

Schreiner continues strong position in course renovation market

By JOEL JOYNER

KANSAS CITY, Kan. — Golf course architect Craig Schreiner built the reputation of his design firm on renovation projects. Although his company tackled three new golf course construction projects last year, Schreiner's renovation work remains in demand.

New golf course construction is considered by many architects to be more lucrative and, in some cases, more rewarding than renovation work, according to Schreiner. However, renovation projects can prove to be more challenging.

"Solving problems via drainage or course inadequacies, getting a committee to take down trees or rebuilding greens to withstand more traffic can be intensely challenging," Schreiner said. "Upgrading a golf course is no easy feat. There can be a fine line between success and failure.

"Management and communication skills need to be heightened because you're dealing with a course superintendent who needs to maintain the course, members who want to continue playing, permitting requirements, course builders, and a number of different people that have to be pleased and often place your work under a microscope," said Schreiner.

Schreiner's firm, headquartered here, has met these challenges at its three latest renovation projects.

NORTHLAND COUNTRY CLUB

Schreiner's renovation of the Donald Ross-designed Northland CC in Duluth, Minn., is nearing completion with improvements made over the last three years expected to return the course to its original grandeur.

"A diverse membership profile and the evolution of golf equipment technology required that we update the course to accommodate today's member," said Joe O'Connor, Northlands' director of golf operations.

Schreiner's master plan on the project outlined a

number of changes to update the 6,825-yard, par-71 layout such as integrating multiple tees to balance par for all players. Fairway bunkers were repositioned to define landing areas, greenside bunkers were restored to proper depth and drainage was added throughout the course. The Bruce Company of Wisconsin is completing the third phase of the renovation work.

"Probably one of the few areas of the course that was left untouched is the greens," said Todd Clark, Schreiner's senior design associate. "Ross designed exceptional green complexes here, and we worked hard to respect the nuances."

The work at Northland is fairly typical of how the firm approaches renovation projects, said Schreiner. "It allows members to continue playing the course and that's a big issue with both private and public courses. They still need to generate revenue, especially in the North where there's such a short playing season."



Bunker construction at Oak Ridge Country Club

PITTSBURGH FIELD CLUB

Originally designed by Scotsman Alex Findley, renovation at the Pittsburgh Field Club also is nearing completion. With roots dating back to 1871, the club is one of the most esteemed private clubs in the Pittsburgh area.

Schreiner worked closely with Frontier Construction of Jones Mills, Pa., to renovate nearly 100 bunkers, reconstruct the 16th and 18th holes and the green on the fifth hole, contour the fairways, re-grass primary roughs and install a new irrigation system. "The bunkers had lost their shape over time and they were extremely contaminated," said Mike Zedrick, superintendent.

Course improvements, originally outlined in 1998, also included a new practice range, tree planting and removal and multiple teeing grounds.

OAK RIDGE COUNTRY CLUB

The architect also has completed a bunker renovation project at the Oak Ridge CC in Hopkins, Minn. Fifty-seven sand bunkers have been renovated, fairways recontoured and several drainage problems resolved at the club located west of Minneapolis.

"Master plans are an important aspect to renovation work," said Schreiner. "There are just too many opportunities that are missed if an architect doesn't really conceive all changes in relation to the entire golf course."

"A golf course is a dynamic, living, growing, changing biomass. It changes everyday," he continued. "Like bunkering, strategic bunker placement has been overlooked much too often."

Duininck Brothers, Inc., of Prinsburg, Minn., completed the work in two phases with minimal disruption to play, said Schreiner.

Renovation upswing

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"As a builder, I see it continuing," he said. "Most of our projects this year will involve renovation work because of the permitting process required and limited finances available for new 18-hole construction."

The company primarily focuses on private owners with upscale public facilities. Crouch has noticed an increase in competition on renovation bids. "I'd say there's an average of five to 10 builders bidding for most projects right now," he said.

PRIVATE LAYOUTS

Golf course architect Rees Jones, in Montclair, N.J., has noticed a trend by courses to upgrade their layouts. "Many courses also are looking for master plan work to be done," he said.

"There are so many clubs, especially private clubs, successfully restoring and upgrading their courses that developers want to keep up with the competition. Renovation work certainly has become more popular."

Jones points to the fact that there also is more money available from the game of golf now than in times past. "Courses are beginning to look at building bunkers and greens properly, adding length for the improved implements of the game and increasing strategy for players," he said. "Some of the older courses may not have had the finances available when their courses were first constructed."

Many older courses may be interested in restoring their layouts to their original look as well, said Jones. "Like we did at the Brookline Golf Club," he said. "We pushed the bunkers out for the pros, but at the same token we restored the greens back to the old style."

Renovation projects will make up the majority of the work for Clyde Johnston, a golf course architect based in Hilton Head Island, S.C., this year.

"Overall, we're probably looking at doing more renovation work than we are new construction projects given what's out there and available, at least at my level of the business," said Johnston.

The renovation work will likely include both minor and major renovation work, according to Johnston. "We have 43 golf courses in my immediate area," he said. "So it's fairly easy for me to do small work around here."

Johnston completed a major renovation project, \$2.6 million, at the Sea Pines Country Club on the Sea Pines Plantation at Hilton Head Island last year and started a \$2.5 million renovation project at the Pine Lakes Golf Club on Jekyll Island that carried over to this year. "Renovation work will be the largest part of my workload this year," said Johnston, "and probably next year as well." ■



Rees Jones

Photo by Larry Lambrecht



Clyde Johnston

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