

## Community hangs its revival hopes on Harbor Shores



Courtesy of Kemperlesnik

No. 6 at Harbor Shores.



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Golf is a game, not a social policy. Efforts to justify a golf-course project because of the good it will achieve in a community go for naught if the layout itself falls flat.

With that in mind, there is much to admire about The Golf Club at Harbor Shores, a key component of a larger development plan undertaken with the best of intentions, aimed at reviving what was a popular Midwest resort destination. The project is part of a widespread downtown effort to breathe new life into this once-thriving, now-distressed community on Lake Michigan's southeast shore. Big plans are afoot for the course, including serving as home to the Senior PGA Championship in 2012 and '14.

The effort is ambitious: a 500-acre, mixed-used development straddling the cities of Benton Harbor and St. Joseph. The area was left in the lurch when Whirlpool Corp. downsized its corporate headquarters. Into the breach stepped a joint venture involving the Whirlpool Foundation, a pair of public-sector economic-development organizations (Consortium for Community Development and Cornerstone Alliance) and a private firm (Evergreen Development).

## THE GOLF CLUB AT HARBOR SHORES

- **Par 71, 6,861 yards;** 74.7 rating, 143 slope
- **Green fees:** \$75-\$125 (Berrien County residents); \$75-\$150 (non-residents); \$4,000 individual annual pass

It's a complicated land plan. Actually, it's an overloaded one, with 800 residential home sites and plans for a resort, marina, Jack Nicklaus Golf Academy and First Tee facility. The course also works its way around existing homes and industrial buildings, as well as wetlands, two rivers and several well-trafficked roads that have to be crossed midround. In fact, the course occupies seven discrete plots of land, linked variously by bridges, tunnels or long hikes (rides, actually). There are four gaps of one-quarter to one-half mile during a round, so it's more than 1 1/2 miles beyond a typical green-to-tee distance.

Such treks through segmented parcels do not have to be a slog but can be made part of a compelling golf experience. The long walks at the Stanley Thompson-designed gem Highlands Links in Ingonish Beach, Nova Scotia, are stirring encounters with stark woodlands and meadows, including a 400-yard stroll alongside the Clyburn Brook from the 12th green to the 13th tee. And at creaky old Rockaway Hunting Club (1919) in Lawrence, N.Y., golfers amble through access roads to houses that evoke a Great Gatsby feel.

But at Harbor Shores, the effect is dizzying and confusing. And it does not help that from a playability standpoint, there are some jarring contrasts and features, such as a half-dozen inexcusably wild greens. The idea, apparently, was to defend par at the green on a layout where the fairways are generally expansive and things get tighter the closer you get to the putting surfaces. But designer Jack Nicklaus and his associate, Chris Rule, just got carried away.

Parts of the course are lovely, in particular a three-hole stretch (Nos. 7-9) atop lakeside dunes. Interestingly, this stretch occupies a 22-acre parcel of Jean Klock Park that Benton Harbor leased to the developers. The land for the park had been deeded to the city in 1917 for public use. That parcel is now the subject of a lawsuit by a citizens group claiming that the land for the golf holes was improperly appropriated. The Michigan Supreme Court is set to hear the case this year.

One of the great touches adorning Harbor Shores is an inventive set of tee markers. Colorful sculptures of metal and stained glass depict various wildflowers and other plants found on site. These were made by Benton Harbor craftsmen Jerry Catania and Josh Andres, and attest to Harbor Shores' commitment to local revival.

Elsewhere, such objects might seem trite; here, they are part of an interesting message. It's just too bad the site limitations, costly green fees and excessive putting surfaces undermine the good intent.