

Jacobsen Hardy christen Golf Club at Gray's Crossing, in Tahoe

TRUCKEE, Calif. — The stars came out when The Golf Club at Gray's Crossing opened for play this summer, but the golf course itself — crafted by Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design on a one-of-a-kind parcel, 6,500 feet above sea level — shined brightest with its risk-reward strategies, pristine conditions, precipitous drops, and long views of the Sierra Nevada range.

With Director of Agronomy Joel Blaker presiding, hundreds of members and visiting dignitaries watched course architects Peter Jacobsen and Jim Hardy, partners in Houston-based Jacobsen Hardy, play an inaugural skins game at Gray's Crossing with Annika Sorenstam and Matt Greiser, a.k.a. Sign Boy. Local charities made off with the money, Greiser and Jacobsen got most of the laughs, everyone drove the green at the reachable par-4 6th, and the assembled crowd got its first look at the Tahoe region's most anticipated new club.

“There's nothing quite like The Golf Club at Gray's Crossing because the land it sits upon is so very unique,” said Jacobsen, who cited as examples layout's two reachable par-4s, the 6th and 14th — the former drops nearly 100 feet from tee to green, while the latter plays slightly uphill to a treacherous green. He also singled out the 13th and 14th, both set amid a high desert prairie that recalls the Sound of Music, and the double-fairwayed par-5 18th that is divided by a striking swath of wildflowers.

“As a firm,” Jacobsen continued, “we design courses in concert with the landscape and terrain. Within 18 holes, we want every player to have 18 different experiences. With the sort of varied terrain we were provided at Gray's Crossing, this was achieved with quite spectacular results.”

The Golf Club at Gray's Crossing is the third course operated by Tahoe Mountain Club (TMC), a members-only year-round sport, recreation and social activities club offered to real estate owners of any Tahoe Mountain Resorts (TMR) community, including Gray's Crossing. The other TMR communities are the Highlands, the Village at Northstar™ and Old Greenwood.

Blaker directs maintenance at all three TMC courses: Old Greenwood and Coyote Moon, both open to the public, and The Club at Gray's Crossing, which is private. No one knows these courses better than Blaker, who worked as the construction superintendent during Coyote Moon's development in the late 1990s. He then served as grow-in superintendent at Old Greenwood, staying on as TMC director of agronomy once it opened for play in 2004.

This sort of climate-specific experience helps explain the pristine turf conditions at The Club at Gray's Crossing, where Mike Cornette serves as head superintendent. On the greens, which are mature beyond their years, Blaker and Jacobsen Hardy opted for Dominant Extreme, a blend of Seed Research bentgrasses (1019/1119) that Blaker has perfected in the maintenance of TMC's other two courses. The turf was custom grown and the greens, like the entire course, were sodded.

"We were 100 percent sodded," Blaker explained. "We have a very short growing season here. It would have taken 12 years to grow in a mature golf course here from seed. This way we play the course 40 days after laying it down."

For some benefits, Blaker and his members will have to wait. Jacobsen Hardy accented its design at Gray's Crossing with seas of wildflowers, some framing holes and others intervening — such as the fairway divide on 18. You can't "sod" wildflowers, of course. Jacobsen noted that seeded wildflower plantings will take a couple growing seasons to fully mature in Truckee. But when they do, thanks to seasonal water flow off the mountains, these wildflowers bloom several times a year — each time in a different color, creating unusually vivid settings on several holes.

Blaker and Jacobsen Hardy have taken the long, responsible view re. The Golf Club at Gray's Crossing. The course was designed to achieve the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, in addition to Audubon International's Gold Signature status, golf's most rigorous environmental standard. Old Greenwood is the only golf course in the nation to earn LEED certification and one of 12 in the world to receive the Audubon Gold Signature Award.

"We expect Audubon certification before the year is out," Blaker said. "We were very up front with Jacobsen Hardy about getting certified, which does

involve some design limitations. We had to move some things around to make sure we had enough wildlife corridors, for example. But Jacobsen Hardy was great about that. They understood and followed our wishes — a lot of designers wouldn't have done that.

“Jacobsen Hardy also created some awesome golf holes here that really fit and look like they've been here forever. The corridors are very generous, but this is the sort of course where if you hit it three or four feet off the rough area, you're in 100-year-old sage plants. It looks very established.”

Favorites holes?

“Well, I think 15 and 16 are two truly awesome golf holes: 15 is a par-5, fairly narrow but you can get on in two — if you don't, you are sternly penalized. Sixteen is a long, downhill par-3 that just looks and plays beautifully.”

Jacobsen not only designed the Gray's Crossing layout but serves here as Director of Golf; Sorenstam is the Director of Health and Wellness. “I wouldn't have chosen this level of involvement if Tahoe Mountain Club weren't such an extraordinary club development,” Jacobsen added. “The golf course we've designed at Gray's Crossing is something special — it had to be considering the land we were provided. Anything less wouldn't have cut it.”