



Local News

Harbor Shores stays on course

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John Madill / H-P staff A wooden bridge cart path winds through the pond at Jean Klock Park in Benton Harbor. The three golf course holes at the park have not been built because of litigation. Harbor Shores developers say nine holes of the 18-hole course should open by mid-July.

Developers select home builders, plan to open 9-hole course in July

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BENTON HARBOR - A nine-hole golf course will be ready for play this summer in Harbor Shores and eight builders have been chosen to build houses on 30 lots between Michigan 63 and the Paw Paw River in St. Joseph, Harbor Shores officials announced Wednesday.

The houses represent a small portion of the more than 800 homes developers expect will eventually be built in Harbor Shores, and other builders will surely have opportunities to land jobs in the development.

But the announcement is notable because it shows that the ball is getting rolling on the next phase of the 530-acre golf, residential and resort development in Benton Harbor, Benton Township and St. Joseph.

In light of the slowdown in the housing market, developers said in a written statement that they intend to use 2009 to build more interest in Harbor Shores, complete pre-sales and start limited construction on single-family homes and cottages. They expect sales and construction to speed up in 2010.

More than 120 people have paid \$1,000 deposits for reservations to buy homes in the development.

Harbor Shores Managing Director Mark Hesemann said he expects some of those people who put down deposits will decide they don't want to buy a home there, but the number of reservations is still significant. He said some similar golf developments in other parts of the United States are drawing few reservations, if any, these days.

The eight builders selected are: Christe Construction of St. Joseph; Construction Service Associates of Benton Harbor; Cornerstone Builders of Berrien Springs; Drake Group of New Buffalo; Garden Homes of Granger, Ind.; Inovateus of South Bend; Schmidke Construction of St. Joseph; and Shoreline Development of New Buffalo. They were chosen from about 30 builders.

Hesemann said each builder selected cannot buy more than two lots on the 30-lot parcel at this point. The builders selected told Harbor Shores they are planning or are open to the idea of building a spec house.

Kerry Wright, Harbor Shores property specialist, said if homebuyers want to use a different builder, they may do so if that builder goes through Harbor Shores' application process.

Hesemann said Harbor Shores is also in the final stages of choosing a company to build 60 cottages along Higman Park Road north of the Paw Paw River. He said developers have narrowed the field to four builders.

Another local builder has made a proposal to build the course's clubhouse on Graham Avenue in Benton Harbor, Hesemann said.

A nine-hole course

Harbor Shores officials said the project's Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course will most likely be available in a nine-hole format when it opens in July.

The focus of the course's first season will be community events and charity outings, Hesemann said.

Fifteen holes of the golf course will be ready this summer, but the remaining three holes developers want to build would be on leased land in Benton Harbor's Jean Klock Park. However, the lease is being challenged in court by two environmental groups who do not want a golf course to be built in the park on Lake Michigan.

"We're feeling very good about where we are," said David Whitwam, the chairman of Harbor Shores Community Redevelopment Inc. "If there's one disappointment it's the delays we've experienced because of the legal actions against the project."

He said Harbor Shores has spent \$56 million so far on land, infrastructure and the golf course. Financing was in place before the economic crisis hit, he added.

Wendy Dant Chesser, a Harbor Shores trustee and president and CEO of Cornerstone Alliance, said developers have responded to the appeal Friends of Jean Klock Park filed in state court after its lawsuit was dismissed. Both sides are now waiting for the court to either schedule a hearing on the appeal or issue a decision.

Developers are also waiting for a Grand Rapids judge to make a decision in a federal lawsuit Protect Jean Klock Park filed against Benton Harbor, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the National Park Service for allegedly violating environmental rules in approving the Jean Klock Park lease.

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