronto 35 miles away.

Perhaps the biggest in the world, the first hole covers 25 to 30 acres and is "an engineering marvel."

"Basically the land was on a 45-degree slope and we sort of tilted the slope to 180 degrees," Haney joked.

A 10- to 12-foot-high, 400-yard-long quarried stone wall was built along the entire first fairway, separating the fairway from a lake. A seven-head-wide system irrigates the 160-yard-wide double fairway.

There is no down side to the figures:

- $25 million for the project, including $8 million for the land, $6 million for the clubhouse, and $2 million on environmental concerns.
- 1.7 million cubic yards of dirt moved.
- 100 acres of sod including 80 acres of bluegrass in all the playable roughs, and 20 acres of bentgrass on greens, tees and fairways.
- 120 tees covering more than four acres.
- Four acres of greens, which average 8,000 to 8,500 square feet, compared to the normal 5,000 square feet.
- 128 sand traps and 80 grass traps.
- Seven miles of cart paths, which Hurdzan "went to extremes to hide."

A second, 250-yard-long stone wall that runs one to three feet above water on a pond between the 15th and 16th greens.

- Fifty-six pieces of earth-moving equipment kept busy at one time.
- Rainbow Maxi 4 Irrigation System, with 1,200 sprinkler heads.

"It's impossible to hit another fairway... even if you tried," Haney said. "You cannot see one hole to the next. It's like the magical mystery tour."

Hurdzan has been known as the master of $1-million golf courses. The Pulpit has changed that.

"When you work with a low budget, you build something that's functional. But it doesn't show how good you really are," he said.

"You're doing plain vanilla. When you have a Devil's Pulpit, where you have a client who says, 'Show me how good you are', then that's a step up. We've had a lot of good projects. But this is the first time...Continued on page 12

Take your pick: Bells & whistles or Scotland reborn

BY MARK LESLIE

When they're completed, Devil's Pulpit and Devil's Links make the most diverse sister golf courses in the world. And that suits co-developer Chris Haney just fine.

"These are night and day," Haney said of his two championship-18 hole layouts in the hills northwest of Toronto. "You can't compare them. It's like comparing PGA West to Muirfield. The Pulpit's got all the bells and whistles. At the Links, you're in Scotland; it's only missing the North Sea. Plus it's got great views — better views than the Pulpit."

"If you're not hitting the ball you've got something to look at, as opposed to a housing development."

As architect Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio, agreed, describing the Pulpit as an Augusta National type — "very contemporary, high-tech golf course architecture. It would make (architect) Pete Dye smile. It has awesome vertical cuts."

The Links Links course, he said, is "a Spanish Bay type and our goal is that it look like it. We never touched it. We're moving minimal dirt, with our goal is that it look like it's absolutely as natural as possible."

Hurdzan was 99-percent through the maze of government approvals for the Pulpit course when Haney called him to tell him he had found another site. Believing Haney meant to scrap plans for the Pulpit after years in the permitting process, Hurdzan was aghast.

But Haney jumped in: "No, no, no. I have another site for a second course... it will sail right through (the permitting)."

He topped it off thus: "And this one makes Devil's Pulpit look like a mud fence."

Hurdzan couldn't believe any site could outdo the Pulpit, from which you can see downtown Toronto 35 miles away.

Yet, "I went out and looked at it, and it does, comparatively," he said. "On a clear day you can see from Niagara clear around the edge of Lake Ontario (probably 200 miles). It's at an elevation of 1,200 or 1,300 feet."

Hurdzan said the Links will truly be a links course, with only two trees being cut down, and less earth moved than on the first hole alone at the Pulpit.

"Item: To ensure that they would know exactly what he wanted in a "links" course, Haney paid the way for a two-week stay in Scotland by project manager Dana Fry, director of golf Doug Ball and superintendent Von Wright, and a client who says, 'Show me how good you are', then that's a step up. We've had a lot of good projects. But this is the first time..."
Mike Young designing three courses

Two golf course projects are underway and a third is scheduled to open for play in July. Owned and operated by Southern Golf, Inc., the 6,700-yard, par 72 course features bentgrass greens. The course was designed to accommodate the average golfer while still challenging the more advanced player and maintaining the strategy of the game.

Scott McDaniel has been hired as the golf course superintendent.

In LaGrange, near the western border of Georgia, The Fields Golf Club plans to open its front nine in May and back nine in August. Owned by Rosemont Hills Development Corp., the course is being built in conjunction with a residential housing development. Measuring 6,700 yards from the championship tees, the course has a Scottish-type look, bentgrass greens and will play to a par 72.

The third project, now in the planning stages, is a nine-hole addition to Hunter-Pope Country Club in Monticello, Ga., about 30 miles north of Macon. If it proceeds as scheduled, the new nine at the private club could open as early as September.

Mike Young Designs/Turf Mark Golf Services, Inc. said its goal is "to provide courses combining attractiveness with efficient and economical maintenance, without sacrificing the strategy of the game or the beauty of the natural terrain."

Courses newly approved in the U.S.

This month Golf Course News begins a new chart. We will continue to publish the following list of courses that are approved around the country. In addition, the chart on page 13 contains the sites and contacts for new courses and renovations in the preliminary planning stages. When these courses are ready to begin construction they will be listed again in the 'Courses newly approved in the U.S.' chart.

We would appreciate your help in updating this new section. To contact us call 207-846-0600 or write: Golf Course News, P.O. Box 907, 38 Lafayette St., Yarmouth, Maine 04096.

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Pulpit

Continued from page 11 we're showing people how good we are."

Yet, even with a bountiful budget and special site, Hurdzan faced stiff challenges. "This was an extremely environmentally sensitive site... and it was a difficult site to work," Hurdzan said.

"We answered all the environmental concerns and did them through good planning and good engineering. No matter how emotional the objection was, we simply defused it with good planning and engineering," he said.

"All the lakes were lined. All the drainage ditches; "a phenomenal practice area"; a club house beyond the view for his satisfaction."}

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