

THE RISE OF DESTINATION GOLF

Almost half of the new 18-hole courses that opened over the past five years were built more than 50 miles from a major city.

By Mark Pazdur, Publisher

ROSCOMMON, NORTHERN MICHIGAN: As our sport continues to find its sea legs with America's changing demographics and leisure preferences, destination golf has become a bright spot in an otherwise lackluster outlook. Journeys to Bandon Dunes in Oregon and Kauri Cliffs in New Zealand have become a rite of passage for the golf purist.

The newest entry into the burgeoning market is Forest Dunes in Northern Michigan. Currently the resort offers Weiskopf and Doak designs with a short course in the planning stage. Each has a distinctly different feel. The Forest Dunes Course (Weiskopf) is highly regarded for its conditioning and bent grass fairways and greens, while The Loop (Doak) features a creative concept—a reversible design that alternates directions every other day.

"The Loop is reminiscent of what you would find in Scotland, providing the opportunity to play a design that's a throwback to our game's origins, without the need for a passport," reported Don Helinski, director of golf operations at Forest Dunes.



FOREST DUNES, designed by Tom Weiskopf, benefits from a landscape sculpted from ancient glaciers. Its front nine is typical Northern Michigan with tree-lined fairways. When making the turn, the back opens into a wasteland, dunes setting.

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ADMINISTRATION

Mark E. Pazdur
PUBLISHER

Theda Ahern Pazdur
PRESIDENT & CFO

G. David Piper
CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

EDITORIAL/MANAGEMENT

Mark E. Pazdur
EDITOR IN CHIEF
mark@executivegolfermagazine.com

Theda Ahern Pazdur
ART DIRECTOR
theda@executivegolfermagazine.com

Joyce Stevens
MANAGING EDITOR
joyce@executivegolfermagazine.com

June Graham
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR
june@executivegolfermagazine.com

JoAnn Pazdur
June Marian
Joyce Arnetta
Eleanor Edwards
Rich Stevens
Taylor JoAnn
Nikki Taylor
Kate Lauren
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

ADVERTISING OFFICES

Mark E. Pazdur
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR

10 Dunlin Lane
Aliso Viejo, California 92656
PH: (949) 933-6478

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PH: (949) 933-6478

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BOARD DIRECTORS

Edward F. Pazdur
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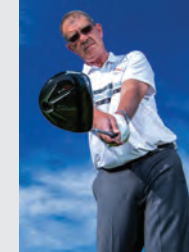
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June Graham
Circulation Director
june@executivegolfermagazine.com

The Publisher's Page

"MY DOCTOR TOLD ME I NEEDED TO TAKE UP GOLF to reduce my stress level. My pace is 100 mph and I can't slow down. Instead of taking up golf, I entered the golf business.



"The impetus for building a short course was my grandchildren. When we would play our Weiskopf or Doak course, they would tee off about 75 yards in front of the green. My grandchildren didn't feel they were playing 'real golf' because we weren't all hitting from the same tee box. I wanted to build a course that would allow everyone, no matter the skill level, to play together and have fun.

"When I purchased Forest Dunes, I didn't realize the 'golf' business is actually the 'hospitality'

business. Repeat customers are our lifeblood. I firmly believe if you are treated well and receive fair value for your dollar, you will want to come back." — LEW THOMPSON

Lew Thompson, owner of Forest Dunes, has built a successful trucking company that transports an incredible 26 million turkeys per year.

TOW TRUCK ON SPEED DIAL

Forest Dunes is located five miles outside of Roscommon, Michigan. "I forgive you if you haven't heard of our town with a population of 1,100," expressed Mark Lutz, vice president at Forest Dunes. "Google Maps includes dirt logging roads in the area. More than once, we've had a player get their rental car stuck in our soft sandy soil that's ideal for a golf course, but not the best



THE LOOP, designed by Tom Doak, was named "Best New Public Course in America" by Golf Digest in 2016.

The Publisher's Page

"THE IDEA OF A REVERSIBLE COURSE is not as revolutionary as it sounds. Many Scottish links, including The Old Course at St. Andrews, were played in reverse in winter to spread out the wear and tear of divots." – TOM DOAK

"MY COURSE REPLICATES a classic style and emulates a risk/reward involvement on most every hole." – TOM WEISKOPF



of surfaces for a 3,500-pound vehicle!

"Two seasons ago, we had a guest from Florida make the three-hour drive north from Detroit after his business meeting. He got lost and by the time he arrived at Forest Dunes his nerves were frayed," recalled Lutz. "With a bit of disgust in his voice he retorted, 'this better be worth it' as he headed out to the first tee. I greeted him in the golf shop after his round to inquire about his day. With an attitude that had changed 180 degrees, he exclaimed in an Arnold Schwarzenegger accent, 'I'll be back.' Low and behold, last year he returned with friends for a buddies golf trip."

A NATIONAL DESTINATION

"I appreciate efforts guests make to travel to Forest Dunes," continued Lutz. "I understand firsthand the importance of checking all the boxes during your trip, not just your day on the golf course. A big part of the experience includes how you are treated and the quality of our food service.

"While attending Ohio State, the first Buffalo Wild Wings restaurant opened on campus. Its service, pricing, and food quality was so superior, that on Tuesdays, when it offered 10-cent wings, the Wendy's across the street would close for lack of business," said Lutz. "I decided to forgo college, used money saved up, and purchased 20 percent equity in Buffalo Wild Wings back in 1983. After

working 100-hour weeks for decades, I retired from the company in 2016 when it had 1,200+ stores in 10 countries with \$4 billion in annual sales.

"After four months without a purpose to wake up in the morning, I joined the management team at Forest Dunes to utilize what I had learned during my career at Buffalo Wild Wings and integrate the 'best of' practices at the club. You don't have to offer an extensive menu. Simplicity and quality are keys to success."

PURE MICHIGAN

The state's tourism slogan, "Pure Michigan," is now in its second decade to promote its vast natural lakes and forests as an ideal vacation getaway. "Hardly anyone passes through Michigan on their way to someplace else," clarified Helinski. We are a peninsula in an out-of-way location not unlike traveling to the Florida Keys. You are visiting for a purpose. As a \$30 million complex, we strive to compete on the national stage that appeals to the higher IQ golfer. We do not offer spa services or a resort-style pool. You come to Forest Dunes for the best of golf. While the state utilizes the 'Pure Michigan' catch phrase, I like to say we are the 'Pure Golf' choice in the region." ■

For information on summer golf packages, please visit ForestDunesGolf.com.



The Publisher's Page



THE LAND AT FOREST DUNES was once owned by William Durant, founder of General Motors.

