

Like clockwork, you can get on and off Hunter's Ridge GC in Howell, Mich., in a timely 4.5 hours. At Hunter's Ridge, there are few delays, even when the 18-hole course is crowded with hackers. Players can count on moving along smoothly, like new cars on an efficient auto assembly line.

"If someone wants to blow off work at noon on Friday to play 18 but has a dinner date at 6 p.m., that person knows to come here to play," says Mike Miesle, co-owner and superintendent of the 6,532-yard, links-style course.

There's order on the course at Hunter's Ridge because every third hole has a clock posted near the tee. The clocks don't tell the correct time; they inform golfers of their tee times. How does this ensure steady play?

Say your threesome tees off at 8:50 a.m. Miesle, who consulted USGA's formula for pacing, has it figured it will take the group a certain amount of minutes to complete each hole. For instance, the golfers who tee off at 8:50 should arrive at the third hole in 30 minutes. On that hole, the golfers will see a clock with the sign, "This is your tee time." If the clock says 8:50, it's telling the golfers they're on time. If the clock is later than the group's tee time, say 8:55, then the golfers are five minutes behind the course's pace and need to pick it up. If the clock says 8:45, the golfers are five minutes ahead of the pace.

When the threesome arrives at the 6th, 9th, 12th, 15th and 17th holes, the clocks will also say 8:50 if they're on time. If all goes well, the threesome should complete their round in 4.5 hours.

"There are courses in the area where six-hour rounds are common," Miesle says. "So our clients appreciate what we're doing. A golfer knows he can check in, hit a bucket of balls on the range and be back in his car and on the way home in five hours."

It's elementary why Miesle's clock plan is good for business — despite having to extend tee-time intervals from eight minutes to 10 minutes to make the plan work.

"We lost a few tee times, but we're not hearing any complaints," Miesle says. "Our players are happier."

Time Is Money at Michigan Links

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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As a golf course owner, you can't put a price on pleased customers. "It just leads to more business," Miesle says.

There are a few vital elements for success, however, to keep the plan on track. For starters, Miesle must deal with slow *and* fast players.

Slow players who are behind their tee times will be told politely by rangers to get moving. If they have to be told twice, they must pick up their balls and move to the next hole to catch up.

Fast golfers, on the other hand, are encouraged to stay on time, even if they're ahead of the clock. They're also not allowed to play through at Hunter's Ridge because they'll screw up the system.

Miesle has found that fast players cause more delay problems than slow players. "People that have complained about slow play were actually playing too fast," he notes.

This is the second year for the clocks at Hunter's Ridge, and Miesle says the system works splendidly.

"It's easy for the golfers," he says. "All they have to do is remember their tee times. We never had a severe pace of play problem, but there were a couple of holes that slowed golfers down."

The system was simple for Miesle to implement — and cheap. He purchased the clocks at Wal-Mart for a mere \$3.50 each. The idea earned him first place at the National Golf Course Owners Association's Idea Fair earlier this year.

Now busy golfers know where to go to play 18 and get off the course at a reasonable hour. Maybe Hunter's Ridge should adopt a motto. How about: "A good time is had by all."

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