

What happens when you put a superintendent, a pro, an owner, a general manager, an architect and a builder in the same room for a

few hours? If you believe in labels — and sometimes they're true — your answer would be that Wrestlemania would break out. The conditions — a room full of determined individuals with strong opinions about how things should be done — would be ripe for a knockdown-drag-out fight. Quick, phone Jerry Springer.

Superintendents and pros, after all, supposedly loathe each other. The label on builders and architects is that they get along as well as the Yankees and the Red Sox. And the poop on owners and general managers is that they'll never ask superintendents, pros, architects, owners — or each other, for that matter — over for dinner.

And then there are the circumstances surrounding Angels Crossing, a new golf course in Vicksburg, Mich., that's scheduled to open this spring. When the course's superintendent, architect, owner, general manager, pro and builder were placed in the same room, they consorted more like the congenial Cleavers than the brusque Bunkers.

They sat around a large table — relaxed and unassuming — and talked about how much they appreciated each other. They complimented each other for their work on the project. They weren't pretending, either. One could tell that by the way they looked each other in the eyes — their respect and trust for one another evident on their faces.

They are proud of what they accomplished — an upscale 18-hole course that epitomizes affordable golf at \$38 a round. But they are proud of their accomplishment in a different sense than for what the course is tangibly. They are proud that they were able to work together with such cooperation. They were able to do what they set out to: keep costs down so Angels Crossing could be played by middle-class people who live in and around the small Michigan town.

There goes Jim Thompson, general manager of Angels Crossing, waxing superlatives about Bruce Matthews III, the architect of the course.

"Bruce doesn't get as much credit as he

Paradise on an Old Paper Mill Site

BY LARRY AYLWARD



UPSCALE AND AFFORDABLE COURSE IS SIMPLY THE RESULT OF PEOPLE WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE A COMMON GOAL

deserves," Thompson says. "That's because he doesn't spend his days promoting himself."

Matthews says Angels Crossing is the most memorable project he has ever worked on. That's saying a lot for a man who has designed some terrific tracks among his 38 works in the Wolverine state. His comment has nothing to do with his payment for the job, which was less than usual. Angels Crossing, which cost about \$1.8 million, will always be in the good memories section of Matthew's brain because of the people involved with the project.

"We worked as team throughout," Matthews says. "Everybody had a turn as a leader. Everybody listened to each other, and everybody cooperated. It was a very cohesive group."

Because they got along so well, they had fun. And it doesn't take Einstein to figure that people are going to give more of themselves in their jobs if they're having fun doing them.

"This wasn't work," Matthews says of Angels Crossing. "This was sheer pleasure."

There's a message here for the golf industry — a big one. It's that good golf courses (and Angels Crossing may soon be regarded as a great course) can be built inexpensively with lower green fees if the people involved with the projects put aside their egos and work together as one.

"For a \$1.8 million, we got about \$2.8 million in effort," Matthews says. "That's priceless."

The industry has been clamoring for golf courses like Angels Crossing. I challenge industry organizers of conferences and seminars to recruit one of Angels Crossing's makers (or all of them) to sit on a panel and talk about what it takes to create a fine and affordable golf course.

I'm sure a significant and vital section of discussion would focus on the importance of a group effort.

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