

# Three gentlemen of Verona

Fazio, Jones and Smith offer 54 good reasons to visit New York's Turning Stone casino



THE 19-story hotel at the Oneida Indian Nation's Turning Stone Resort and Casino, 40 minutes southeast of Syracuse in the hamlet of Verona, N.Y., doesn't so much define the local skyline as embarrass it, since the only competition is three 100-foot corn silos and a peeling water tower. "The tallest building between Albany and Syracuse"—as the casino's website describes it—is impossible to miss from the Thruway.

Think of it as a giant beacon that will guide you to some very good golf. Set roughly 4 1/2 hours north of New York City, Turning Stone is home to three marquee courses, the best of which is the Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed Kaluhyat (pronounced ga-LU-yut), which opened in August 2003. Having wrested this commission from brother Rees, RTJ2 carved a sort of Princeville East out of low-lying forest and converted farmland. Challenging but not relentless, visually stimulating and superbly conditioned, Kaluhyat is a triumph of landscaping. Fairways are intelligently shaped and greens contoured subtly with an almost obsessive attention to detail.

**Turning Stone**, Verona, N.Y. *Green fees:* Kaluhyat and Shenandoah, \$90 (\$125 for non-guests), Atunyote, \$175 (\$200 for non-guests); turningstone.com; 877-748-4653

**No. 5 at Atunyote (above) and the Lodge's interior.**



Some form of forced carry over dense patches of protected native grasses or wetlands figures in all but a few of Kaluhyat's holes. The 554-yard sixth shows off the difficulty that is bound to get good golfers to return: The view from the tee obscures a lake to the right of a narrow driving area—and you need to get it out there, because even a solid drive leaves you with 180 yards over wetlands with your second. If you decide to lay up short of the cattails, you've got about 170 into the green for your third. Once you're in the patch of fairway in front of the green, be prepared to navigate a cross-bunker directly blocking the narrow putting surface. It's a hole that demands three precise shots for a chance at par.

If Kaluhyat will appeal to golfers who like to gamble, Tom Fazio's year-old Atunyote (ah-DUNE-yote) is for gamblers who might like to play golf. Atunyote's handsome, luxurious clubhouse, generous fairways and placid parkland views make for a peacefully secluded round that will soothe high rollers trying to forget about last night's five-figure hit. It's plenty long—7,315 yards from the tips, nearly 7,000 from the blues—but for the most part trouble is hard to find. So are long rounds, since play is limited to fewer than 50 players a day.

The Rick Smith-designed Shenandoah was the first course built at Turning Stone (2000). In difficulty, Shenandoah fits neatly between Kaluhyat and Atunyote. The fourth is a fun 364-yard dogleg left that, given a helpful wind, can be driven, if you decide to carry the hazard extending up the left-hand side of the fairway.

Turning Stone is definitely playing the golf card. In addition to the three big-name courses, the Oneida Indian Nation boasts an executive nine built by Smith and operates a local nine-hole muni. In June, the casino opened a year-round domed teaching facility with 24 hitting stations and 5,000 square feet of putting surface. If the Oneidas

follow through with plans to build one or two more golf courses (the name Pete Dye is invoked) Turning Stone would indeed be transformed from "a casino with golf into a real golf destination that happens to have a casino on it," as director of golf Bob O'Brian puts it.

By the way, don't assume you need to stay in the big hotel you can see from the highway. Turning Stone also has The Lodge, an elegant little Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired hotel that opened in 2004. Beyond the airy glass exterior are some of the most stylish rooms you'll find anywhere, tastefully decorated in walnut, aqua-tinted glass and pewter.

One peculiarity bears mention: No liquor is served at Turning Stone, though guests may bring their own. Business doesn't seem to be suffering as a result. The casino is packed on weekend nights. For connoisseurs of Texas Hold 'Em and stud poker, Turning Stone hosts a very nice little 24-hour poker room with a range of stakes, plus a tournament almost every day of the week. The refrain heard from half a dozen employees and guests was, "What else ya gonna do in Verona?"

Somebody, show these people the golf courses. —*Raphael Tennenbaum*