



## Import

### The best 15-hole golf course around?

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The Dunes Club in New Buffalo has been called the best nine-hole golf course in America. The private nature of the club means many golfers have not been able to experience the course and form their own opinions about the claim. However, there is a great opportunity awaiting local golfers as early as next summer — Harbor Shores, the nation's greatest 15-hole golf course. Construction delays, due in part to the 14,782 (approximately) lawsuits brought against the project, mean the three holes to be built in Benton Harbor's Jean Klock Park won't be seeded until next year and won't open for play until 2010. That leaves 15 holes to be finished in 2009, though it hasn't officially been decided if the course will play as a nine or 15-hole test. Certainly, the 15-hole course would be unique, especially the stop at the snack bar as one makes the turn in the middle of the eighth hole before playing the back seven and a half. The delay in building the portion of the course in Jean Klock Park means the upcoming fall and winter months can be devoted to the legal arena. Ridiculous claims have, of course, come from both sides. Some opponents claim the golf course project will take away Benton Harbor's only public beach. Are they actually familiar with the plans? The beach itself will not be affected, and if anything, it will be improved. I would guess summer days find more Benton Harbor residents at Silver Beach than at Jean Klock Park. With the planned improvements, perhaps that will change. Harbor Shores developers have said recently that they have no Plan B if the opponents' lawsuits were to prevail and the Jean Klock Park land was not available. Certainly, from a marketing standpoint and a quality standpoint, having the holes overlooking Lake Michigan is a big boost. An advertisement or brochure boasting "Lake Michigan views" is much different than one merely stating the course is near Lake Michigan. However, a course merely near Lake Michigan still can be a world-class golf course. Point O'Woods is near Lake Michigan. Lost Dunes is near Lake Michigan. Both have at various times been ranked among the nation's top 100 courses by various publications. The Dunes Club, as well, is near Lake Michigan. None of those courses is on Lake Michigan. Being on Lake Michigan would, of course, make Harbor Shores stand out from those private courses as well as the current top upscale public courses in the area like Lake Michigan Hills, Berrien Hills and HawksHead. Lacking those views doesn't mean people won't play it. It's also doubtful developers plan to leave it as a 15-hole course if the Jean Klock Park area is unavailable. No Plan B? There's a Plan B. If there was no option beyond the Jean Klock Park land, there wouldn't be 15 holes under construction and set to open next year. Developers aren't going to eat the project and shut down operations after having already spent so much money. Somehow, land would be found for three more golf holes. The rate debate Greens fee ranges for the Harbor Shores golf course have been listed at \$65 to \$225. While it's not uncommon for top-notch public courses to fetch such a high rate, it is hoped area players can get on for a more reasonable amount, if for nothing more than some local good will. Greens fees at Arcadia Bluffs, in Arcadia Mich., range from \$75 to \$180 for the course rated by multiple publications as the best public course in Michigan. While more remote than Harbor Shores, Arcadia Bluffs features Lake Michigan views on all 18 holes. The Chicago area, where many of Harbor Shores' tourist golfers will come from, is noted for high greens fees. The Glen Club in Glenview, Ill., recently rated by Golf Magazine as the top public course in Illinois, charges \$100 in the offseason and \$160 in season. A number of other top public courses around Chicago charge near or more than \$100. So fees that high are not unprecedented. There are top-notch public courses available for much less, too. Some of them are even Jack Nicklaus designs. In-season rates for courses on the Bear Trace, a collection of Nicklaus designs at state parks in Tennessee, range from \$42 to \$60. Old Works, in Anaconda, Mont., has been referenced to by Nicklaus himself as an

example of what a top golf course can do economically for an area. The fees at Old Works range from \$29 to \$50, depending on time of year. Its Web site proudly boasts a Golf Magazine reference to it as the nation's best course for \$50 or less. Harbor Shores can probably get well over \$100 for greens fees in the summer when it's fully open. But there's no reason it can't let area players get on for \$30 or \$40 sometimes, even if only on weekdays in April and October. Darren Phillips is a sports writer for The Herald-Palladium. Contact him at [dphillips@TheH-P.com](mailto:dphillips@TheH-P.com)

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