



Forest Akers

POSTCARDS FROM GREATER LANSING, MICHIGAN GREEN ENERGY – GOLF FLOURISHES NEAR THE HOME OF THE MICHIGAN STATE SPARTANS

By Glen Turk

I just spent the same amount of cash filling up my tank yesterday as I did for a dozen of the latest premium golf balls.

Once that reality sunk in, I devised a plan – only take trips to overflowing golf destinations that offer a bevy of courses within a small radius. Fortunately for me, I remembered my trip a few years back to **Greater Lansing, Michigan**, a.k.a. The Land of Sparty, and a multitude of courses that left me green with envy.

And when I say multitude, I might be underselling the region, as the Greater Lansing Area is home to over *50 courses* within a *50-mile radius* in a metro area of only 450,000 people.

The **Greater Lansing Convention & Visitors Bureau** oversees spreading the word that the home of Michigan State University is also home to a dynamic, underrated golf destination. “In my opinion the Greater Lansing golf scene may be overlooked simply because of our location in the state,” began Tracy Padot, vice

president of marketing for the Greater Lansing CVB. “But I think we prove that you don’t have to drive for hours to Northern Michigan or other Midwest destinations to find excellent courses. Lansing’s central location makes us an easy day trip or weekend getaway. Additionally, the region’s courses offer fantastic value, allowing golfers access to premier courses at affordable rates. The region has hosted national collegiate championship level events at Forest Akers, while Hawk Hollow is set to host the 2022 Michigan Amateur at the end of June. Who doesn’t want to test their skills on the same courses where the champions play?” concluded Padot.

Of the 30 courses inside the metroplex, nearly all are open to the public and most feature green fees under \$50 with cart for 18 holes. Unfortunately, MGM couldn’t experience all of Lansing’s golfing treasures, but we were able to experience six of their top tracks during a whirlwind three-day trip this spring.

*Day 1 –
A Long Drive in the Car Followed
by Shorter Drives on the Course*

Having to hit an opening drive after being on the road for five hours is an arduous task when you're close to hitting the big 5-oh. That's why we headed to **Forest Akers**, the home facility of Michigan State University, which also has one of the top 50 practice ranges in the country.

I love playing university golf courses as the great ones have a definable spirit about them. Plus, it's cool to recall all the prominent players that walked the fairways before they became household names. Forest Akers excels in that regard, but they do separate themselves by having two championship layouts near campus, the West and the East.

"Our West and East Golf Courses are a great 36-hole combination," began Bryan Harris, general manager, PGA professional of Forest Akers. "Many guests schedule 36-hole days where they play the East for their morning round and the West for their afternoon round. The East Course allows golfers generous landing areas for tee shots and larger greens than that at the West Course. The West Course is designated an arboretum, where each tree species is native to the State of Michigan. The terrain is rolling with smaller greens that require precision iron shots to setup the player for birdie opportunities. Tree-lined corridors off most tee boxes make it important that the player is in control of their driver," explained Harris.

Holes of distinction on the West Course, which hosts most Big Ten competitions, include a stout collection of par-3s. All four measure over 160 yards from the playable set of green tees that come in at 6,402 yards. My favorite of the short holes is the uphill 184-yard 9th, complete with two massive bunkers right of the putting surface and a fall-off area left.



It is also important to note that Forest Akers partners with **The Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center**, which allows guests to stay where Spartans stay. The complex features one of the best restaurants in the area (The State Room), a full-service workout facility, and a hospitality team that is as good as you will find anywhere.

Our home base for the trip was the **StayBridge Suites** in nearby Okemos. Not only did we enjoy a multi-room suite, but they have cool amenities like a free, hot breakfast and their social hour. Monday through Wednesday from 5:30-7:30 p.m., they supply a



Eagle Eye

sampling of appetizers and snacks at no additional cost. Plus, thanks to their ideal location (just a stone's throw away from I-96) every course we played was less than a 20-minute drive.

Day 2 – Even After 48 Holes of Golf, We Didn't Want Night to Fall

I won't lie, our itinerary for day two was ambitious. 18 holes by morning, another 12 by afternoon, and then quick dinner followed by get in as many as you can before dusk. All three properties, **Hawk Hollow, Eagle Eye, and Woodside** are owned by the Kesler family and are less than five miles apart. The ease of travel between properties made this memorable day possible.

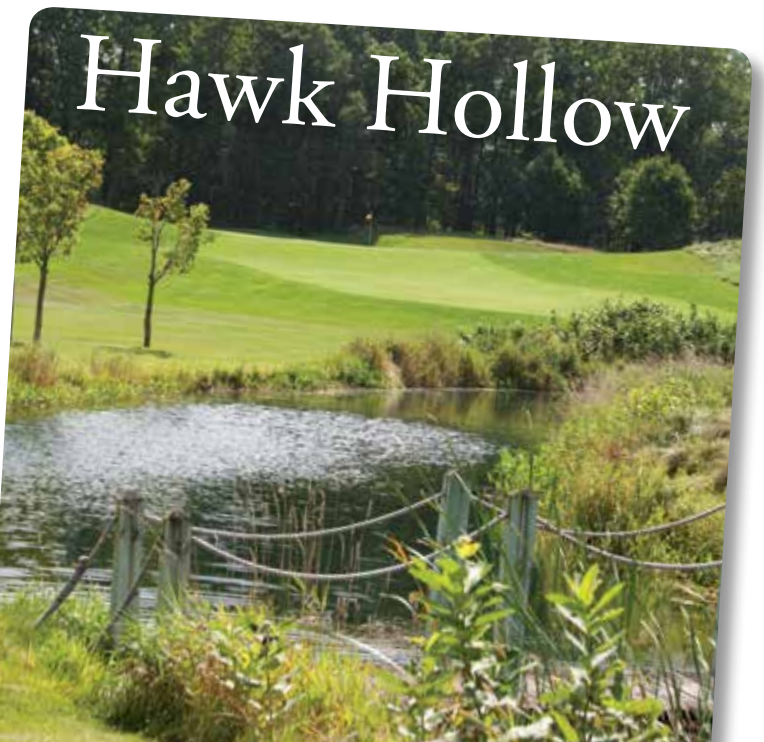
Our morning round commenced at Hawk Hollow, a 27-hole gem that will host the 2022 Michigan Amateur Championship, June 27th-July 1st. The 6,974-yard layout is a worthy championship host, as the property weaves in and out of tree-lined vistas and open prairie land. The easiest way to describe the Jerry Matthews layout is that every hole presents challenges through its character and design. I personally love holes 16-18, as the par-4, par-3, par-4 trio feature a slew of water hazards that test your swing, confidence level, and strategy all at the same time!

Eagle Eye, even though it's across the street from Hawk Hollow, bears no resemblance. The



brawny course is highlighted by water hazards on 13 of 18 holes and culminates with a scary stretch of ending tests.

"At Eagle Eye Golf Club, the finishing holes might be the best in the state of Michigan," began Cory Amendt, director of marketing. "Starting at hole #15, an accurate tee shot is required to leave a short iron approach shot



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to an elevated green with severe slopes on all sides, so club selection is critical. The 16th is a long par-4 that turns back into the prevailing wind and will require two good shots to hit the green – par is a great score on this hole. Hole #17 is a replica of the island green at TPC Sawgrass and will be the highlight of every golfer’s trip to Eagle Eye. Your round concludes with a long par-5 with water that runs down the right side of the entire hole and finishes at the huge multi-tiered green,” explained Amendt.

After a stellar lunch at **McAlister’s Deli** with Lori Lanspeary of the CVB and James Sawyer of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, it was off to Woodside GC for 12 holes of late afternoon golf. Being on the western side of the Eastern Time Zone strikes again, as even in late April the sun didn’t go down until 8:30 p.m. All I can say is every destination needs a 12-hole course like Woodside. The par-47 plays between 4,061 and 3,263 yards and can easily be walked. Plus, the 9th hole comes right up to the tiniest clubhouse in America, in case time or daylight are your enemies.

If you have a few more days than we did, I strongly recommend playing **Timber Ridge Golf Club**, in nearby East Lansing. The Jerry Matthews design sits atop one of the highest points in Clinton County, making for long-flying tee shots and dramatic approaches to sunken greens. Plus, Timber Ridge has a thriving stay and play and outing business thanks to its Up North atmosphere and great staff.



Day 3 - Completing the “College” Experience

After experiencing the power of Hawk Hollow and Eagle Eye for the second time, I was thrilled to experience **College Fields** for the first. The links-

More Great Golf Options in Greater Lansing

Eldorado Golf Course – www.eldorado27.com

The Emerald Golf Club – www.emeraldgolfcourse.com

The Falcon Golf Course –
www.eagleeyegolfclub.com/golf-courses/the-falcon-golf-course

Grand Ledge Country Club – www.grandlegecountryclub.com

Groesbeck Golf Course – www.lansingmi.gov/golf

Ironwood Links Golf Course – www.ironwoodlinks.com

Royal Scot Golf, Bowl and Banquet Center – www.royalscot.net

style layout takes a minimalistic approach to design and presentation thanks to architect Dave Savic, who is now part of the Jack Nicklaus Design Team.

“There was a minimum amount of soil moved which allows for an easy walk for those who prefer that type of play,” stated Carey Mitchelson, director of operations. “We are blessed to have distinct 9s. The front was built on what was originally a farm and is more open with mostly flat tee shots. The back was cut through woods and has more elevation, water, and trees. Wetlands come into play on each hole of the back and many tee shots require placement rather than distance,” stated Mitchelson.

You’re telling me Carey. After a mostly successful front-nine that featured multiple comfortable pars, the inward nine was anything but comfortable – but in a good way. College Fields is the type of course you want to play multiple times to better understand the nuances of each hole. This is most evident on holes 12 through 14. College Field’s version of Amen Corner. I’ll leave it at that, as these three holes must be experienced and not described.

In conclusion, you’ll never have a Spartan Existence when in the Greater Lansing area. They have created their own version of ESPN’s Documentary Series *50 for 50* with 30+ courses in a 30-mile radius. Now that’s what I call higher learning in the Land of Sparty! For more information on all that Greater Lansing has to offer, visit www.lansing.org or their dedicated golf tab at www.lansing.org/things-to-do/sports-and-leisure/golf/

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