

# 'Dream Team' Building 45 Holes at Cragun's

*First 18 Completed Rapidly at Gull Lake Resort*

By RALPH TURPINEN

A "dream team" assembled to build the 45-hole golf complex at Cragun's Resort on Gull Lake north of Brainerd certainly completed the first 18 holes rapidly.

From August 6, 1997, when the first yard of dirt was moved, to August 5, 1998, when owner Dutch Cragun hit the inaugural tee shot, it was exactly one year minus one day to get the first of two championship courses completed.

Naturally, there's still some fine-tuning to be accomplished, but the course officially will open on September 11 for limited play.

Another championship nine will be completed next year as well as a unique "reversible nine" which has yardages ranging from 100 to 240 yards and can be played clockwise or counterclockwise. Later, one more championship nine will complete the 45-hole layout.



This 250x66 maintenance building at Cragun's, which also will house a 12-unit dormitory for interns, serves as a backdrop for Tom Kientzle, director of golf; Dan Steiger, head golf course superintendent, and his friend, Kaz.

Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., Cragun's new, yet-to-be named courses provide still another attraction to the Brainerd Lakes area which is rapidly establishing itself as a golf destination with a variety of places to play and stay. (See "Golf Boom" story on Page 17.)

Describing Cragun's construction crew as a "dream team" organized to simultaneously handle various construction phases — such as cutting and filling, building tees, clearing and grubbing, irrigation or whatever — Tom Kientzle, CGCS, director of golf at Cragun's, said "We're proud of what we've accomplished thus far and we're all set to make it an outstanding facility."



A towards-the-tee look from the first green at Cragun's.

Head Golf Course Superintendent Dan Steiger, who worked with Kientzle when the Marsh Nine was being built at Grand View Lodge, then went to Green Gables in Colorado before joining Cragun's construction team a year ago, echoes Kientzle's comments.



Reshaping the huge bunker at the 16th hole are several members of Cragun's grounds crew.

"We really have had great cooperation by all concerned," said Steiger. "We had a crew of about 30 during most of the summer, and they did a magnificent job. We also were provided with a great opportunity to do the work properly. We were able to purchase equipment when wanted and needed, and we had great support from our suppliers, too."

Working closely with Steiger were Matt McKinnon, formerly at Bemidji Town & Country Club, and Steve Jetvig,

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who previously was a groundskeeper at Coors Field in Denver.

For Kientzle, the Cragun's project presented an appealing challenge, much like at Grand View where he was employed from 1984 to 1996 and helped build the 27 holes at



An amphitheater of nine tees can be viewed across this section of marshlands on the 13th hole, a par five.

The Pines and was involved in the grow-in of grass at The Preserve. His family owns Birch Bay golf course, also located in the Brainerd lakes area.

Kientzle is enamored by several design features, such as having at least four tees on every hole with one, the 13th hole on the first 18, presenting an amphitheater of nine tees. Another on the third nine will have 11.



Golf course construction is the natural topic for, from left, Dan Steiger, head golf course superintendent; Steve Jetvig, assistant, Chad Radzieg, and Tom Kientzle, director of golf.

"Not only will this approach allow golfers to enjoy the course according to their abilities, but it also will allow us (the groundskeeping department) to care for the tee boxes properly," Kientzle said.

He also said he enjoys Jones' "goalkeeper" approach that has bunkers (like goalie mitts) blocking areas at various greens, thus forcing a player to circumvent the blocked areas.

Before the first tree was trimmed, Kientzle said, Cragun's



Moving dirt rapidly is Jerry Thomas on a Terex TS-14.

joined the Audobon program and adopted "a sustainable development program that protects and preserves a place to work and recreate." The Jones firm was hired in the Spring of 1997 after Dutch Cragun had reviewed three proposals.

Cragun, 66, has been as enthused as anyone about the overall design of the 45-hole complex, the construction progress and the sincere effort made by all concerned.

"I'm so excited I forgot about being 66," he said. "I'm revitalizing. After being in this business since I was eight years old, this is probably the most exciting time of my life."

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## Cragun's—

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He is most appreciative of the cooperation and hard work exhibited by Kientzle, the Cragun staff and Bruce Charlton, vice-president and golf course architect for the Jones firm.

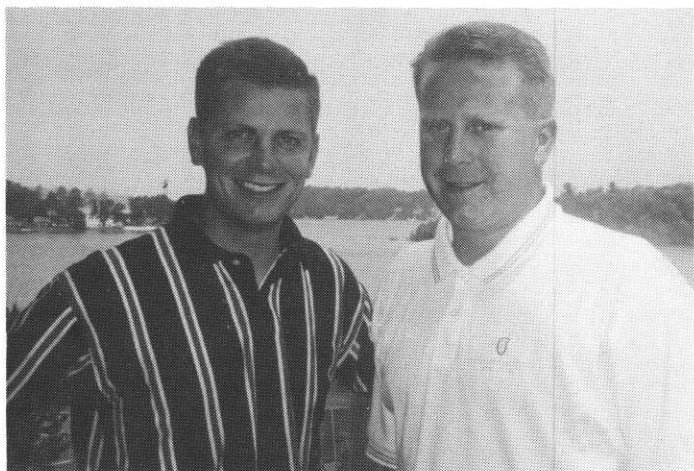
Good weather also favored rapid construction, except when a record rainfall, which brought several sleepless nights for Kientzle & Company, doused the Brainerd area in June. "Otherwise, we had good weather, allowing Rardin Construction, scraper operator Jerry Thomas and Erickson Irrigation to proceed with their work consistently."

Cragun's course is being shaped around basically level terrain and has required the least amount of dirtmoving of any projects undertaken by the Jones firm. It also includes a 104-acre lake, has marshlands that have been utilized judiciously and offers Providence greens and fairways and Penncross on its tees.



A 104-acre lake adjoins the par three 12th hole.

Construction of a 250 x 66-foot maintenance building, which also includes a dormitory to accommodate 12 interns, is proceeding this fall. In addition construction of a club-



Head golf pro Chuck Klecatsky and assistant Tom Hice.

house is scheduled to start soon.

Cragun's will be the site of the Stodola Scramble, sponsored by the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association to raise money for research, next summer, and Kientzle is looking forward to it.



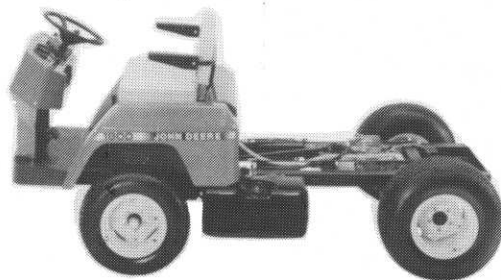
Two Anoka-Hennepin Tech students — Denny Perrault, left, and Phil Jones — pause to review mowing progress with Tom Kientzle, director of golf at Cragun's.

"By that time things should look pretty good around here," he said, "and it will be nice to have our industry colleagues see what has been accomplished."

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