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Muni Masters

These municipal courses have demanding holes and luxury facilities

By JASON DEEGAN

• April 04, 2005

The phrase "municipal golf course" conjures an image among many golfers of an older course in poor condition used by beginners or by seniors on a budget. But that stereotype has changed in recent years as some local governments have gone luxury with their links. (See story, Page 20).

For this year's Crain's Executive Life Golf Guide, we've picked the 10 best municipal golf courses in metro Detroit as determined by a panel of three local golf writers and three Crain's readers.

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The competition was tight; 28 of the area's 45 municipal courses received at least one vote from a panel member.

The panel included Randy Tasco, director of auto groups at Dental Dental Plan of Michigan in Farmington Hills; Terry Oplinger, a consultant at Mainstreet Business Solutions in Farmington Hills; and Jeff Meyer, manager of vocational marketing for General Motors Isuzu Truck in Pontiac.

Here are the top 10 municipal courses, as chosen by the panel, listed alphabetically:

Fieldstone Golf Club 1984 Taylor Road, Auburn Hills, (248) 370-9354, owned by Auburn Hills. This property transformed from boring to "bling-bling" when Arthur Hills redesigned the old 27-hole Arrowhead course in 1998. The facilities caught up to with the course when a new clubhouse opened last summer. This 6,978-yard course with one of Detroit's highest slope ratings (142) is tough enough to host the qualifier for the PGA Tour's Buick Open.

Glen Oaks Golf Course
30500, 13 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (248) 851-8356, owned by Oakland County. This playable par-70 course maxes out at 6,110 yards, thanks to six par-3s on the course and two short par-5s on the front nine. Its slightly rolling terrain and location in the heart of Farmington Hills



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make it a popular stop. The 1920s English-style stone clubhouse is designated as a Michigan Historical Building.

Lakes of Taylor Golf Club

25505 Northline Road, Taylor, (734) 784-4653, owned by Taylor. Part of the Arthur Hills Golf Trail, the Lakes of Taylor opened in 1995 and is the longest municipal course in the area at 7,014 yards. Mounding, bunkering and water all play an equal part in keeping players humble. A design quirk, three straight par-5s beginning at No. 8, makes for an interesting round.

Leslie Park Golf Course

2120 Traver Road, Ann Arbor, (734) 994-1163, owned by Ann Arbor. Even with though Ann Arbor boasts a handful of good public courses with a country club-type setting, many locals consider Leslie Park the city's best. Built in 1967 and redesigned in the 1990s by Arthur Hills, the 6,591-yard design is well-conditioned and filled with strategy. It hosts the Ann Arbor senior and men's city championships. The walk up to the 14th tee is so steep, it is nicknamed Cardiac Hill.

Lyon Oaks Golf Course

52251 Pontiac Trail, Wixom, (248) 437-1488, owned by Oakland County. The gem of the Oakland County courses, the 6,775-yard Lyon Oaks opened in 2002, immediately drawing praise. A large driving range and a 21,000-square-foot clubhouse, which can accommodate up to 450 people for weddings and banquets, complement the Arthur Hills signature course. Lyon Oaks features target golf with numerous carries over wetlands, especially on approach shots. The back nine demands "island hopping," as golf-course architect Steve DeForrest describes it, where players must hit to designated fairway areas over, and around, wetlands.

Pheasant Run Golf Club

46500 Summit Parkway, Canton Township, (734) 397-6460, owned by Canton Township. The 27-hole course is part of a community complex that includes a large conference center. Architect Steve Forrest of Arthur Hills and Associates helped build the original 18 holes in 1996 that play through a housing development. The new, more-secluded nine holes opened in 2002. The new 27th hole, which was the old No. 18 before the redesign, is a memorable one, a 540-yard par-5 dogleg right that bends around a large water hazard.

Pierce Lake Golf Course

1175 S. Main St., Chelsea, (734) 475-5858, owned by Washtenaw County. This 6,903-yarder is the best course of the handful that can be seen from I-94. Rolling, wooded terrain right off Main Street in Chelsea provided the perfect theater for architect Harry Bowers, best known for his work at The Rock at Drummond Island. The back nine ends with a bang, a 234-yard par-3.

Rackham Golf Course

10100 W. 10 Mile Road, Huntington Woods, (248) 543-4040, owned by Detroit and managed by American Golf. The best of the Detroit city courses, the 6,555-yard Rackham has a rich history. Built in 1923, the Donald Ross design has hosted two United States Golf Association men's Amateur Publinx championships and is one of the state's busiest courses, drawing 55,000 rounds a year. The bold Ross bunkering and small, target greens will test the accuracy of your irons on approach shots.

Rouge Park Golf Course

11701 Burt Road, Detroit, (313) 837-5900, owned by Detroit and managed by American Golf. The 6,262-yard Rouge Park has been serving locals since 1930. Rouge has had its problems - flooding from the Rouge River, vandalism and theft of carts - but Karen Peek, the regional director for American Golf, said she expects a better year in 2005. Keeping your ball out of the river, which cuts across seven holes, is always a challenge.

Whispering Willows Golf Course

20500 Newburgh Road, Livonia, (248) 476-4493, owned by Livonia and managed by TJW Inc. Many consider Fox Creek to be the best of the three Livonia city courses, but this 6,056-yard par-70 impressed panelists. The course, opened in 1967, has 11 holes that flirt with water. Hitting it straight is paramount to a good score.

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