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Renewal at Arlington Lakes Golf Club

An extensive renovation ensures fun for future generations

By Len Ziehm



Arlington Lakes has been an 18-hole facility operated by the Arlington Heights Park District since 1979, so it was due for its first renovation. The result, though, was far beyond most expectations when the course re-opened on July 1.

The course had been closed for 13 months to allow architect Mike Benkusky to completely renovate a layout that was designed by the late St. Charles architect David Gill on what had been a Nike missile base. The course is built on just 90 acres, so expanding beyond the 5,432 yard, par 68 specifications wasn't possible.

What Benkusky could do, though, was modernize the layout and make it much more versatile for its players. That was done

in two major steps: Benkusky flipped the nines, allowing for the creation of three- and six-hole loops for shorter rounds at certain times, and the extraordinary number of bunkers was reduced by two-thirds.

Tim Govern, operations manager for Arlington Lakes, is intrigued by the possibilities that the loops will create. Govern envisions more players – those with some time constraints – being enticed by the option of playing just three or six holes. Nos. 3, 6, 9 and 18 all come back to the clubhouse. Such playing options will be priced accordingly, and attractively. For example, a quick three holes would cost just \$5 for juniors and seniors on weekdays.

"We'll probably never be the most prestigious course to play, but we'll always hope to be a course for fun golf at fantastic rates," said Govern. "The course is finally going to be what it should be – a great community municipal course."

Govern was understandably excited about that aspect of the new look, but players teeing off during and immediately after the July 1 grand opening also were delighted by the well-conditioned putting surfaces, nine of which are brand new, and the increased number of tee placements. The course also has wall to wall cart paths now, allowing for play in more inclement weather conditions.

The new loops and the terrific greens are big improvements, but the bunker reduction will be the most appreciated aspect of the renovation for players who visited the course frequently in the past. It certainly is a boost for superintendent Al Bevers.

“We went from 106 traps to 37, or from 97,000 square feet (of bunker space) to 37,000 square feet,” said Bevers. That makes for much less maintenance work and much less frustration for more casual players.

Gill’s original design likely called for more bunkers to offset the inevitable lack of length. They did serve the purpose of making a short course more challenging, but that had drawbacks as well.

“The crazy bunkers that we had before were just too darn difficult for the clientele,” said Govern. Many of the surviving bunkers are now adorned with fescue edges.

Bevers and a five-man crew handled the bulk of the work, which also included the adding of a half-acre of lake space to provide better drainage. Seventy trees were also removed and some new ones were planted in strategic places.

As far as the rotation goes, Benkusky did much more than switch the nines. He also created three new holes (Nos. 7, 8 and 9) to improve the flow of play and congestion around the clubhouse, but water still comes into play on nine of the holes. The clubhouse also was upgraded in the \$2.4 million project with a new patio area—the most eye-catching improvement.

“This offers a lot for everybody,” said Benkusky. “We hope it brings the families out.”

Based in Lake in the Hills, Benkusky has worked on a wide variety of Chicago-area courses since opening his design firm in 2005. Among them are public facilities Ft. Sheridan, Brae Loch, Countryside, and Red Tail, and privates Hawthorn Woods, Itasca, and St. Charles Country Club – the site of this year’s Illinois State Amateur.

The New Arlington Lakes Playing Tips

Hole #1 / Par 4 / 333 Yards

A fun start to your round with a tee shot from an elevated tee where you should favor the left side of the fairway to avoid the pond to the right. An approach to a slightly elevated green requires a little more club than you might think.

Hole #2 / Par 5 / 501 Yards

The number 1 handicap hole, this is a difficult three-shot hole for most players with water guarding both sides of the fairway basically through the green. Most players will be satisfied with par and move on.

Hole #3 / Par 3 / 141 Yards

A new back tee was added on this par 3 with the renovation. Center of the green is never a bad option on this hole.

Hole #4 / Par 4 / 401 Yards

Feel the freedom for your tee shot that was created on this hole as many older cottonwood trees were removed from the right side of the fairway. A new green complex was created with a bail out area to the left. This is one of the lengthier par 4s on the course.

Hole #5 / Par 3 / 176 Yards

A straightforward par 3 where there is now a more usable back tee. Avoid the bunkers and you should walk away with a par.

Hole #6 / Par 4 / 402 Yards

This hole plays longer than the yardage as it is generally into a prevailing wind and uphill. Try and stay below the hole on your approach to avoid a treacherous downhill putt. Par is a very good score here.

Hole #7 / Par 4 / 323 Yards

This hole starts a stretch of the three brand new holes at Arlington Lakes. A tee shot of about 190 Yards is ideal to avoid bringing the newly extended pond on the left into play. An approach to a narrow green guarded by water on both sides will test your swing on this par four.

Hole #8 / Par 3 / 125 Yards

The potentially new signature hole is a shorter par 3 from an elevated tee. There is now plenty of water to negotiate on both sides of the green. Watch the wind direction on this hole. Don’t get greedy here.

Hole #9 / Par 4 / 332 Yards

A little more open tee shot is apparent on this new hole. However, be careful of water to the left. Take a little more club for your approach here and favor the left side of the green as you do not want to be in the deep bunkers on the right.

Hole #10 / Par 4 / 391 Yards

The former first hole is a very straightforward par 4 with a generous tee shot landing area. New mounding to the right of the green protects an errant approach.

Hole #11 / Par 3 / 192 Yards

The most difficult par 3 on the course. Try to stay out of the bunker short and to the right of the green. There are several difficult hole locations that can be used that make par a good score here.

Hole #12 / Par 4 / 388 Yards

A pond to the right and out of bounds left make this tee shot a tester. Once again, staying below the hole can make a potential birdie putt a lot easier here.

Hole #13 / Par 4 / 275 Yards

Long hitters might want to try to drive to the green here. But beware of a newly placed bunker in front of this redesigned green. Avoid the bunkers and a potential birdie opportunity awaits.

Hole #14 / Par 3 / 148 Yards

Another fun par 3 with a knee knocking carry over water for many players. Trust your swing and you can walk away with a par on this hole.

Hole #15 / Par 4 / 272 - 251 Yards

Longer hitters will again be tempted to drive the green here but a new bunker in the front left and a green approach that slopes down from left to right will not favor that decision. Still a very good birdie opportunity awaits here.

Hole 16 / Par 4 / 368 - 334 Yards

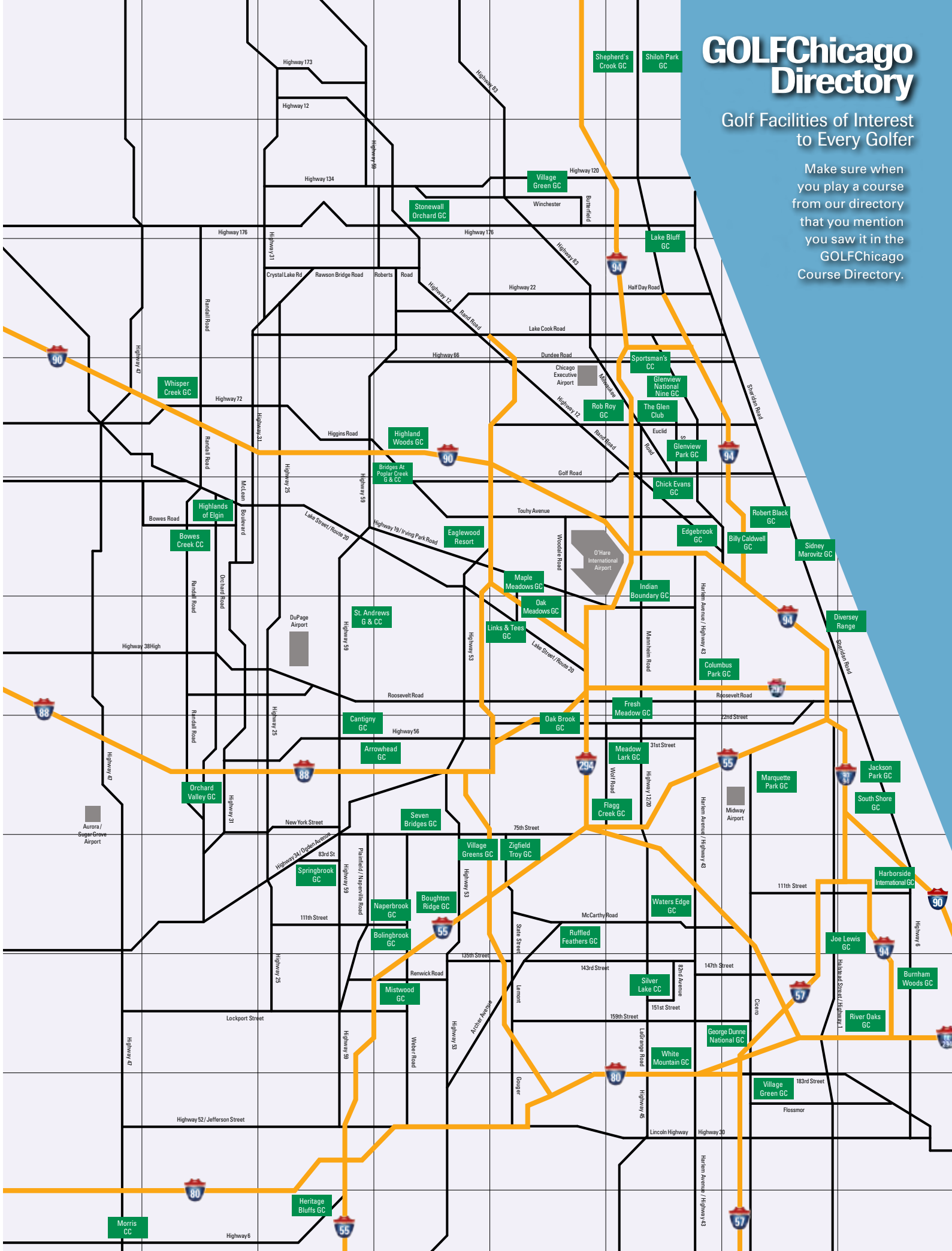
Two ponds to the left of the fairway should be avoided for your tee shot on this hole. A very undulating green is a three putt waiting to happen for those that start from above the hole.

Hole #17 / Par 3 / 183 Yards

Favor the right side of the green to avoid a difficult left bunker on your tee shot here. Another tough green makes walking away with a par acceptable for even the better player.

Hole #18 / Par 5 / 481 -4 58 Yards

This is a great finishing hole to a fun round of golf. Lakes on both sides of the fairway on the tee shot makes accuracy a priority. A newly constructed green complex now has water short and left. The bail out option is to the right, however this leaves a difficult pitch back towards the water. A big number can still be made here if you start thinking about the 19th hole too early.



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