

## Dheensaw column: Island golf in full bloom

Column by Cleve Dheensaw -

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From Gorge Vale to Oakmont to the Presidents Cup at the steps of the legislature to a Shark sighting near Duncan, the sport of golf was more prevalent this week than the flowing suds, loud jokes and even louder pants on men's night at the club.

The game seems to be burgeoning, both as a sport and a lifestyle, and it's altering the Island's landscape from the ever expanding paw print on Bear Mountain to the under-construction Cliffs over Maple Bay to the planned-for-2009-opening \$650 million Wyndansea golf community on 148 hectares of prime waterfront at Ucluelet.

All three developments command ravishing viewsapes and have attracted the biggest name former-superstars-turned-course-designers to the Island with Jack Nicklaus involved at Bear Mountain and looking over Wyndansea last month and Greg Norman inspecting the Cliffs Over Maple Bay on Friday.

The trend has its detractors, of course, and neither of the three splashy golf-residential-hotel developments is without its critics. Some simply don't like this as a land use, and dream of an Island utopia of Birkenstocks, farmer's markets and multi-billion dollar sewage treatment plants. They talk of paradigm shifts that need to happen. A shift has happened, only it seems to have gone the other way as the Island undergoes one of its greatest development surges in history.

Other detractors are just plain cynical, in that typically petty and vindictive Island way. Commonwealth Games? Will never happen. New Victoria arena? Will never happen. And now who are these 30-something upstarts such as Len Barrie of Bear Mountain and Warren Paulin of the Cliffs to launch such seriously ambitious developments? They're not exactly from the Island old boys' network, and seem to be resented for that fact alone in some corners.

They have various reasons but you sense there are some in the community who want Bear Mountain, the Cliffs and Wyndansea to stumble, so they can point and say we told you so. But that seems to drive Barrie and Paulin even more. Both appear mirror images of each other, in appearance, age and sensibility.

And if rumours of financial trouble at the Cliffs have dogged that development in the past, all appeared upbeat and optimistic on Friday.

"Last year there were some questions [about the development] but this is serious and it is going forward," said Paulin. Norman commended Paulin on his "foresight."

The Cliffs Over Maple Bay resembles a moonscape at the moment, clear-cut bald and covered in heavy earth-moving equipment, but the developers see a future of shimmering subdivisions in five phases surrounding a world-class course.

Financially comfortable, golf-loving retirement-minded boomers have as much right to this Island as the panhandlers on Douglas or the landed gentry of Uplands. More than that, they represent a significant future wave and are helping transform not only the Island, but numerous other markets.

The Presidents Cup, on display at Gorge Vale during the Times Colonist Victoria Open, was taken over the Malahat to the Cliffs on Friday in honour of Norman, who played on the International team against the U.S. on three occasions. The Aussie Norman was surprised but happy to see the Presidents Cup at the Cliffs and said he was instrumental in helping get it started in the early 1990s - the 2007 Presidents Cup tournament is in September at Royal Montreal - because the rest of the world had caught up and golf had outgrown the Europe versus U.S. Ryder Cup format. In an earlier era, the

Ryder Cup itself had outgrown its Britain versus U.S. origins.

The point is there is enough expanding affluence to allow golf to continue growing. Norman said he is currently designing five new courses in Canada alone and that his Island stop was en route to overseeing course design work in Korea, Vietnam and Australia.

"That speaks volumes to where this game has come," said Norman. And to where a segment of the Island demographic is headed.

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