

Golf Architect Staying Busy Even in Tough Times.

By Ken Moum

In the 1990s golf course architects were building courses at a feverish pace. But that all changed with the economic difficulties of the past several years. More recently, many golf course architects have either moved most of their practice overseas or have tried to find other ways of paying the bills.

Minnesota-based golf architect Kevin Norby, says that hasn't been the case for him, in fact, he's currently hiring. That's right – hiring. "I guess it's a bit unusual" says Norby. "We've been fortunate to have picked up a number of projects over the past few years and 2012 was one of our busiest years in 22 years".

"Like a lot of guys, after things slowed down in 2008, I chased a couple projects in China and even thought about opening an office over there or hiring a marketing consultant to help us find projects overseas". In the end, Norby decided to focus his efforts domestically so he could dedicate the time to make sure the projects turn out right. "When we do a new project, I spend a lot of time researching the market and then



spend a lot of time on site to make sure they turn out like they should".

As a result, if there is a renovation or expansion project going on in the Midwest, there's a good chance Norby has a hand in it. He just landed what might be one of the only 18-hole construction projects in the country – a nine-hole expansion and renovation at Fox Hills Golf Course in western North Dakota. "Our plan is to start with the twelve new holes that won't impact the existing course. Then, when those holes are ready to play, we'll build the remaining six holes and the new practice facilities". According to Norby, there

will be 18 new holes and about 300 home sites situated on about 500 acres.

Norby also has projects under construction in Minnesota and South Dakota including a major renovation at Bakker Crossing in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and at Bunker Hills in Minneapolis. He is also working on projects in Colorado, North Carolina, Iowa and the Dominican Republic.

In addition to completing some pretty high profile and highly acclaimed design projects, Norby has developed a reputation for helping owners figure out how to make their course successful. “A lot of what we do involves long range master planning and what makes us unique is the amount of time I spend trying to help owners figure out how to increase membership and revenue, rather than simply making architectural changes to rejuvenate the golf course or reduce maintenance costs.”

Norby says, “Often times that means spending days getting to know the local golf market, the culture, the other area courses, our client and our client’s golf course.” Ultimately, we want to create a course that is enjoyable yet profitable. For a private club that means new members and for a public course that means increased value and increased play. We can only do that if we understand what it will take to make our courses successful and then make the changes needed to reposition or differentiate them from their competition.

“We’ve been fortunate to have weathered this downturn pretty well,” says Norby. “It’s been a tough few years but it seems like, as long as we’re willing to focus on building great golf courses and focus on finding ways to make them successful, we’ll stay busy”.



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