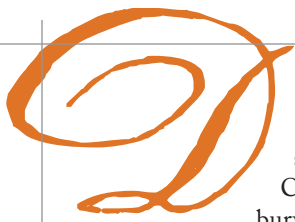


before the sunset...

With Michigan's Number Two economic driver being tourism, our state has a wealth of diverse resort properties. Some are still under construction, some are filling a new niche and are expanding and some have existed for a very long time. If I had unlimited time and resources, here's the road trip I'd gladly take to enjoy Michigan's summer months.

BY KYLE OLSON



Double JJ Resort in Oceana County's Rothbury began operation in the 1930s as a horse ranch. In 1993, owners Bob and Joan Lipsitz expanded the resort to include the Thoroughbred golf club, which quickly became one of the top courses in Michigan, if not the Midwest.

The Thoroughbred covers about double the acreage of the typical course and claims to be the only course in Michigan where golf carts and horses share the same paths—and horses have the right-of-way.

The Double JJ expanded into a conference center in 1996 to include condominiums, hotel rooms, a saloon and steakhouse. The resort expanded its original theme in 1998 by adding the Back Forty Ranch with accommodations including log homes, an RV park, and family cabins.

In 2006, Double JJ added suites and their signature Gold Rush waterpark—60,000 square feet of pools, hot tubs, a Lazy/Crazy river, and one-quarter mile of slides. The project cost an estimated \$40 million.

"We have a wide variety of amenities which are diverse enough to appeal to virtually every guest," Bob Lipsitz said in an April 9, 2004 article for The Timeshare Beat.

In 2006, Lipsitz said "with sand dunes, the Lake Michigan car ferries, Michigan's Adventure and the lake shore, west Michigan has more to offer tourists than northern Michigan."

Double JJ is destined for music fame soon with the ROTHBURY Festival scheduled July 3-6, 2008. The massive festival—compared to Bonnaroo Music Festival in Manchester, Tennessee (think Woodstock, but with a little more civility)—will feature over 70 bands with headliners including Dave Matthews Band, Phil Lesh & Friends, John Mayer, and Snoop Dogg. The expensive event (tickets are around \$250) is veiled

as an enviro-friendly effort to get America into the "post-carbon age," but will ultimately be an indirect tribute to American capitalism.

Further up the Lake Michigan coast is a five mile stretch of shoreline that once was the home of a mining operation and massive cement plant. Located between Charlevoix and Petoskey, developer David Johnson of Bloomfield Hills began converting the property into Bay Harbor, a sprawling development of homes, a golf course, equestrian club, marina and yacht club. Golf Digest has called Bay Harbor Golf Club "The Pebble Beach of the Midwest."

The focal point of the entire development is The Village at Bay Harbor, a downtown-style stretch of shops, restaurants, and condominiums. This writer's favorite is the Original Pancake House, a landmark of southeast Michigan featuring waffles, omelets, crepes, and of course, pancakes. I've been there several times when the line goes out the front

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DEVELOPER, THE VILLAGE AT BAY HARBOR

door and down the sidewalk.

"We have in the process now, the Performing Arts Center which will anchor the next phase of Bay Harbor Village, consisting of retail shops and residential housing units and the expansion of Bay Harbor Yacht Docks and Marina to accommodate our customers' demands," Johnson said in an e-mail interview.

Johnson says on Bay Harbor's website that he wanted to create something that would benefit all of Michigan. "The answer lay in the scarred remains of an abandoned cement plant. While most would believe it not worth the risk, I saw what could be, not what was," he says on the site.

"I created strategic alliances with those having a similar interest in cleaning up the area: environmental groups, government agencies, and citizens. As these groups came together, the harmony among us generated an unprecedented momentum which came to be known as 'Bay Harbor Time.' Once people saw this, they realized that the largest land reclamation in North America would succeed," Johnson said.

As if summarizing the entire effort, Johnson said on the web site, "what once was a scar upon the land is now a thriving community."

Bay Harbor is continuing to battle the problems that scarred the land in the first place. A system that was built with the intention of collecting runoff and delivering it to a treatment plant failed. That led toxic elements to surface near million dollar homes and the bay.

Bay Harbor and their former development partner, CMS Energy, are working aggressively to tackle the problem. CMS is overseeing the environmental clean-up with 12 to 15 staff members working "environmental, financial, operational and public-affairs aspects of the cleanup along with employees of project contractors," according to a November 27, 2007 Petoskey News-Review article. CMS projects the cleanup costs could



left to right: Thoroughbred Golf Club at Double JJ Resort; the Golf Club and Village at Bay Harbor; the historic Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island.

be as much as \$93 million.

Because of the wide variety of Bay Harbor's offerings, it's hard to categorize it like any other resort. "Probably the largest single evolution was the community evolving into a legacy lifestyle multi-generational community, meaning we sell Lifestyle not Real Estate," Johnson said via e-mail.

While the amenities are completed, the development is maintaining a brisk pace. Johnson said they have enjoyed "extremely strong" real estate sales in the first 3 months of this year and Bay Harbor has 550 property owners from 23 states and 3 countries.

"...We have activities and major events programmed throughout the year that anchor the experiences for our visitors and owners. The Bay Harbor Dream Cruise and Vintage Car and Boat Show on June 20-21 are among the best events in the United States," Johnson said.

Our final destination is the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island — "the great luxury liner of a hotel resort," as a New York Times story put it May 28, 2004. Few experiences better exemplify Michigan vacationing than sitting on the porch of the Grand and taking in Lakes Michigan and Huron at the same time.

Opening in 1887, the Grand Hotel began as a summer retreat for "vacationers who arrive by lake steamer from Chicago, Erie, Montreal, Detroit, and by rail from across the continent," their web site says. Quite different than today,

rates ranged from \$3 to \$5 a night. In the summer of 1895, Mark Twain gave lectures in the Grand Hotel Casino for \$1. Two movies were filmed at the Grand Hotel: This Time For Keeps in 1949 and Somewhere in Time in 1980.

The hotel has a long political past and has hosted 5 U.S. presidents: Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Gerald R. Ford, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. During World War II, Michigan Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Grand Rapids chaired a meeting at the hotel

during the biennial Republican Mackinac Conference where factions of the party found common ground on a unified foreign policy statement. The result of the meeting was "Republican congressional support of the United Nations and ultimately the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," a Michigan Historic Site plaque reads near the hotel.

The hotel today hosts multiple conventions and summer meetings every year. Visitors can play the 18-hole Jewel golf course, dine at one of five restaurants or enjoy cocktails at one of 4 bars, including the Cupola Bar at the top of the hotel.

Guests can also swim, play tennis, go horseback riding or cycling, take a carriage tour, or rest in the Grand Hotel Spa.

One of the most memorable experiences is the lavish dinner. "I think tradition is very important," Dan Musser III, hotel president, said in an October 22, 2005 Capital Times story. When guests dress up, "it turns dining into an event" and is "a way to class up the place without spending a dime," he said.

As for the furnishings and décor: "You remember it," Musser said. "You don't wake up thinking you're in a Holiday Inn in Dubuque."

Michigan has plenty of destinations that are more than the chain hotel. While some will travel far to enjoy a break from reality—Michigan offers several breaks, too. There are few places I'd rather be than some beautiful spots right in our state. **MAR**

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DAN MUSSER III
PRESIDENT, THE GRAND HOTEL

