



Stateside, Florida Leads the Way

Despite a slowdown, Florida still can't be beaten when it comes to luxury golf course real estate.

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

After generating a record 398.5 new golf courses in 2000, the number of new 18-hole courses opening each year in the United States has been consistently dropping. And last year's number of new courses, 124.5, marked the lowest annual total since the mid-1980s. Visit Florida, however, and the golf industry still has a sunny outlook with 1,764 new golf holes since 2001, or the equivalent of 98 new 18-hole golf courses—tops in the country, according to the Jupiter, Fla.-based National Golf Foundation. And this year alone, Florida leads the nation with 153 new holes opened through August.

PHOTO COURTESY QUAIL WEST

Of course, real estate continues to drive the majority of new layouts in Florida, which leads the world with 545 golf-course communities. And one of the growing leaders of luxury golf-course communities is the Celebration, Fla.-based Ginn Company.

One of Ginn Clubs & Resorts' newer projects is the redevelopment of Quail West Country Club near Naples, Fla. After acquiring the property in April '05, 300 single-family lots still were left for sale in this private 36-hole Arthur Hills-designed community. By year-end '06, Ginn was expecting to have 200 of those lots sold (prices are \$600,000-\$1.3 million for half-acre to 1-acre home sites), according to Vice President of Sales Tom Brosnan.

That should push Ginn's total sales revenue to \$190 million since the acquisition, not including another \$70 million in resales. One reason for Ginn's charged up sales activity is the \$45 million-\$50 million being invested to completely renovate the 70,000-square-foot clubhouse and upgrade the club's amenities and overall look. Among the additions planned over the next two years are a new spa and pool, and a members' beach club.

Brosnan acknowledges it's not the sales frenzy it was two years ago, but the "supposed slowdown" hasn't really affected Quail West. "This is such a unique trophy property," Brosnan says. "What's great about Naples and the Southwest is people here expect to see growth. We're adding so many premiums to Quail West there's still a feel for growth opportunities."

Another Naples development generating a buzz is Grey Oaks, the only private golf club community located in the city limits of Naples. Five years ago, Grey

Grey Oaks has several other new real estate offerings worth looking into. For instance, Noble Heron and Marsh Wren are two new sections of luxurious golf-front "villas" being built by the prestigious Naples-based Lutgert Companies. According to Dickinson, the single-family residences, launched last year, start at \$2 million for 3,400 square feet of living space.

At Lake Nona Golf & Country Club in Orlando, a high-end private community that features resident golf members such as Sergio Garcia, Retief Goosen and Annika Sorenstam, marketing executive Rob Adams also reports positive growth.

"We're doing pretty good," says Adams, whose entry price point for the 600-acre country club is now more than \$1 million. "We really haven't seen much drop in the high-end market."

One of Lake Nona's newest neighborhoods is Kensington Shores, a 120-unit enclave where semi-custom homes are starting around \$1 million. Additionally, there will be attached coach homes for \$900,000 to \$1.4 million (average size: 3,000 square feet). Across town at Isleworth, Lake Nona's sister community, the Gardens at Isleworth is off to a strong sales start too. The final phase of new home construction for this exclusive community, where Tiger Woods, Shaquille O'Neal and numerous other celebrities live, the Gardens are maintenance-free luxury villas ranging from 3,800 square feet to 5,500 square feet, priced from \$2.5 million.

Of course, robust golf real estate news isn't confined to Florida or even traditional Sun Belt markets for that matter. Case in point is developer John Lang's latest project in Northern Michigan, Lochenheath Golf Club. Situated on Grand

Top 10 States (by golf real estate)

State	Total Facilities
Florida	545
California	224
Texas	194
N. Carolina	172
Arizona	143
S. Carolina	129
Georgia	125
Michigan	118
Illinois	89
Ohio	77

Source: National Golf Foundation

PHOTO COURTESY MURPHY O'BREIN



Oaks' developers, relatives of the well-known Barron Gift Collier family, added a third golf course to the 1,200-acre community, the award-winning Bob Cupp-designed Estuary Course. The course winds through beautiful preserves and represents the backdrop to some of Grey Oaks' priciest and newest real estate.

For example, last December, Grey Oaks launched the final phase of its estate-size lots that border the Gordon River Estuary Preserve and overlook the golf course. The 35 home sites, which average just more than a half-acre each, start at \$995,000 and go up to \$1.9 million. Connie Dickinson, vice president of sales and marketing for Grey Oaks, says the estate lots are in high demand for a number of reasons.

"These lots are the very last of their kind within the city limits," adds Dickinson, whose 953-unit community is more than two-thirds sold out. "What's unique is you have all the amenities of country living with a city address. Once these are sold, there will not be another opportunity to find open land of this size and integrity that has the exclusive city address of Naples."

If estate-size living doesn't sound appealing, Dickinson points out that

Traverse Bay, Lochenheath's 644 acres is being transformed into one of the Midwest's finest private golf clubs and residential communities with lot prices ranging from \$225,000 to \$2.2 million.

Previously, Lang was involved in two highly acclaimed private residential golf communities in Arizona: Estancia in Scottsdale, and The Club at Seven Canyons in Sedona, Ariz.. He is convinced the end result will be no different at his latest endeavor in Michigan.

"Regardless of where you are, there's always going to be good places for what we do," says Lang, president/CEO of Scottsdale-based Pinnacle Development. "Scottsdale and Sedona have been two good spots and we've done some nice projects elsewhere. We look for irreplaceable real estate. The most important thing in real estate is not what you build, and it's not selling it. The key is what is unique about this property or the market. So we've come across this term irreplaceable real estate."

And even in today's sluggish golf course market, developers are discovering golf is still an "irreplaceable" component to the whole equation. **UH**