

# Adding Culture to Golf at St. Eugene

By Joshua Conway and Graeme Douglas

What sets many golf courses apart is determined by playability and atmosphere. Whether it is impeccably manicured greens and fairways, or an inviting 19<sup>th</sup> hole, the unique aspects of each course contribute to its popularity. The St. Eugene Golf Resort Casino in Cranbrook, B.C., is no exception.

developed more than 10,000 years of aboriginal history and 11 years of first-hand experience with the course. For Graeme Douglas, CGSA, manager of golf and hotel facilities, the path to creating the markers started with the inspiring phrase, “The Ktunaxa language has no word for extinct.

“We want to be more than a golf resort,” says Dallas Ferguson, chief executive officer. “We want to be able to educate people about the Ktunaxa and aboriginal people as a whole. We see it as something unique we can offer as part of that whole experience you are just not going to find anywhere else.”

Through a coordinated effort by staff and Ktunaxa elders, golfers at the St. Eugene Golf Resort Casino can learn a few words in Ktunaxa as they play a round of golf. The tee box markers throughout the golf course are being renamed in the Ktunaxa language—with phonetic spelling and translation. In keeping with the Ktunaxa culture, the nature of the course, and the overarching environmental ethos of the resort, the hole names reflect far more than distance and shape.

In fact, Ktunaxa names show an intimate knowledge of the environment that



The Ktunaxa are an indigenous people of North America. The goals of the Ktunaxa Nation Council include preservation and promotion of Ktunaxa traditional knowledge, language, and culture. A coordinated effort by staff and Ktunaxa elders help golfers learn a few words in Ktunaxa as they play a round of golf. From left to right: Graeme Douglas, manager, Golf/Hotel Facilities; Dorothy Alpine, Ktunaxa nation; Richard Bellerose, Golf Course Turfgrass Department.

Let’s keep it that way.” Since the course’s inception, he explains, the resort has always worked diligently to protect the environment by leaving wildlife corridors, buffer zones, and paths to water, and taking other measures to reduce its impact on the area.

But renaming the holes wasn't as easy as coming up with a fitting name. The Ktunaxa written language, like many aboriginal written languages across this country, is a new and evolving initiative. In fact, until 1979, the Ktunaxa language had no written lexicon. "If you look at the history of our people or the condition of our language today—I could be the last of the fluent speakers," says Dorothy Alpine. "If we don't do what we can to preserve what we know and pass it on to the younger generation, this language is going to be extinct. I get a special kind of good feeling when I hear



"We have a lot of wildlife here. Sometimes you'll see an eagle chasing an osprey for its fish. Kingfishers actually fish in Joseph Creek" says Mr. Douglas. "But it's more than just looking at the wildlife - some holes were named for their natural character like 'Rising Spirit'."



St. Eugene Resort Casino celebrated the Canadian Aboriginal Day on June 21, 2009. Community members were invited to St. Eugene to learn about the Ktunaxa culture through story-telling, dance presentations, basket weaving demonstrations, and the raising of a tipi.

people trying to speak it. On the golf course, with the phonetic spellings, people who don't understand can at least try and say the words. We are in Ktunaxa country and I want people to know that."

Along with renaming the holes on the golf course, St. Eugene also hosts an Aboriginal Day to celebrate the history and culture of

the Ktunaxa. The St. Eugene Resort Casino is owned in equal partnership by the Ktunaxa Nation, the Samson Cree Nation, and the Chippewa's of Rama First Nation. Home to an 18-hole championship golf course, St. Eugene has been a member of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses since March 2002. "The outreach and education component is often the most difficult for members to complete; the efforts of St. Eugene to tap into the local culture is a great example of how this can be done," states Joellen Lampman, program manager for the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses.

Joshua Conway is the education and communications manager for Audubon International. [jconway@auduboninternational.org](mailto:jconway@auduboninternational.org)). For more information on Audubon International, visit: [www.AudubonInternational.org](http://www.AudubonInternational.org). Graeme Douglas is the manager of Golf/Hotel Facilities for St. Eugene Golf & Casino Resort in Cranbrook, B.C. ([info@steugene.ca](mailto:info@steugene.ca)). For more information, visit: [www.steugene.ca](http://www.steugene.ca)