

Design case study

# AN ATYPICAL TRACK

COMMUNITY RELATIONS, ROUTING AND SOIL SET A WASHINGTON COURSE APART

by HAL PHILLIPS

A nine-hole golf course will soon be part of the isolated, southeast Washington city of Walla Walla, which is dominated by acres of wheat production.





Turf students at Walla Walla Community College will be able to use Illahee as a working lab.



Conventional wisdom holds that innovation is often driven by market pressures. Consider a golf example: Everyone wants to build new courses in a populous region where golfers are underserved. If a developer doesn't get there first, competitive factors oblige him to innovate and come up with something new to set his project apart from a crowded marketplace.

How, then, does one account for Illahee, a project taking shape in the not-so-noted golfing horbed of Walla Walla, Wash.? Illahee's routing – conceived by Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design to allow rounds in three-hole increments – is just the sort of alternative scheme nontraditionalists and golf futurists have been calling for. Its maintenance program – a from-conception collaboration between developer Pennbrook Homes and the turf management faculty at Walla Walla Community College – will attempt to set a new standard for public/private partnerships. What's more, Illahee will be a different resort development, featuring just nine holes, no clubhouse and its own 30-acre vineyard.

All this in an isolated, southeast Washington community of 30,000 people (in a county of 55,000), dominated by thousands of acres of wheat production and home to just two existing courses (one muni, one private). In other words, it's not exactly a hotbed of market pressure.

"It's a pretty cool project, that's for sure," says Rex VanHoose, senior vice president and managing architect for Houston-based Jacobsen Hardy. "You hear about 12-hole golf courses, but you rarely see them developed. Here's a project where the developer wanted nine and leaned on us to come up with something flexible and nontraditional."

The Illahee project, where construction is scheduled to begin this fall and the grand opening is set for late 2007, has a footprint of 356 acres, 90 of which have been set aside for golf. The design calls for three three-hole "pods," each of which circles back to a central starting point. It's not a clubhouse but merely a starter's facility on the first floor of Illahee's boutique, luxury hotel, which will be operated by a third-party manager. VanHoose calls the facility the resort core. Its proximity to all three loops will allow guests and daily-fee patrons the opportunity to play rounds in three-hole increments.

## AT A GLANCE

### Illahee

Web site:	TBD
Location:	Walla Walla, Wash.
Course type:	Resort
Cost:	\$3.2 million
Construction to begin:	August 2006
Course completion:	Scheduled for September 2007
Yardage:	3,441
Par:	36
Number of bunkers:	2 waste bunkers and 37 formal bunkers
Average green size:	6,200 square feet
Greens:	T-1 bentgrass
Tees:	Perennial ryegrass
Fairways:	Perennial ryegrass
Accent:	Native grasses and vineyard
Slopes:	NA
Ratings:	NA
Professional:	TBD
Director of golf:	TBD
Superintendent:	TBD
Architects:	Peter Jacobsen, Jim Hardy and Rex VanHoose
Design Firm:	Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design
Builder:	Eagle View Golf

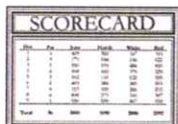


# Illahee

Walla Walla, Washington

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The design of Illahee calls for three three-hole "pods," each of which circles back to a central starting point.



Jacobsen Hardy  
GOLF COURSE DESIGN  
12777 Jones Road, Suite 150 - Houston, TX  
Phone: 281-987-4176 - Fax: 281-477-3703  
www.jacobsenhardy.com

Also accessible from the resort core is a huge, double-ended driving range, around which holes one, two and three are routed. The target greens in this range area, along with strategically placed tee boxes, form their own nine-hole minirouting. When the range is shut down, kids and novices can play the short course without clogging up Illahee's full-length nine.

"We did a similar thing at The Rope Rider, an 18-hole project under construction at the Suncadia Resort near Seattle," VanHoose says. "Our client there challenged us with designing a family resort course, and this junior routing within the range was a perfect fit. As for the full-length resort layout at Rope Rider, there's a tradi-

tional nine-hole loop, but we routed the other nine to include a six-hole loop and a three-hole loop. This will allow folks to play 18 holes or nine or six or just three.

"Of course, the operational aspects of the Illahee routing are even more flexible, and it's only nine holes total."

## Community collaboration

Illahee's routing and resort core approaches are innovative, but when all is said and done, they might well pale in comparison to the unique relationship Pennbrook has forged with neighboring Walla Walla Community College. Several universities have school-owned golf courses where turf students can learn their trade. But Illahee, a privately

owned project, is breaking new ground with its level of academic collaboration.

"Pennbrook and Jacobsen Hardy have been great in terms of including us from the earliest stages of the project," says Bill Griffith, an instructor and program coordinator for turf management at Walla Walla Community College. "In terms of our students maintaining the site, it's not 100 percent clear how that will be structured. What I expect is that a superintendent will be hired, and he will also do some teaching here. Our students will certainly work on the crews. Our first-year students each do a six-month internship, and I can see them spending that time at Illahee."

Plans include a classroom in the maintenance facility itself, so WWCC faculty can lead training and lab work on site. Griffith says the college also has a technician training program, and those students will assist in maintaining Illahee's fleet of machinery.

The collaborative relationship is enabled in large part by Griffith himself, a third-generation golf course superintendent who serves on the boards of the Northwest Turfgrass Association and the Inland Empire Golf Course Superintendents Association. (He's a past president of both.) Griffith was head superintendent at Veterans Memorial Golf Course in Walla Walla before joining WWCC full-time in 1996, so it made sense to solicit his input on Illahee's grassing plan, which is perennial ryes on fairways, roughs and tees, with the possibility of some Kentucky bluegrass blended into the green surroundings. Griffith also handled Illahee's irrigation design.

"We just have so many incredible possibilities that are beneficial for both parties," he says. "From a teaching standpoint, the college already has a three-acre outdoor turf plot, but imagine what we can do with 90 acres as a working lab. With all the normal play, you can't get more real life than that."

Despite all of Griffith's experience, he has never been involved in the development process before, and he's finding it enjoyable.

"I've been impressed with Rex and the process Jacobsen Hardy has led here," he says. "I love their use of the native grasses around the edges and in the transition zones. They've created nice buffer strips. And I was struck by their attention to detail on the edges of the lake areas. There's lots of water involved [in the routing], and it's all tied together and circulated."

VanHoose wants the playing surfaces to be lean and mean.



"We want it to be alive and healthy, but we want it to be conducive to the ground game because we've designed a lot of variety into this golf course, and firm conditions will maximize that variety," he says.

## Well-draining soil

Aside from its one-of-a-kind name, Walla Walla is known for wheat and wine production, thanks in part to superbly draining topsoil that extends down about 25 feet. VanHoose says the original plans for the third "pod" (holes seven, eight and nine) included two man-made streams that were ultimately scrapped.

"First of all, there are no native streams in this area, so we didn't feel they'd fit with the natural landscape," he says. "But mainly, the cost would have been prohibitive. The soil here drains so well, we'd have had to line those streams."

Veterans Memorial is the same way, according to Griffith.

"We drilled down once, and went 27 feet before we hit a rock," he says. "I can tell you there's not a rock on the Illahee site."

That's good, because when the last wheat harvest comes off the property in August, about 4.5 million cubic yards of dirt will be moved. Each golfing "pod" will be excavated to a depth of 20 to 25 feet, creating three

separate golfing amphitheaters and yielding enough soil for 365 residential units, all the course features, landscaping and a 20-foot berm encircling the entire development.

## Environmental impact

Griffith says he likes the way the whole development is terraced down to the golf course, making it a focal point and providing the maximum amount of green space for all the homeowners. What he likes even more are the direct comparisons Illahee will draw between the environmental impact of wheat production and golf.

"I hope this will provide some opportunities for us, as locals, to show the positive aspects of golf development," Griffith says. "The reduction in pesticide use, for example, will be dramatic. As a golf course, we'll have 300 acres of cultivated land where 98 percent of the pesticide use is confined to one acre – the greens only. And with some of the new ways to apply fertilizers, we'll reduce usage even further than that. No leaching of nitrates. This property will be infinitely better than it was, environmentally."

"We're going to take an agricultural area that was at the bottom of the spectrum revenue-wise and produce more crop revenue," he adds. "The revenue-producing

quality of this particular piece of land wasn't good. The 30 acres of vineyards alone will produce more."

It's hard to imagine a project like Illahee taking shape in a larger, less isolated community. When designing the irrigation system, for example, Griffith plans to pioneer the MP Rotator, a match-precipitation head manufactured by Nelson Irrigation, a Walla Walla-based ag company, for golf use.

"In heavily sloped areas, we're finding this sprinkler puts the water on very slowly and precisely with great uniformity," he says.

Pennbrook and Jacobsen Hardy were determined to build a walking course at Illahee, and the routing delivers exactly that. But the design team has done one better by integrating 10 miles of walking trails that circle through the development and golf course before connecting to the Walla Walla's own trail system.

"We're always open to new ideas because you can get to a point in this industry where the temptation is to do things automatically," VanHoose says. "By taking the time to explore the possibilities, we've come up with something unique." GCN

*Hal Phillips is a freelance writer based in New Gloucester, Maine. He can be reached at [onintwo@maine.rr.com](mailto:onintwo@maine.rr.com).*



When designing Illahee, Peter Jacobsen (left) and Jim Hardy helped integrate 10 miles of walking trails that circle through the development and golf course.