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On Tour with Steve Pajak at Trinitas

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The Bee's Steve Pajak is touring area golf courses unfamiliar to him. Three Bee readers are coming along each week.

Mike Gutierrez

- Age: 54.
- Resides: Elk Grove.
- Occupation: Civil servant.
- Handicap index: 11.4.
- About Mike: He graciously exchanged furlough Friday for Monday to join us. The Christian Brothers High School graduate said: "I want to apologize to all the guys on the golf team that I laughed at while I was playing football."

Scott Laronge

- Age: 28.
- Resides: Citrus Heights.
- Occupation: Looking for full-time work. He has an international MBA with a concentration in operations.
- Handicap index: 7.4.
- About Scott: He graduated from Mira Loma, where he volunteers as an assistant golf coach. "It's great working with a lot of kids with different skill levels," said our official group photographer.

Andy Austin

- Age: 39.
- Resides: Folsom.
- Occupation: IT systems analyst.
- Handicap index: 13.0.
- About Andy: *Our other Mira Loma graduate credits Empire Ranch pro Brett Taylor with curing his slice and teaching him to hit a draw. Andy learned the hard way at Trinitas that when the pin is back left on No. 17, long right is not good.*

COURSE OVERVIEW

When was the last time you were excited just to see the next hole on a golf course and it didn't have anything to do with how you were playing? Play Trinitas for the first time and you'll have your answer.

The holes look fun. They are fun. And they play fair. There are numerous forced carries and creeks crossing fairways making for some target golf, but the course isn't as intimidating as you would think for one with a slope of 149 and rating of 73.3. There is reasonable room off the tee and no undue penalty strokes lurking. Length isn't an issue at 6,700 yards and par 72 from the back tees.

That's because "each hole doesn't start until you reach the green," Scott Laronge said.

He's right. Some examples: No. 2: The green appears to slope toward the fairway at 45 degrees as you face an uphill second shot. It's a stunning look.

No. 4: Wide and shallow is redefined on this green. The bold golfers will take dead aim with bunkers front and back; the experienced will bring the approach shot in from the open right side and work with the contour.

No. 6: The short par 3 will require no more than a 9-iron for most players when the hole is located in the narrow tongue in the front of the green. The hole was in the wider back portion when we played, thank goodness.

No. 11: The par-4 green has an unusual front-to-back tilt.

No. 17: An hourglass shaped green built over a creek. Wait, there's more. Head pro Don Winter let us in on a little secret about this short par 3 – after our round. Even though there might not be a direct line to the hole if your ball is in the wrong quadrant, the green's contour will allow a putt to get to where the hole is located from anywhere.

No. 18: Do not be left of the hole. Miss the green to the right, but do not be left of the hole.

The scenery is so special, all the three-putts likely won't bother you. When we reached the ninth tee, we noticed we had no idea which way was back to the clubhouse. Winter appeared as if out of nowhere with our lunch. Trinitas has no food or beverage service, so players fill out sandwich orders when they arrive and get lunch from a nearby deli delivered as part of

the green fee.

The \$75 also includes a cart (a must) and practice balls. There is no driving range, so players warm up hitting off the 12th tee – the tee closest to the course's only building that is home to owner/builder/designer Mike Nemeo, his wife, Michelle, and their two young sons, the pro shop and the lounge, which is expected to be completed next week. Winter collects the balls before the day's first group passes back through.

Big plans for a lodge, spa and clubhouse are on hold as a zoning battle with Calaveras County plays out. Players making the 70-minute drive from downtown Sacramento will have to be satisfied with a fascinating course and no frills in the meantime. The course isn't even listed in the latest Northern California Golf Association guide.

The attractive Lodi red cobblestones that line the hazards will catch your eye and likely spark a debate regarding their fairness. There are lots of elevation changes, the most memorable being the tee at No. 3 to a par-3 green far below and the tee at No. 15 to a fairway with a lone tree in the middle.

The 30 minutes between tee times will make you feel as if Trinitas is your own private course. Our foursome made up half the day's play two Mondays ago. The five-hour round won't bother you.

"Guys can kind of feel like they can come in and own the place," Nemeo said. "That's our sweet spot."

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