

By BOB SPIWAK

Running Y Ranch, a resort within a working cattle ranch in south-central Oregon, will celebrate the official grand opening of its golf course on Aug. 26, with designer Arnold Palmer playing an inaugural round.

Built by John Thronson of Jen-Weld Corp., the course wanders through picturesque Payne Canyon, playing from 4,886 to 7,165 yards.

Water comes into play on five holes and more than 30 bunkers are strategically

## Thronson a key in Running Y Ranch

placed, eight of them surrounding the 9th green.

Traversing an open meadow, with views of Klamath Lake and the Crater Lake Range, the front nine hosts the signature 5th hole, a short par-3 at 4,200-foot elevation and dominated by water on the right. It measures 140 yards from the middle tees.

The back nine is a nature walk, with a mixture of juniper, pine and other trees, frequently occupied by bald and golden eagles and ospreys, with deer wandering beneath.

Wildflowers are an important part of the design, adding color to the fescue roughs, bluegrass-ryegrass fairways and bentgrass greens.

According to Thronson, it took 10 months over two seasons to build the course, despite abnormally difficult mud and rock conditions.

## Thronson designs in hands-on way

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even though we have had more lucrative offers."

Thronson is a man who, literally, has his hands in the dirt. He designs a course, but does not use a computer for three-dimensional renderings.

"What I do for each hole is take them [constructors and shapers] out and find a place with loose dirt," he said. "Then we sculpt it by hand into how the hole should look. They get a better feel for it than off a piece of paper, and we can easily change something on the spot."

What Thronson sculpts is a course that is kind to the typical resort player "... who is generally hitting woods for the second shot." The rough is cut to 1-1/8 inch, the fairways to 5/8 inch.

Thronson defines the holes at the Ridge with mounding which, "echoes the far backgrounds." Where volcanic peaks dominate the background, the course's contours are sharper. Where the background is lower, gentler mountains, the course is more rounded.

"It's not something I would do in the Midwest," Thronson laughed. "The features must be in keeping with what nature has provided."

The courses at the resort have two trademarks: acres of wildflowers and fast greens. "Stimping" at around 9, the greens are PennLinks bentgrass, mowed to about 1/8 inch. Every two weeks they are top dressed with a light layer of sand.

"They're firm, but they hold shots well and they putt at the same speed in the afternoon as in the morning," Thronson said. He explained that he keeps the putting surface "lean" by minimal fertilization — no more than 3-1/2 pounds per 1,000 square feet per year of nitrogen.

Thronson is excited about the new Running Y course at Klamath Falls. "It was tough to build, muddy and rocky. We had to blast some of the hard rock. And we used a lot of the pieces as decorative features," he said.

The average piece of rock was the size of a dining-room table and some of them required two D-8s to move. At the end, 101 people were working to finish the course which took only 10 months to build, with a winter layoff in the middle.

Running Y is half meadow

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