

The shape of things to come

Dave Smith has always enjoyed digging into things. As a child he'd play in the sandbox with his Tonka trucks building roads and castles. As a teen attending Crestwood Secondary School in Peterborough, his attention turned to dirt biking and off-road motorcycling. "We had a field behind our house that my friends and I converted into a dirt track, complete with jumps and moguls. I never thought of it until now, but 25 years later I'm still basically having fun with 200 acres of dirt," says Smith, who didn't pick up a golf club until he and his girlfriend, now wife (Rosie), started playing the game while he was attending Seneca College, taking civil engineering technology.

Today, as president and managing partner of Muskoka-based Persimmon Golf Inc., Smith, 40, is amusing himself in a much bigger sandbox. He and his associates have played a role as project manager and consultant in the development and construction of some of the most prestigious new golf facilities in Ontario, including Bigwin Island in the Muskokas, Grey Silo in Waterloo, Copper Creek in Kleinburg and Taboo at Muskoka Sands in Gravenhurst. He's also coordinating efforts at Wildfire Golf Club near Peterborough and helping out with the new Nick Faldo design at Lake Rosseau Beach Resort.

"At the end of 1999, I decided I wanted to go off and do my own thing," says Smith, who was hired right out of college by Bruce S. Evans Ltd., after completing two co-op work terms with the company. He worked his way up from field worker to company president over a 13-year peri-



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od that included stints with Evans' civil construction, entertainment and golf course construction divisions. "Golf was always the favourite area of the business for me, but the one thing I saw while working with clients was how tough a process it can be to build a golf course from the ground up."

There's a lot more to a golf course, he says, than building 18 holes, a range and clubhouse. "The grass on the golf course is really the paint on the wall; there is a lot that goes on before we see the green," says Smith, who logs, on average, 75,000 kilometres a year in his mobile office, an SUV that's hooked up with a cell phone and laptop. Among the expeditions are site investigations, land purchases, environmental assessments, financing, rezoning, planning, maintenance buildings, roads, hydro, sewers, parking lots—the list goes on.

"At Persimmon, we put together the right team for the project and make sure

at the end of the day everyone is doing what they're suppose to be doing so that we stay on schedule and on budget," says Smith, who has great working relationships, but no allegiances with any design, consulting or construction companies. It's his job to get the best fit at the best price for the golf course owner, keep the lines of communication open for everyone involved and hopefully have a little fun along the way.

"I like to consider myself representative of the average golfer, and I don't think it hurts that I bring that perspective to the table when we're discussing projects," says Smith, who "may play golf 10 times a year, but it's usually business related."

That said, he's pretty handy with a wedge and doesn't mind an architect who puts a lot of bunkers in his way. But what else would one expect from a man with such experience at playing in the sand?

—Brent Long