

Michigan's gold coast — golfer's paradise

By Joan Adamczak
special writer

THERE'S GOLD in the rolling hills of northern lower Michigan. It's not in the form of shimmering, irregularly shaped nuggets, but round, white, dimpled golf balls. Promoters and marketers are now calling this area Gold Coast.

Sylvan Resort, scheduled to open this fall in Gaylord, will bring the Gold Coast tally to 10 resorts and 19 championship courses.

Links-lovers can play courses designed by such golf greats as Jack Nicklaus, Robert Trent Jones, Arnold Palmer and Bill Newcomb. Many feel this golf mecca rivals the courses at Myrtle Beach and Pebble Beach.

"Northern Michigan is probably one of the finest areas for public golf in the country," says Plymouth resident Dave Richards, advertising and promotions director of P.A.R. Golf, a Dearborn-based company promoting golf vacations in the area.

THE GOLD COAST was formed about two years ago when P.A.R. Golf founders Doug Paul and Ron Butkovich were hired to pull the northern Michigan resorts together

travel

and market them as one area. This type of promotion is already done in Hilton Head and Myrtle Beach.

"If you took the Northern Michigan Gold Coast and compared it to the best-known area, Myrtle Beach, the only thing different would be the ocean," Richards said. "They have four or five very nice golf courses, but after that it's more quantity than quality."

According to Richards, the terrain of northern Michigan with its hills, trees, lakes and the abundance of sand, makes the area a natural for golf courses. The Legend, Arnold Palmer's course at Hilton Shanty Creek, cuts through ravines and offers tree-lined fairways in a natural setting that makes it very attractive.

"There is a lot of land in northern Michigan so you can make the courses long and difficult," Richard says. "In Florida and Myrtle Beach where land is selling for maybe \$40,000 an acre, you just can't afford that much."

NORTHERN MICHIGAN weather allows golf courses to stay open from about May through September, which is comparable to Myrtle Beach's season, says Richards.



One of the newest courses in the Gold Coast area is "The Bear" at the Grand Traverse Village resort. Here golfer's enjoy the 13th hole.

The diversity of the links in northern Michigan lures golfers from around the country. Some courses are built on easy, rolling hills. Others, like the Boyne Mountain Monument Course, remind golfers that they are playing on a ski slope; golfers tee off down the side of the mountain and finish off on a spectacular 480-yard, par 4 island green.

Another notable is the Boyne Highlands Heather Course, designed by Robert Trent Jones. This course has been one of Golf Digest's "Top

100" courses for the past 11 years. "The greens, fairways and marshlands have earned a reputation of toughness," according to Richards.

THE AREA'S newest golf gem is Jack Nicklaus' The Bear at Grand Traverse Resort Village. This championship course has back tees that are even tougher on the pros, but alternative front tees enable weekend golfers to enjoy it too. An addition to the resort this summer will be a \$23 million, 15-story condominium tow-

er, overlooking east Grand Traverse Bay. It will contain 186 suites with a restaurant and lounge on top.

It is hoped that such expansion will continue in the areas around the resorts as more people are made aware of Michigan's Gold Coast. P.A.R. golf set up northern Michigan golf vacations for about 1,500 people in 1985. This year they hope to increase that to 4,000 to 5,000.

Their long range goal is to make northern Michigan a national golf destination within the next three years.

"We want to bring in the out-of-state people and let the people in the Detroit and Grand Rapids areas know that there's great golf up there," Richard said. "Approximately 21 percent of the golfers in the country live in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin."

THE BEST GOLF market is in the Midwest and is there for the taking, according to Richards.

"With 21 percent of the golfers in the country in our five states, all we have to do is let them know the courses are up there," he said.

To reach that audience, the Gold Coast is advertising in Golf Digest and various Ohio and Chicago magazines, covering a 12-state area around the Midwest. Last year responses were received from over 40 states and from as far away as Saudi Arabia and Belgium.

If you're not a golfer you can still

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enjoy all the amenities the Gold Coast has to offer. Most of the resorts have indoor-outdoor pools, children's programs and tennis. Many have racquetball courts, exercise rooms and even a massage.

PRICES for a three-day, three-night golf vacation range from \$180 per person to \$288, including golf fees. The resorts are also close to such attractions as the Sleeping Bear Dunes on Lake Michigan, the Star of Charlevoix dinner cruise, Mackinac Island and the Cherry County Playhouse in Traverse City.

If you already have vacation plans for this year, keep a golf vacation in mind for next year. Golfers can take advantage of new and improved courses as early as this fall. A Robert Trent Jones course called Tree Tops will open this autumn at the Sylvan Resort in Gaylord.

For more information about golf vacation packages or courses in Michigan, call P.A.R. Golf at 1-800-222-2220 or 562-2533 locally.



Golfers hole out on the 15th at the Boyne Mountain course.

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