

Chicagoland Golf -June, 2002 New course in far southwest Essex is affordable and fun.

New High Point GC won't blow your budget.

By Phil Kosin

We've said it herein many times in the past: the only way to grow the game of golf is to build more new courses that cater to recreational golfers while not being too dumbed-down for accomplished players to get a solid challenge. The sad news in the \$25 billion per year golf industry is that while 3 million new players take up the game annually, an equal number abandon their clubs for other pursuits.

With that in mind, the new High Point Golf Club in far southwest Essex, Illinois, will make its debut June 10 and offer what this market needs most – affordable, fun golf.

High Point is a nine-holer, and because it is on the periphery of the Chicagoland area (about 7 miles south of downtown Braidwood), you should figure that to make the drive worthwhile, you'll play it twice in one trip. Brian Tulk, the director of golf operations, has set up a reservation system to accommodate 18 hole rounds without unnecessary delay between nines.

"We've anticipated most people doing that, and so we'll book starting times that compliment each other, so there isn't a long delay when making the turn" he said. "Of course, people are also welcome to come out and play nine, if that's all they want to do. We're committed to having a great product."

High Point is part of a new residential development, but its routing attempts to emulate a "core" golf course that doesn't have the homes IN the golf course. The course was designed by local golf course architect Greg Martin, who did all 27 at Carillon and most recently did the excellent redesign at Phillips Park GC.

At the urging of the owners, Martin made the course playable for everyone.

"That's what we wanted," said Mike Piper, who owns the course and golf community along with Randy and Chris Bisailon and Chuck Fieldman. "I don't claim to be a great player, but I do enjoy the game. We wanted to build a course that is user-friendly. We hope to have a lot of family play, husbands and wives, parents and juniors. We'll have some organized leagues, too. It will be fun."

High Point is selling a limited number of memberships, very affordable and aimed

at local residents and future homeowners. There are about 75 lots, ranging in price from \$35,500 to \$45,000.

The course conditioning is still a bit rough, due to lousy weather so far this spring, but Tulk anticipates it should be in very playable condition by opening day.

The fairways are Kentucky Bluegrass, with bentgrass, sand-based greens to speed drainage after a shower. There are bunkers that dome into play, but just enough to keep better players honest. The course is on the highest point of Kankakee County, just south of the Will County line, but don't expect an Alpine experience. The wind will be a factor every day.

Martin inherited an interesting site, more than just a dull, former cornfield. There are three wetlands on the course and several old groves of thick, mature woodlands add to the experience.

From the back tees, High Point plays to par 36 at 3,265 yards with a course rating of 70.8 (for 18 holes) and a slope of 116. For women, the rating is 68.8 from 2,556 yards with a 111 slope. The white (middle) tees play from 2,945 yards with 68.0/110.

The two par-3's are quite challenging at 180 and 169 yards – the latter (No. 8) requires carrying a serene pond. Tulk has his eye adding an additional back tee, one that stretch No. 8 to about 190 yards, all carry over the pond. Whew!

The par-5's at 527 and 487 yards demand accuracy, but both are reachable with 2 solid shots – but No. 5 has a tough green complex and the finishing ninth is well-bunkered with a heavily-contoured putting surface. Eagles will be well earned.

The par-4s range from 357 to 405 yards, and Martin made good use of his imagination – no two holes look remotely alike. And again, he made the course play fair without any artificial tricking-up.

Please note the contoured greens (averaging about 7,000 square feet) at High Point will demand good reads and proper pace. While the course was designed to be friendly to players of all abilities, only a sharp putter will survive his/her round without a three-jack.

There will be a practice range on site in the future, and the foundation has been installed for an expansive clubhouse.

Perhaps the best news is the green fee, which won't require taking out a second mortgage. A Monday through Thursday 18 with cart is \$18.00 to walk and \$30.00 riding.

When the grow-in is complete, High Point will be a good one, worth both the price and the drive.

