

# A GOLF BOOM IN INDIA?

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## What a Choice!

Just eight months after it opened for play, Washington's **Chambers Bay** lands the U.S. Open



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**Singh's Sad Song**  
Vijay lets one get away  
at Pebble Beach

2.15.08

Edited by Brett Avery and Ryan Herrington

Bunker

# Bunker

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## Digging an Open landmark

Washington politician transforms gravel quarry into a major site in 2015

FORGET Jack Fleck. There may be no more unlikely U.S. Open winner than John Ladenburg. He's a 9-handicap, a professional politician not a golf pro and, until taking up the game a decade ago, found his fun playing slow-pitch softball on a team with eight brothers—he's one of 16 children.

But inspired by Bethpage Black, the executive of Pierce County on the southern edge of Puget Sound in Washington, overcame all odds to get a world-class course built on public land. Ladenburg completed his unlikely journey last Friday when the USGA, acting on lessons learned from Whistling Straits, quickly accepted an invitation by Chambers Bay and named it host of the 2015 U.S. Open. The course landed the 2010 U.S. Amateur as well.

Not bad for a former gravel mine that opened as a course just last June. The design by Robert Trent Jones Jr. and Bruce Charlton has everything the USGA loves: a great



course on lots of land to hold fans and corporate tents. And, unlike the other stellar new Pacific Northwest facility, Bandon Dunes, also managed by KemperSports, Chambers Bay is easy to reach by air and affords plenty of hotel rooms and restaurants.

The 2015 Open, declined by Winged Foot GC outside New York City three months earlier (*The View*, Jan. 11), will be the first held in the Northwest. A West Coast location means prime-time TV in much of the U.S. Add the links nature of the sand-based, treeless design (see page 22) and it was a no-brainer, even though many at the USGA annual meeting in Houston reacted by saying, "Where? Never heard of it."

That will change. Chambers Bay joins Bethpage Black, which comes back next year after being a smash hit in 2002, and Torrey Pines this year as municipal courses in the Open mix. If you include high-end resorts Pebble Beach and Pinehurst No. 2, nine of 17 Opens from 1999-2015 will be played on public venues. Of 98 previous Opens, only three were played on non-private facilities: Pebble Beach in 1972, '82 and '92.

"I don't know how he got it done," marveled Jones about the political obstacles. Elected in 2000, Ladenburg realized the county owned 1,000 acres on Puget Sound perfect for a park. He knew for it to work, it had to generate revenue. That's when he thought of a

## Going public

Beginning in 1999, when the U.S. Open came to Pinehurst No. 2, and through 2015, the latest year for which a venue has been announced, the trend for the men's national championship has moved away from private clubs.

YEAR	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
1999	Pinehurst	
2000	Pebble Beach	
2001		Southern Hills
2002	Bethpage	
2003		Olympia Fields
2004		Shinnecock Hills
2005	Pinehurst	
2006		Winged Foot
2007		Oakmont
2008	Torrey Pines	
2009	Bethpage	
2010	Pebble Beach	
2011		Congressional
2012		Olympic Club
2013		Merion
2014	Pinehurst	
2015	Chambers Bay	

course. When Ladenburg saw the Bethpage success—a state park that held the most lucrative tournament ever—he decided to build a major-quality course.

“There was a tremendous amount of resistance,” Ladenburg said. “None of the county board members played golf, and they had the stereotype that it’s an elitist game.” He had to sell golf, then a relatively high green fee and \$20 million price tag.

“I’d been in government 25 years,” said Ladenburg, re-elected in 2004 amid the Chambers Bay fight and now Democratic candidate for state attorney general. “I did a little arm twisting; I called in some political IOUs.”

Chambers Bay surpassed its six-month goal for rounds played in three months with 40 percent of the play coming from more than 200 miles away, Ladenburg said. While future sites usually are announced at an Open, state sunshine laws requiring disclosure of negotiations involving public money prompted the USGA to name Chambers Bay before the contracts have been signed. No obstacles are expected.

When Whistling Straits opened to raves in 1998, the PGA of America acted quickly and in January 2000 awarded the Wisconsin course the 2004 PGA Championship, essentially planting its flag on the property. Whistling Straits performed so well it was given the PGA in 2010 and 2015 as well as the 2020 Ryder Cup. The USGA made certain it did not miss out on Chambers Bay.

“I think that is a fair representation,” USGA president James F. Vernon said when asked if Whistling Straits provided a lesson.

“We thought we had found something special [in Chambers Bay], and we wanted to, not stake a claim, but we really did want to make it clear that we wanted to have an opportunity to have a championship on it.”

Perhaps the only person happier than Ladenburg is Mike Davis, who sets up courses for the

USGA. “When I saw the site, I was just blown away at how gorgeous it was, how big the property was and the fact that it truly was all sand,” Davis said. “When a course is built on all sand, you can really get great championship conditions.”

And when the 2015 U.S. Open is played at Chambers Bay, the story will be told many times of how those great championship conditions sprang from an abandoned gravel mine due to the vision of John Ladenburg. —Ron Sirak

## A new look for the Open

Five ways Chambers Bay is different from previous U.S. Open sites:

- 1) It is in Washington, the 18th state to host an Open.
- 2) It has free-flowing tee “spaces,” instead of traditional tee boxes.
- 3) It has fescue greens (early Open sites Shinnecock Hills and Myopia Hunt might have had them, but this is a first in the modern era).
- 4) It has waste bunkers—big ones. A few cover several acres each. They are filled with a sandy, gravelly mix, with some patches of vegetation.
- 5) The fifth hole features two greens. One plays 490 yards from the back tee. The other is 369 yards—and because the hole is steeply downhill, probably drivable. —Ron Whitten



## Atwal crash report reaches Florida AG

LAST week the Ninth District of the Florida State Attorney’s office received from the state Highway Patrol case No. 07-OFF-025073, which concerns a traffic accident in Orlando that killed one man and left the survivor facing potentially serious consequences.

Arjun Atwal has yet to have an opportunity to explain what happened March 10 at around 5:30 p.m. near his home in Windermere, Fla., but FHP investigators have spoken, recommending the former PGA Tour player be charged with vehicular homicide.

According to police, Atwal and John Noah Park were driving at high speed in their respective vehicles along a winding stretch of southbound CR 535. Both lost control, but their cars never touched. While Atwal was unharmed when his 2006 BMW sedan skidded across the median, Park died after his 2006 Mercedes-Benz flipped and was demolished after striking a tree. Atwal and Park did not know each other.

## Atwal tied for 15th last week to open his European season.

Vehicular homicide in Florida is a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison, according to Danielle Tavernier, public information officer for the State Attorney’s office. Atwal has not been deemed “a public threat,” she said, and he hasn’t been charged with a crime. The matter is considered a “non-arrest case,” which might not be reviewed for months. An assistant for state attorney Lawson Lamar will be assigned to the case in the next few weeks, Tavernier said, but “arrest cases,” which by state statute must be acted upon within 33 days, take precedence.

The office handles 80,000 cases per year, Tavernier said. Kim Miller, spokesperson for the Florida Highway Patrol, said her office last week received confirmation of charges on a case submitted in November 2006.

Once the FHP evidence is assessed, Tavernier said, the prosecutor could proceed with an arrest warrant, modify the recommendation to a lesser charge or drop the charge.

Venues

# Laudable Audible

Why would the USGA go off script and pick a brand new muni for the '15 U.S. Open? Because Chambers Bay is *that* good

By Ron Whitten

PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHEN SZURLEJ

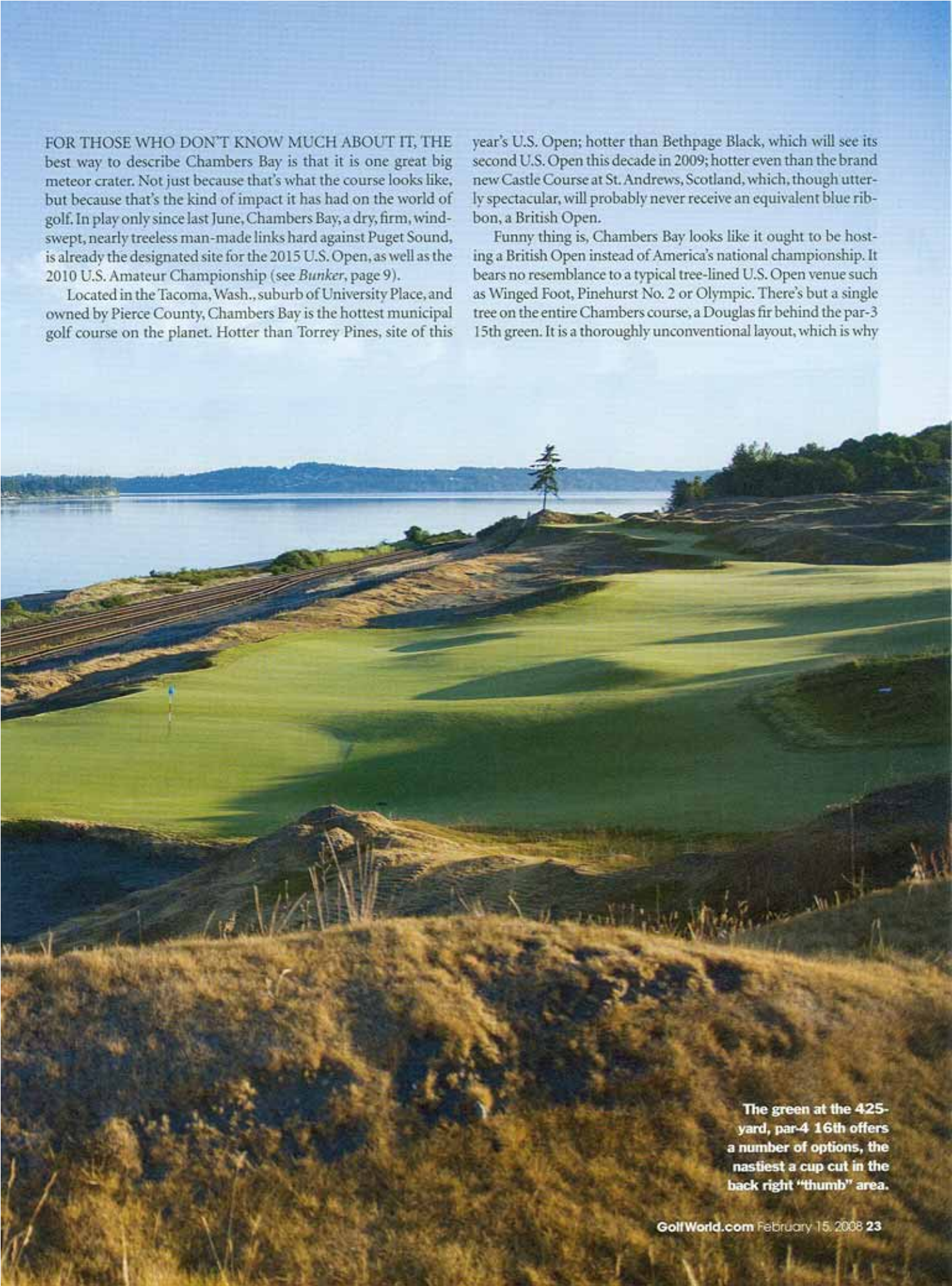


FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT, THE best way to describe Chambers Bay is that it is one great big meteor crater. Not just because that's what the course looks like, but because that's the kind of impact it has had on the world of golf. In play only since last June, Chambers Bay, a dry, firm, wind-swept, nearly treeless man-made links hard against Puget Sound, is already the designated site for the 2015 U.S. Open, as well as the 2010 U.S. Amateur Championship (see *Bunker*, page 9).

Located in the Tacoma, Wash., suburb of University Place, and owned by Pierce County, Chambers Bay is the hottest municipal golf course on the planet. Hotter than Torrey Pines, site of this

year's U.S. Open; hotter than Bethpage Black, which will see its second U.S. Open this decade in 2009; hotter even than the brand new Castle Course at St. Andrews, Scotland, which, though utterly spectacular, will probably never receive an equivalent blue ribbon, a British Open.

Funny thing is, Chambers Bay looks like it ought to be hosting a British Open instead of America's national championship. It bears no resemblance to a typical tree-lined U.S. Open venue such as Winged Foot, Pinehurst No. 2 or Olympic. There's but a single tree on the entire Chambers course, a Douglas fir behind the par-3 15th green. It is a thoroughly unconventional layout, which is why



The green at the 425-yard, par-4 16th offers a number of options, the nastiest a cup cut in the back right "thumb" area.



it is a bit startling to learn the course is the product of veteran golf architect Robert Trent Jones Jr., primarily known for ornate but sedate formulaic designs.

When contacted last week, Bobby Jones was quick to share design credit with his partner Bruce Charlton and their young associate Jay Blasi. "We're beyond happy," Jones said. "For our team, for Pierce County, for public golfers everywhere."

It is a career pinnacle for all three, but particularly for Jones, who at age 68

finally has one of his designs awarded a major championship. It puts him 1 up against his brother and fellow course designer, Rees Jones, who had established his reputation by refining The Country Club near Boston for the 1988 U.S. Open and has since doctored a succession of national championship sites, including Congressional, Pinehurst, Bethpage and Torrey Pines, but has never had an original design host the big show.

It draws Bobby closer to the achieve-

**Chambers Bay's only tree and Puget Sound set the scene for the par-3 15th.**

ments of their father, the legendary Robert Trent Jones, who gained headlines for turning Oakland Hills into a "monster" for the 1951 U.S. Open, revised a handful of other Open courses and had two original designs host Opens soon after their debuts: Missouri's Bellerive in 1965 and Minnesota's Hazeltine National in 1970. (How is this for family bookends? Chambers Bay is the first



new course to be awarded an Open since Hazeltine National.)

"I'm not comparing myself to my father," Bobby said, "but I have to say I think his spirit was with us on this project. In fact, we held a grand opening on June 20, 2007, which just happened to be the 101st anniversary of my father's birth."

Chambers Bay was created from a mined-out gravel pit, a huge gash in a hillside, its eastern edge a vertical escarpment leading up 80 feet to a city street, its

western edge separated from the shoreline of Puget Sound by a set of railroad tracks. The site begged for something Scottish, and Jones, Charlton and Blasi were intent on proving they could fashion a natural-looking, windswept pseudo-links.

It helped that Chambers Bay had an abundance of sand. The site was, says Charlton, "a 250-acre sandbox," basically flat except for a few existing spoil piles. By the time the last bulldozer left the site, 1.4 million cubic yards had been pushed

around to form gigantic, rugged land forms, massive waste areas and bunkers with gnarled, eroded faces. Last summer a great many of the faux dunes still bore bulldozer tracks. By this summer, wind and water erosion, and growth of tall fescues and patches of Scotch broom, will have removed all evidence that the dunes were machine-manufactured.

Chambers Bay was designed with a potential U.S. Open in mind. During construction, USGA officials visited the site several times and offered suggestions concerning course strategies, gallery circulation, spectator vantage points, locations for concession stands, TV towers and the like. (As a gag, Charlton had bag tags printed that read, "Chambers Bay—site of the 2020 U.S. Open." He missed his prediction by five years.)

Chambers Bay's par is 72, and it tops out at 7,585 yards, although it is unlikely it would play from the tips for a U.S. Open. The scorecard offers plenty of flexibility. The opening par 4 can measure 498 yards, downhill and into the prevailing wind, while the 604-yard 18th plays slightly uphill, with the prevailing wind, and therefore could be a reachable par 5. In between, the par-4 fifth plunges down five stories to two separate greens, one 150 yards farther than the other. (Think what fun the USGA could have alternating play on this hole on consecutive days.)

The 304-yard 12th is a genuine reachable par 4, uphill with a rollicking green in a punchbowl setting. The 425-yard 16th is merely a drive and a pitch for top players these days, but the green has a unique back-right pin position, a mere thumb of putting surface between flanking bunkers.

Except for the long, straight par-5 eighth, holes constantly change direction, often with every shot. The wind off the sound is omnipresent and can be strong. (Once, in 1940, wind twisted and buckled the old Tacoma Narrows bridge into a pretzel.) It is what Bobby Jones calls his "invisible hazard," and it is part of what the USGA finds appealing about this championship course.

There is hardly a flat spot on the premises, and that includes the tee boxes. In what may be the first truly original design idea of the 21st century, Charlton convinced his colleagues to abandon traditional tee pads in favor of long, skinny, free-flowing ribbons of teeing space. Many are not much wider than walking



paths; many are recessed rather than elevated; most are gently contoured with a variety of flats spots just the size of throw rugs. The idea is to pick the lie that might best help shape a shot off the tee: sidehill lies if you wish to fade or draw the ball, a slightly uphill lie if you need help getting it airborne, a downhill lie if you want to keep it under the wind, or a flat lie. It's too early to know whether USGA officials will accept those unorthodox teeing areas for the U.S. Open. Jones hopes they will.

"We'll probably address that after the [2010] U.S. Amateur," he says. "But it's not like there are no flat spots out there. We have dozens of 'batter's boxes' within the undulations. I would hope they'd position the markers far apart and let golfers choose their particular lies. Our goal was to get into the players' minds, even on the tee, and to put some integrity back into tee shots. Don't let them just stick a peg in the ground and bomb it."

The tees are the same fescue turf as the fairways and primary rough, which heightens the illusion that the course was simply mowed out of an existing landscape. It's dry, firm turf everywhere, a mix of fescues with a hint of Colonial bent (about 5 percent), conducive to the sort of bounce-and-roll game required on a links. With just one type of turfgrass, fairways can be easily narrowed, or widened, in preparation for the Open.

Chambers Bay's boldly contoured

## Playing Chambers Bay

**Location:** 6320 Grandview Drive W, University Place, WA 98467

**Drive time from Seattle:** 60 minutes

**Drive time from Tacoma:** 20 minutes

**Drive from SeaTac Int'l Airport:** 40 minutes

**Green fees (resident/guest):**

March-April 2008—Mon.-Thurs., \$74/\$131, Fri.-Sun., \$91/\$142

May-Sept. 2008—Mon.-Thurs., \$97/\$154, Fri.-Sun., \$114/\$171

*Stay and play packages available with several Tacoma hotels; for more info, go to [www.chambersbay.com](http://www.chambersbay.com)*

**Caddie fees:** \$35 single, \$70 double, \$50 forecaddie

**Tee times:** Can be booked online 30 days in advance or by phone (253-460-GOLF); Group events of 16 or more may be booked up to a year in advance

greens also are fescue, a genuine departure for any USGA event. In recent years Open greens have been *Poa annua*, which can be cut incredibly short for ultra-fast speeds—13 on a Stimpmeter—but must be kept moist in hot weather to stay alive, making them softer and more receptive than the USGA would like. The fescue greens at Chambers can't be cut quite as short—maybe 11 on the Stimpmeter—but they can be maintained very firm in June.

"We designed the contours for speeds of 10 or 11," says Jones. "Downslope, they'll still putt like they're 13. I think players who have seen fescue greens at British Open

### The 227-yard, par-3 ninth (foreground) tumbles from a Jones-made hilltop.

courses will like them. But they won't be firing at the flags. They'll have to work the ball to some pin positions."

It cost an estimated \$20 million to build Chambers Bay, so even before the Open announcement, it sported a rather pricey green fee for its locale. County residents pay between \$55 and \$114, depending on the season. Tourists pay \$75 through the end of this month, \$142 for weekend play in March and April, and \$171 on weekends from May to September. But there is no need to rush to Tacoma to avoid price-gouging. The USGA contract prohibits the county from raising greens fees in excess of a cost-of-living adjustment until three years after the Open.

But when you do make the trip to Chambers Bay—and what golf fan doesn't want to tread upon a brand new U.S. Open venue that even Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson have yet to see?—be aware the course is a walking-only facility. You can carry your bag, rent a pull cart, rent a motorized pull cart or hire a caddie. However there are no golf cars, no cushions for your tush, no fenders for club washers and ice chests, no cart paths to scuff your ball and spoil the scenery.

Chambers Bay is links golf. And the U.S. Open will be links golf, too—in seven years. **GW**