

Giants Ridge Golf Club In Biwabik Opens Despite Obstacles

By HAL PHILLIPS

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Three years ago, a turf war between bickering governmental factions nearly scuttled an 18-hole course project in Minnesota's Iron Range region. But architect Jeff Brauer stuck to his environmental guns, patiently assuring opponents that a golf course would not tamper with the ecosystem.

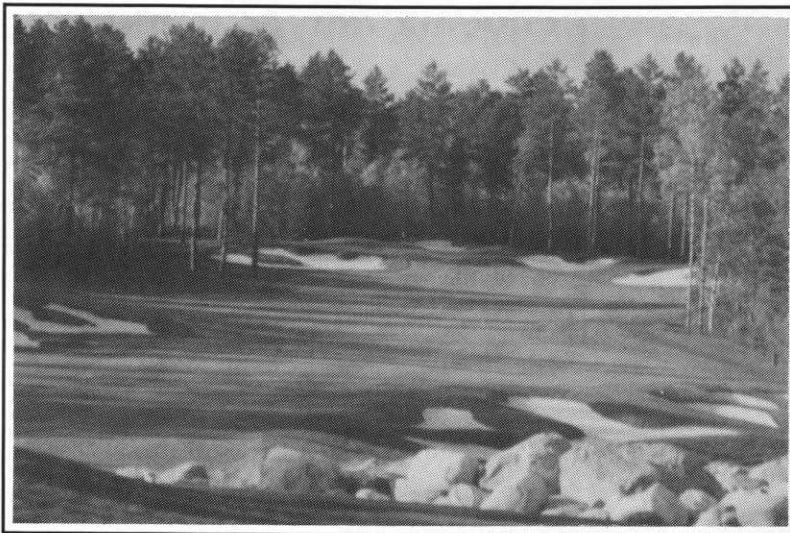
Brauer's perseverance paid off as Giants Ridge Golf Club opened for play in Biwabik. The Arlington, Texas-based

architect has made full use of a spectacular north woods setting, routing the course over and around natural boulder fields, wetlands and ancient pines. Designed with help from touring pro Lanny Wadkins, Giants Ridge stands to be Brauer's most high-profile project to date.

"Well, it's actually the lowest profile project we've done, in terms of mounding," Brauer said. "We didn't have to manufacture much because the site is so special. I think because of the site, this is definitely my best work. But the best one is always the next one."

A former president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, Brauer can list several acclaimed projects in his portfolio, among them are Wild Wing Plantation near Myrtle Beach and TangleRidge Golf Club in Grand Prairie, Texas. Yet Brauer believes Giants Ridge should surpass them both.

The irony? The project nearly fell apart in 1994 when state and county environmental organizations disagreed on project approval. The Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB), administered by St. Louis County, okayed the project while the Minnesota Depart-



ment of Natural Resources (DNR) disagreed. Seems the DNR didn't think the county had the technical knowledge to decide one way or the other.

In response, the DNR asked for a full-blown Environmental Impact Study, the first ever requested for a golf project in Minnesota — indeed, the less stringent Environmental Assessment Worksheet had never been requested for golf project in the state.

After the state's Environmental Quality Board ruled in favor of St. Louis County, two citizens groups immediately filed suit to stop the work. The suit named some 120 environmental reasons to halt the project — many lifted directly from the DNR's motion for EIS.

Sherry Enzler, Minnesota's deputy attorney general at the time, summed up the situation: "It appears the DNR has been in close contact with the citizens group."

Eventually, the suit was thrown out. Indeed, further studies conducted by Rockwell, Md.-based Environmental & Turf Services (ETS) showed that Brauer and his team had already gone to extraordinary lengths to protect wetlands and preserve endangered species like the Barren Strawberry and March Marigold.

"I have never worked on a project where the golf course architect has gone to such great lengths to prevent surface drainage," said ETS President Stuart Cohen at the time.

The IRRB approved the project in early November 1994.

"Two full construction seasons later, here we are," said Brauer, weary from the process but well pleased with the results.