



# LUXURY LINKS

A look at what's happening in the world of high-end golf.

## Chipping Away at Naples

New developments in Sarasota are competing with the Naples golf market.

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

On the West Coast of Florida, the Naples-Bonita Springs area always has reigned supreme when it comes to high-end private golf course communities. In fact, Naples boasts of having more millionaires and golf courses than any other city in America.

In the past year, however, the Sarasota area, equally as swanky and luxurious, has quickly made a name for itself as a serious option for upscale golf course living. Two clubs in particular have put Sarasota on the golf map: the Founders Club in Sarasota County and The Concession Golf Club and Residences located on the border of Sarasota and Bradenton.

The Founders Club, a traditional golf club developed by U.S. Assets Group and The Starling Group, is a 700-acre low-density community that features just 262 homes and a par-72, 7,094-yard championship course designed by renowned architect Robert Trent Jones II. The private equity club, which opened February 2005, is already more than half sold out with 152 of the 275 total memberships committed.

As of December, the Founders Club had just 20 of its 108 estate lots left, ranging in price from \$535,000 to \$850,000 for .5-acre to 1-acre sites. Meanwhile, six of Sarasota's leading builders were marketing 3,200-square-foot-plus homes starting at \$1.8 million. In November, the Founders Club opened a new 24,000-square-foot clubhouse or Golf Hall, completing the community's project.



At the Concession, developer Kevin Daves is just getting started. The golf course was slated to officially open Jan. 23 with co-designers Jack Nicklaus and former British Open champion Tony Jacklin in attendance for the festivities. Much like the Founders Club, the Concession is an exclusive low-density development, comprising just 255 single-family homes on the 1,232-acre development. Cost of entry for this \$600 million gated enclave is \$100,000 for a full golf membership and \$2 million to \$15 million for the homes.

For golf purists, the par-72 course designed by Nicklaus and Jacklin is core golf with no homes on the 540-acre layout. Additionally, the Concession features a first-class 23-acre practice facility with two practice putting greens, a short-range area with a chipping green and three bunkers and a hitting area with seven target greens. Other major amenities are exceptional dining facilities, spacious verandas, luxurious locker rooms, card and billiard rooms at the main clubhouse, and a separate sports clubhouse that will offer well-

appointed fitness facilities and treatment rooms, a resort-style pool with poolside eatery and Har-Tru tennis courts.



These renderings depict Nicklaus Manor, a luxury neighborhood to be built within The Concession Golf Club and Residences.

The scope of luxury trappings is no different at the Ritz-Carlton's newly opened private Tom Fazio-designed Members Golf Club that costs \$100,000 to join. A core golf course that spreads across 315 acres about 20 minutes from downtown

Sarasota, this walkable layout is yet another prime example of how far Sarasota golf has come. Among the club's signature amenities is the Ritz-Carlton's caddie-concierge program, which encompasses everything from conducting traditional caddie duties to making dinner reservations and providing ice-cold oshibori towels soaked in rum and lime juice.

Founders Club general manager Ian Fetigan says it has been a "long time coming," but Sarasota is finally able to directly compete with its ritzy neighbor to the south, Naples.

"That's the market we're all after," adds Fetigan. "For the last 40-50 years, Naples was where everybody went because that's where the demand was satisfied. With the Founders Club, we're now able to attract that type of high-end member.... Sarasota has always been a great cultural city. Now, it's such a vibrant town and there's so much going on."

And high-end private golf is leading the way.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE LANDMARK DEVELOPMENT GROUP