

Giants Ridge proving to be a behemoth of obstacles for developer

By HAL PHILLIPS

BIWABIK, Minn. — Should the Giants Ridge golf course ever receive the go-ahead from Minnesota courts (see *GCN August 1994*), architect Jeff Brauer will have a unique parcel at his disposal.

The hold-ups have included endangered species, potentially endangered species, alleged forest fragmentation, water resource squabbles, state government in-fighting and citizen action lawsuits.

The latter has tied up the project in court, though Brauer remains hopeful the matter may finally be settled early this month.

The 18-hole project is situated an hour north of Duluth, here in the state's iron region, a mountainous area where mining was the primary industry until 20 years ago. The mining of iron ore gave way to tourism in the 1980s, however, when the state built the Giants Ridge ski resort.

Caymans get 1st regulation track

GRAND CAYMAN, BWI — On an island known more for diving and snorkeling, visitors to the Caymans can now add "teeing off" to their list of vacation activities. Golfers can test their skill at The Links at SafeHaven, Cayman Islands' first 18-hole championship golf course. Located five miles north of George Town, the new 6,500-yard, par-72 course cost \$8.5 million to develop and complete.

Designed by Roy Case, and built by Gregori International SARL of France, The Links at SafeHaven was built according to U.S. Golf Association standards. SafeHaven Ltd. Chairman Owen Matalon noted the challenges his intentional team of developers overcame in completing the project. More than 60 acres of the 103-acre course were planted with hybrid Bermudagrass, cultivated under difficult conditions through the spraying technique hydromulching, used successfully for the first time in the Caribbean.

The landscape is planted with more than 4,000 indigenous tropical trees and shrubs, including coconut and thatch palms, mahogany, cordia, oleander and mahoe.

Case who has designed more than 50 courses throughout the Caribbean and southern United States, said that, because of the originally "hostile" environment, The Links at SafeHaven provided critical information about the problems of growing grass in soil-less, salt-laden material.

"It's by far the most difficult project I have ever undertaken, and I am extremely proud of the results," he said.

Despite the emerging popularity of routing golf courses in and around old rock quarries, Brauer resisted the urge.

"We're not going to use a trashed ore dump, though we did consider some old mine sites before locating the golf course adjacent to the chalet, which allowed us to use the existing structure as a clubhouse," said Brauer, president of Dallas-based Golfscapes Inc.

"It's quite a nice piece of land,"

continued Brauer, who will design the course with assistance from Lanny Wadkins. "It's a natural glacier field, so rocks are strewn about. I actually called [Geoffrey] Cornish and [Brian] Silva to see how they handle such rocky conditions, because the site is very much like New England. Some of the boulder fields are quite striking."

In New England, colonial farmers had to do something with all the rocks they pulled

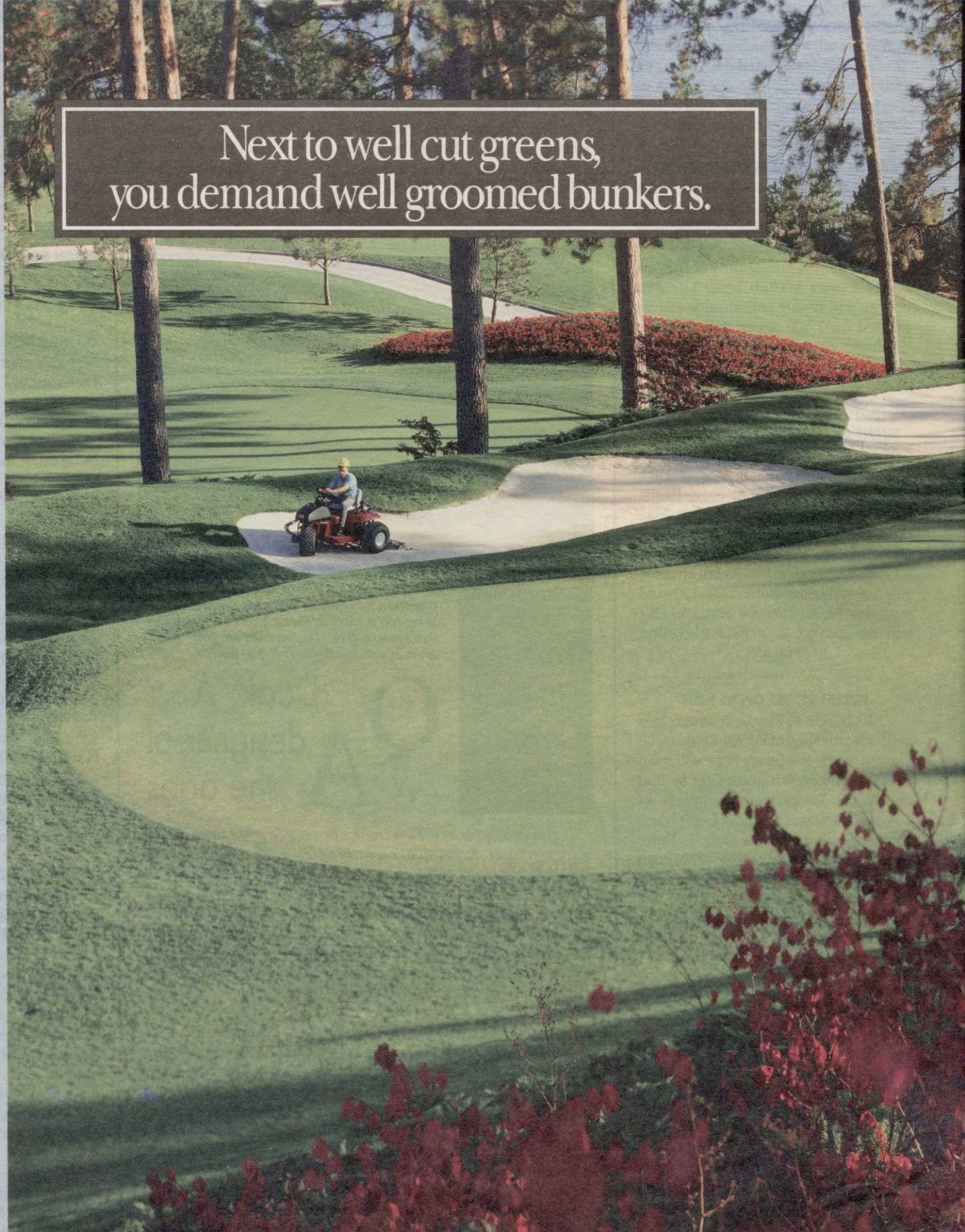
from the soil, so they built stone walls. Brauer said he may use them to create retaining walls and shore up tees.

Giants Ridge is a dual-purpose ski area, featuring downhill and Nordic tracks. In fact, the northern Minnesota facility has become a national biathlon training center and cross-country ski Mecca.

Routing the golf course on and around existing cross-country ski trails has provided Brauer an

education. "It became quite a point of design," he explained. "We have a ski trail specialist on board so we don't interfere with the cross-country trails. We made sure we didn't interfere with the trail's homologation — which is the required up and down, right and left a trail must have to be a proper track for competitions."

"I've learned more about cross-country skiing than I ever hoped to know."



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