

Sports

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Norby-designed golf course at Rathbun Lake receives high marks

A new golf course designed by Minnesota golf architect Kevin Norby is getting a lot of attention these days. The Preserve on Rathbun Lake near Moravia was recently named as runner-up Best New Course of 2009 by Golf Inc. magazine. In addition, The Preserve on Rathbun Lake received honorable mention in GOLF Magazine's "Best New Public Courses of 2009" and both LINKS magazine and Golf Digest named The Preserve one of America's 10 Best New Public Courses of 2009.

The course is situated within the 850-acre Honey Creek State Park, located in south-central Iowa about 90 miles southeast of Des Moines.

According to Norby, who owns Herfort Norby Golf Course Architects, "In the beginning, our goal was to build an up-scale course that would be enjoyable for the average golfer while at the same time offering the challenge and strategy the more skilled golfer seeks."

The layout features bentgrass greens, tees and fairways as well as fescue secondary rough, 24 acres of restored native short-grass prairie, beautiful grass-faced bunkers and panoramic views of Rathbun Lake. There are five sets of tees, a state-of-the-art irrigation system and weather station to improve water management and a full-length driving range and practice facility.

In addition, Norby stated, "We wanted a course which would sit lightly on the land and could serve as an example for the state of Iowa and other developers on how to develop a golf facility while working with the environment."

According to Arnie Sohn with the Iowa DNR, "The Iowa Department of Natural Resources probably approached the golf course project from a different perspective than many other developers might. Kevin's awareness and understanding of the importance of incorporating and yet protecting the site's natural features were instrumental in putting this course on the ground in a way which was respectful and complimentary to those resources."

The golf course was constructed by Duinick Golf, a certified member of the Golf Course Builders Association of America. "We've worked with Duinick on a number of projects in the past and again they did a great job of keeping the project completion on-time and on-budget," said Norby. Construction of the golf course began in the spring of 2007 and was completed in November of the same year. Originally the plan was to open the course for play in the summer of 2008 but, due to the torrential rains and flooding in Iowa that summer, the opening was delayed until the spring of 2009.

The golf course cost only about \$4.7 million to construct, in part, because very little grading was needed to create the course. In fact, according to Norby, "the



project actually came in under budget."

"We really think one of our strong suits is our ability to bring the owner more value for his investment dollar," said Norby. The Preserve stands as tribute to that ability. Many of the courses which were rated by these three publications had budgets of \$8 or \$10 million. "By comparison, we were able to create an absolutely stunning golf facility for, in some cases, what amounted to half their budget," Norby added. In the end, that means less debt for the owner and lower green fees for the golfer.

Norby began his career working with Don Herfort, a Bloomington, Minn.-based golf architect and a Fellow with the American Society of Golf Course Architects. Herfort retired in 2003 and, since that time, Norby has been busy remodeling existing golf courses and building new ones.

This isn't the first time Norby's work has received high praise. Early in 2009, The Refuge Golf Club in Oak Grove, Minn. was named by Golf Week as the fifth "Best Course You Can Play" in Minnesota. The Refuge was also named by the Twin Cities Golf Guide and the Hacker's Guide as the best course in the Minneapolis/St. Paul market. Other highly acclaimed projects include Pleasant View Golf Course in Middleton, Wis. and Greystone Golf Club in Sauk Center, Minn., where he partnered with PGA Tour Professional Tom Lehman to design a beautiful links-style course on the shores of Sauk Lake.

"Currently, most of our work involves the assessment or redesign of existing golf facilities," says Norby. "We're also doing a lot of long-range master-planning to help owners understand how to prioritize improvements to their facility and become more competitive in their market area."

Norby adds, "The way in which we design a private golf course is very different from the way in which we design a destination golf course or a public golf facility. A private golf development may seek to attract a larger number of lower handicap golfers and will therefore likely be more challenging and have a comparatively high budget for maintenance and construction. The public golf course, on the other hand, or golf courses which are part of a residential golf community are generally attempting to appeal to a wider range of golfers and will likely be trying to create added value in order to increase lot values or accelerate real estate sales. Therefore, it is particularly important that we maximize golf course exposure and views and that we create a golf course that is both visually exciting and enjoyable to play."

For more information about Herfort Norby Golf Course Architects, visit www.herfortnorby.com. For more information about The Preserve on Rathbun Lake, visit www.honeycreekresort.com.

Photos by Peter Wong/Courtesy Herfort Norby Golf Course Architects

From top are holes 4, 5 and 11 at The Preserve on Rathbun Lake at Honey Creek Resort State Park.