



Blue Ridge Shadows ~ Hold Your Head Up

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The following story is all too common in the golf world. Developers have big dreams for a project that includes a golf course, community, and resort. On paper it looked like a sure bet for success until the proverbial, unforeseen bump-in-the-road throws everything in another direction.

I recall sitting down with the owners long before a spade struck the ground and previewing the original plans for Blue Ridge Shadows in Front Royal, VA. It looked like a no-brainer. I was probably as excited as the developers because I knew this area could really use a concept like this one. The residential development was going to be the cash cow for the unprecedented endeavor for the Northern Shenandoah Valley. We all know what happened next. The housing market went down the toilet. Add some additional costs in building the resort, and the road to get Blue Ridge Shadows open was a long and hard road to say the least. Since its opening in 2007, all three entities have different teams leading them, and we are happy to say the present day golf destination looks more attractive than ever.

The Tom Clark designed golf course is recognized annually by regional and national experts as one of the best Virginia has to offer. Clark's work here is a wonderful testament to laying a course out on the land. Doing this created several different styles in the layout. Parkland, target, and sweeping links holes are all evident at Blue Ridge Shadows. With all the "Top 10's" they have garnered over the years, you'd think they would just sit on their laurels. But the folks at Blue Ridge Shadows have seen fit to make some changes. A couple of years after the opening, the back nine was realigned, and this year the par 5 fourteenth (pictured on the cover) was significantly transformed to make the hole play easier and fairer. More on that hole later — let's start where we first tee it up and see why Blue Ridge Shadows has been dubbed "Virginia's Most Beautiful Golf." The par 4 opener carries that moniker proudly with Skyline Drive on the horizon coinciding with the landscape of the hole. A split-level fairway provides options off the tee with the safer route up the right side. From there, it's a gem of an approach to a multi-tiered green protected by a pond to the left. The next two holes play parallel to one another with the short, par 4

second an uphill tester, while the long, par 3 third plays downhill to a wide green. The remainder of the outward nine is fashioned through native hardwoods. A pair of par 5's and the lovely par 3 fifth take you to the westernmost part of the property. From there, three par 4's swing you back to the clubhouse. Each play from elevated tees get progressively more difficult. Players, take note of the false front on number seven and the deep greens on eight and nine that will change your club selection on your approaches.



The back nine at Blue Ridge Shadows is more open with less trees and a lot more water. The tenth is a solid par 3 that requires a valid tee shot to clear a large ravine. Anything less, and it's time to re-tee. Another signature, elevated tee shot gets you started on the par 4 eleventh that plays to a narrow fairway and finishes on a double green shared by the thirteenth, also a par 4. The twelfth is a par 3 with a large lake protecting the right of one of the longest greens. As previously mentioned, the zig-zag par 5 fourteenth has had a smart and welcomed face-lift. A wetlands area that used to split the fairway has been filled and now plays as fairway, thus giving a larger landing area from the tee. This hazard used to punish well struck drives, and was a bit unfair. The hole is now a true risk-reward for big hitters and is the first hole that brings Crooked Run Creek into play. Fifteen is a gorgeous par 4 with the tee box located adjacent to the clubhouse and high above the fairway. One hundred feet below, a large pond on the right and the creek on the left border the landing area. The last and the longest of the par 5's is sixteen. Trouble surrounds this customarily three-shot hole with designated target areas. The notorious green has three distinct areas that form a horse saddle. Needless to say, it





is one of the more interesting par 5's you'll ever play. Seventeen and eighteen are both short par 4's. The former has a stone bulkheaded pond protecting the green, while the latter is a great finisher with a 60-foot waterfall cascading behind a devilish putting surface.

Five sets of smartly situated tees provide a recipe for any level of golfer to enjoy Blue Ridge Shadows. From the tips, it's over 7300 yards and carries a lofty 75.5 rating. Only the most experienced players should attempt this ultimate test. The weekend warriors will have plenty to handle from the 6200 yard whites. Senior tees are very comfortable, and the women play from just over 5000 yards. *Golf Digest* places the course in the Top 50 "Women Friendly" in the country. For the last two years the course is perched among *Golfweek's* top five Virginia courses. The Holiday Inn and Suites overlooks many of the finishing holes and makes for a great golf getaway. The rooms and amenities are smart, stylish, and very golfer friendly. Houlihan's Restaurant quickly established itself as a fine culinary watering hole for locals and out-of-towners.

Today, the success of Blue Ridge Shadows can be attributed to two things. The first is the beautiful golf course, which always makes for a quality day on the links. The second is that the management core has been consistent since their opening. PGA professional Mike Arhnsbrak is one of the most respected in the mid-Atlantic and holds the District 10 Director post for the PGA. Superintendent Vince DiStefano been there since day one and does an incredible job. Both have been able to fight through some economic challenges along the way to help Blue Ridge Shadows hold its head up as one of the top courses in all of the Commonwealth. 🏌️



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