

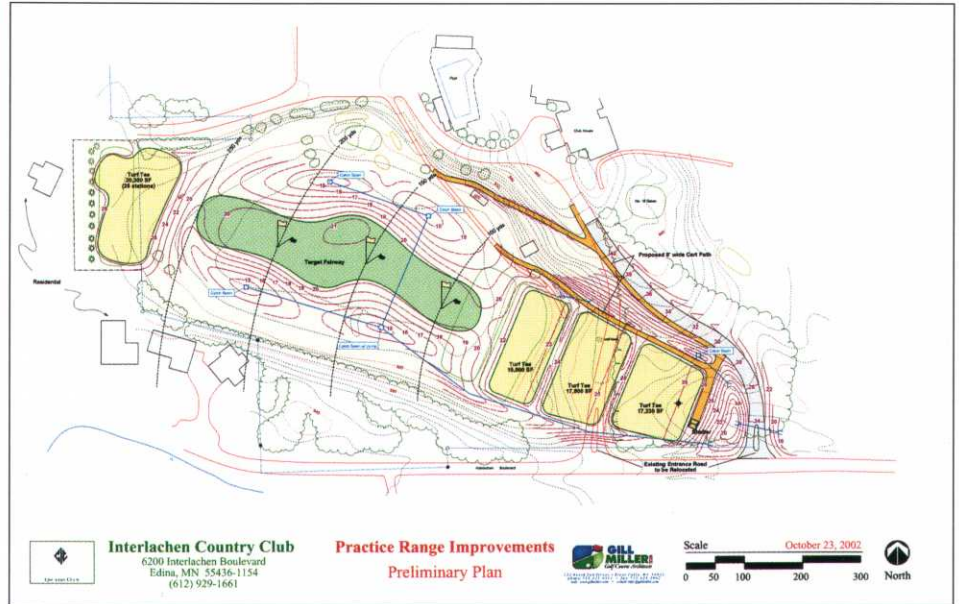
Interlachen Country Club's Practice Range Renovation Project

By Matt Rostal

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Practice ranges at old country clubs are usually small in size. Interlachen Country Club's was no exception in being undersized. Over the last twenty-five years the growth of the game of golf and golf technology had made our range very inadequate. We lack teeing area, necessary length, practicability, drainage and aesthetics to match the golf course. The practice range's elevation is lower than the surrounding area; it is a flat hole with all the surrounding area surface drains to. The exiting drain line travels 270 feet through a residential lot and under Interlachen Boulevard to Mirror Lake. This drain line is in an easement that dates to 1919. After a one-inch rain there would be a pond for a few days on the range. The practice range had many deficiencies, so in 1998 we started discussions at the club about a renovation of the practice range.

Our first step was to hire a qualified golf course architect. In 1999 we interviewed four architects and hired Gill Miller Golf Course Architect which the club felt was most qualified for this project. There were a few meetings between Gill Miller and the Green Committee to develop a wish list for the new range. Gill



Miller designed a plan which included the entire wish list. They also provided a cost estimate of the project through industry cost standards. The plan developed by Gill Miller was met with little support from our Green Committee and Board. The price put the range project on hold..

In late 2001 the Green Committee start-

ed this process again, we again knew Gill Miller was our architect of choice. Instead of developing an all inclusive wish list, we determined fundamental objectives that must be included in a new practice range. After a couple of meetings with some intense debating there were only three objectives determined.

1. Lengthen practice range
2. Adequate tee ground
3. Drainage

Gill Miller did a fantastic job of designing a plan. Actually the Green Committee charged Gill Miller to design three separate plans with cost estimates associated with each plan. These plans were received in early 2003.

Plan A was the most aggressive by moving our entrance drive 100 yards to the east, so we could maximize teeing ground. Plan B moved the driveway 50 yards to the east and a substantial tee ground enlargement. Plan C did not move the entrance drive but still met our objectives. All three plans met the club's objectives, but to varying degrees. The cost estimates for all three plans were nearly identical which was unexpected. This project

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Big rigs at work.

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needed fill to develop the elevated target fairway with drainage basins and the less we moved the entrance drive the more fill we needed to buy. The unexpected need of fill offset the price of moving the entrance drive. This was a great selling point for going with the most aggressive Plan A.

The green committee made a decision which I believe was instrumental in getting this project approved. They decided to bring one plan to the Board; also they wanted a firm price to go with it. This decision was made to simplify the approval process. The only problem was we needed approval to spend the money to obtain finalized construction drawings. Somehow my green chairman convinced the board to spend the money even without project approval. Gill Miller provided construction drawings and we sent it to bid with qualified golf course contractors. We received ten bids in April of 2003 and narrowed our choice down to four contractor and interviewed them. Duinink Bros. Inc. was selected as our contractor and we took Duinink's number to our Board.

The Board of Directors supported the decision to renovate the practice range, but needed to get the flavor of the membership, even though they did not need membership approval to approve the project. They decide to have two town hall meetings in May, so the Green Committee could explain the process involved getting to Plan A. The membership also could ask questions and voice opinions about the project. These meetings were very interesting to be a part of; most of the attendees absolutely favored the project and some were against it. The Board weighed all the opinions and approved the project at the May 2003 Board meeting.

Plan A was the most difficult plan but it completely met all of our three major objectives. However, we had some challenges with this plan.

- + Relocate entrance drive 100 yards
- + Replace entrance drive lighting
- + Rebuild entrance sign, needed variance for permitting from city
- + Relocate club's sanitary sewer
- + Lower eight-inch irrigation well 15-feet
- + Replace irrigation mains to golf course

- + Replace power and communication to irrigation satellites
- + Bore 12-inch drainage line 270 feet under Interlachen Blvd.
- + Get permitting from two watershed districts for drainage
- + All club's utilities (gas, electric, phone, cable) were in the construction zone

The project was started on August 18, 2003 and finished by November 1, 2003. After the first two days when 50 mature elms, oaks and pines were removed the area looked like a war zone; even I had my doubts and the membership did too. Through the duration of the project we had many unexpected challenges: the club's power was cut once due to a poor locate, an additional irrigation main was discovered leading to the golf course, picketers at our front entrance and many more. When the final project was finished with trees planted, tees seeded and the field sodded not one member complained, even the members against the project voiced how pleased they were the completed project.

The renovated practice range was lengthened by 100 yards, the teeing area went from 20,000 sq. ft. to 70,000 sq. ft. and the drainage system installed has an outlet sized for the accumulated runoff. The range does not close with significant rain events. Aesthetically the range now looks like a golf hole with a target fairway. The bentgrass tees are very similar to our fairways; this increases the practicability.

Our project was a success for many reasons, but a few were key. First, we set obtainable objectives for the design of the range; second we had a great team with Gill Miller and Duinink. Also we kept our membership informed. I wrote articles in the newsletter, sent letters to membership and posted information in the clubhouse. They knew what to expect during the entire project. Weekly construction meetings kept everyone on the same page. Finally, we had a firm price for the project going into the Board approval process. We kept the change orders to a minimum and finished under budget. That makes for a very successful project.



Interlachen's new entry drive.



Deep drainage.



Constructing the target fairway.



Ready for practice.