

## Awaiting a banner season

### Improving economy could help area courses

BY MIKE TERRELL

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Area golf courses are off to an early start with winter coming to an end the last of March.

And early signs indicate it could be a banner season.

The last few years have been less than kind to the northern Michigan golf industry. Cold, wet summers coupled with a slowdown in the economy have seen many courses do well to hold their own in uncertain times. Signs are that things are looking up for the upcoming season.

"Last season we sold 1,200 of our Three Play Packages, which is a couple of overnights at A-Ga-Ming's condos and a round of golf with the cart included at A-Ga-Ming, High Pointe, and our course The Chief," said developer and partner Tom Rowe.

"This season, just through the golf shows, we've already pre-sold 800 packages. I think that bodes well for the upcoming season."

Other signs are also apparent after a long, hard and cold winter.

"When we opened for golf that first weekend in April there were 30 to 40

cars in the parking lot the first day," said Roger Putman, Elmbrook's manager when asked what kind of season they were anticipating. "I think there's a lot of pent up demand after the winter for golfers to get out and play. We expect another good year."

"The phone has been ringing off the hook since it warmed up at the end of March with people wanting to schedule tee times for this summer," added High Pointe golf pro Ben Croftchik. "Traffic at all the downstate golf shows was up for a change. I think if the weather cooperates, it will be a great season."

That bodes well for Northern Michigan golf courses and resorts. Following is a selective look at what's new around Northern Michigan golf courses and resorts, which includes some new course openings.

A-Ga-Ming Golf Course, overlooking beautiful Torch Lake about 10 miles north of Elk Rapids off U.S. 131, is looking forward to opening its second 18-hole course and a couple of new course names, according to owner Mike Brown.

"We may have a few holes open for limited play this fall, but the official opening will be the spring of 2005," he said. "Seven of the holes are done, growing, and they look great."

With the development of the new Jerry Mathews designed course at the Ming, they are also coming up with some new names.

"It will be A-Ga-Ming Golf Club with the present course being called The Torch and the new course will be named Sundance," Brown added.

A new clubhouse is also in the works, but probably won't be started until 2005 after the opening of the new Sundance course. For more information, call (231) 264-5081, or click on [www.agaming.com](http://www.agaming.com).

On the opposite side of Torch Lake and above Lake Bellaire Hawk's Eye, the second John Robinson 18-hole course with The Chief development, will celebrate it's grand opening this spring. It was open on a limited basis late last summer and fall, but the nines were reversed.

The new course is a beauty and not as severe as The Chief with its 145 slope rat-

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