



Photo by Resort and Golf Marketing

The Heather's famous 18th hole with its watery grave was actually designed by Everett Kircher.

The Heather at Boyer Highlands

By Jack Berry

What would Northern Michigan be today without Everett Kircher and Robert Trent Jones, the Odd Couple that triggered the sleepy north country into becoming the midwest's summer golf playground?

It was the middle 1960s and Jones was the No. 1 golf course architect in the fast-growing business. His toughening of Oakland Hills Country Club for the 1951 United States Open made Jones the top gun and in demand by everyone who wanted a challenging golf course that everyone would talk about and want to play. Jones

designed big, muscular golf courses like the Dunes Golf & Beach Club in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and Point O'Woods in Benton Harbor, Mich.

Kircher wanted the best and he got him. But Jones didn't know as much about Kircher as Kircher knew about him. Jones didn't know that Kircher was a hands-on,

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The Heather course, Boyne Highlands

no-nonsense builder, a man with vision, a man who knew what he wanted and knew how to get it, a man who knew machinery, a man who knew his land.

Kircher wanted a golf course to retain key employees from the ski season and to attract business meetings and conventions in the summer. At the time it was a novel idea for a ski area owner but, as happened often, Kircher's pattern was copied by ski areas from coast to coast.

Kircher got involved in building what he'd name the Heather, whereas Jones was accustomed to clients who stood back respectfully as he worked his magic.

"They were both opinionated

and Everett reminded him that he owned the property," a longtime Boyne employee said.

Kircher's greatest contribution was the hole everyone talks about—the downhill, par 4 18th, that devil with the water in front of the green, such an expanse it seems like one of the Great Lakes. Well, maybe not that big but definitely intimidating because there really is no safe way around it. There's a road on the right and on the left a strip of grass that seems no wider than a Band-Aid. Jones left before the 18th was grown in and Kircher felt the hole lacked pizzazz, a fitting climax for a big, tough golf course. So he directed a huge hole be dug in

front of the green and filled with water. Fittingly, a water-guarded 18th green now is the signature of every Boyne course—the Alpine and Monument at Boyne Mountain and the Donald Ross, Moor and Arthur Hills that are the Heather's teammates at Boyne Highlands. The water is 152 yards from edge to edge and you're playing from a downhill lie. The result is predictable and entertaining to everyone enjoying a post-round beverage at the snack shop behind the green: Splash! Invariably followed by: Splash!

"The average is two balls per player," said Boyne's Director of Golf, Bernie Friedrich. "Thirty to 40,000 balls are retrieved from the

pond every year.”

It’s ironic that Jones didn’t come up with the pond on the 18th since water was one of his hallmarks. He put the water in on the par 3 16th at the Augusta National Golf Club and his redesign of Baltusrol Country Club in Springfield, N.J., included water in front of the par 3 fourth hole. When members said it was too hard, Jones, playing the inaugural round after the redesign, made a hole-in-one. That stopped the criticism.

And Jones made lavish use of water elsewhere on the Heather— only the first and eighth holes on the first nine are waterless. The par 5 fifth winds around a lake and wetland and is a classic risk/reward hole. The par 3 fourth and sixth are all carry as is the par 3 12th on the second nine.

The Heather has aged beautifully since it opened in 1968 and was named one of the Best 100 Courses in America by *Golf Digest*.

This year, in time for the State Pro-

Am Championship, June 5-6, and the 95th Michigan Amateur, June 20-24, there will be sparkling white PGA Tour-type sand in the bunkers.

“The only complaint we’ve had was stones in the

big hitters.

“The fifth tee is back 45 yards, in the middle of the runway,” Friedrich said, laughing. “The new tee on nine will bring the water into play.”

The par 4 14th is another Kircher touch. Under the Jones plan, it was bunkerless and Kircher dug a nice big bunker right in front to make the shortish straight-away hole challenging.

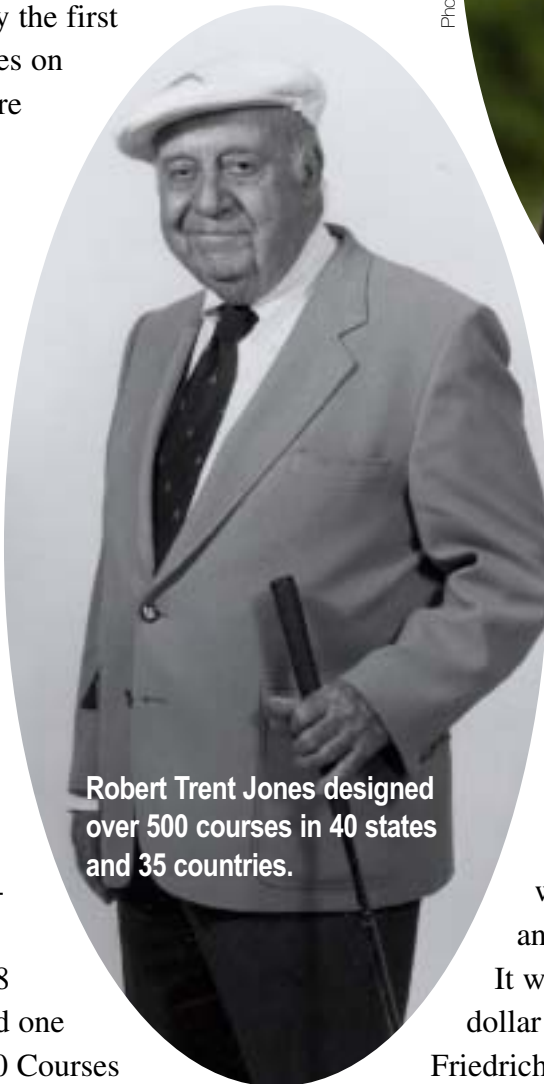
“The Heather is a great course that’s going to challenge the best players to play their best game,” Golf Association of Michigan executive director David Graham said. “This is the second time the Amateur’s been played on the Heather in eight years and it’s a fantastic venue. Boyne has such a great history and tradition— they opened up northern Michigan golf and they know how to put on tournaments.”

The GAM obviously likes Boyne Highlands— the 24th Michigan Men’s Mid-Amateur Championship will be played on the Donald Ross and Arthur Hills courses Aug. 31-Sept. 1.



Everett Kircher was more than a passive observer of golf course architecture.

Photo courtesy of Boyne USA



Robert Trent Jones designed over 500 courses in 40 states and 35 countries.

bunkers,” Friedrich said of the area’s indigenous sand that’s been used. “We’ve completely redone the bunkers with drainage and the new sand.

It was a half-million dollar project.”

Friedrich said new back tees on the fifth, ninth and 14th holes are an answer to today’s