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# Legends of Golf at Big Cedar Lodge

*Johnny Morris Hosts Champions*





Golf's greatest champions have earmarked the PGA Tour Champions event in Branson as one of their favorite events. The Bass Pro Shop Legends of Golf draws former Tour stars who fiddle down to Big Cedar Lodge for a week in front of the galleries. The playing field includes icons who have stopped playing competitive golf. "It's fun to see Chi Chi [Rodriguez], Jack [Nicklaus], Gary [Player], and the guys who aren't out here every week. Champions Tour player Andy North shared, "To me, that's as much fun as anything."

The event is unusual, yet that is the appeal for many players. The Bass Pro Shops event is 54 holes, and it is the only PGA Tour event to include competitive play on a par-3 course for 18 holes. This is part of the attraction to non-exempt and retired players. The short course does not require a driver, or even a 3-wood, and this provides the players with more time to fish, hike, and pat paws with the fans outside the ropes. Gary Player feels that the Top of the Rock course could encourage a new perspective on a round of golf. "What golf needs desperately is shorter golf courses, and this is ideal," Player shared during a post-round interview.

The Top of the Rock course is a nine-hole rollercoaster ride that was credited to Jack Nicklaus. Nicklaus openly spells out his participation in the course's design,

"I did the golf course to start with, and I suppose my contribution was the routing, a shell of tees, and a green." The rest of the course was the vision of Bass Pro Shop founder and Big Cedar Lodge owner Johnny Morris. Nicklaus explained, "Johnny's contribution was ten times ... maybe 20 times that. And he put in beautification around it. He did a beautiful job." The result is one of the premier par-3 courses in the country, and an attraction on par with the rest of Branson's natural wonders.

Bass Pro Shop Legends of Golf is also contested on Buffalo Ridge, a Tom Fazio designed course. Formally known as Branson Creek Golf Club, Buffalo Ridge is annually ranked as Missouri's finest track. The players love it too. Davis Love III had to see it to believe it, "Until you see it, until you play a hole and there's buffalo, there's actually a buffalo." Morris' conservation effort revitalized the course and branded it with his lifelong efforts to preserve the beauty of the area. Love III adds, "That's what happens here. It is neat and fun and you can see why everybody loves it here." And that goes for players, fans, and guests.

Next on Morris' agenda is to open two new courses that will position Big Cedar Lodge as one of the premier golf resorts in the country. With an opening set for 2017, Gary Player's course places a priority on accessibility. The layout will be 12 holes

to encourage families to tee it up in the heart of the Ozarks. Utilizing dramatic rock formations and incredible vistas, Player's course will be an opportunity to connect with nature on a grand scale. It also leaves extra time to visit the areas other attractions.

Esteemed golf course architects Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw have collaborated with Morris to add a perfect complement to Buffalo Ridge. Set to open in 2018, the Coore/Crenshaw-designed course is a tribute to the Ozarks region and shares Morris' passion for authentic native areas.

Big Cedar Lodge is just a small part of Johnny Morris' impact on the outdoors. His efforts have not only preserved the natural wildlife surrounding Ridgedale and Branson, he has used his fortune to give back to the land, the people, and the waters that draw millions to this Midwestern destination. Guests are sure to mirror Bernhard Langer's impressions of Big Cedar, "... so much detail into everything. Even if your golf's not good, you can just look around and relax and enjoy this place."

### **Big Cedar Lodge**

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