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DYNAMIC DUO

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HOW THE CLIFFS BECAME A COMMUNITY

With 3,000 residents now in seven mountain developments, The Cliffs has come a long way from the real estate recession

STORY BY LAURA WILLIAMS-TRACY

Does having a purpose in life affect health and wellness? Scientists say there's a strong correlation.

Donna Bailey and others living well in the seven Cliffs Communities in the Blue Ridge of western North Carolina and South Carolina may not have their own research, but their example of giving their time and talents to others adds evidence to the argument.

Take Bailey, for example. She had a successful career in marketing for a software firm, and while living in Kiawah Island, S.C., joined the board of the LPGA Foundation and helped start a national girls' golf academy with the help of friend and women's golf legend, Nancy Lopez.

Now a full-time resident of The Cliffs at

Walnut Cove near Asheville, Bailey rallied her neighbors – most of them retired professionals with connections, time and resources to contribute – to help launch a women's golf program at UNC Asheville.

The neighborhood helped raise a sizable portion of \$500,000 needed to fund scholarships for the first six women accepted to the team. And the Jack Nicklaus-designed course at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove is the team's home course.

"A lot of that came from Walnut Cove. People stepped up to the plate with full and half scholarships," Bailey says.

Beyond money, women in The Cliffs who enjoy golf volunteered to mentor the athletes and help them make the transition from high school students to college athletes and



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eventually to their professional careers.

The success led the rest of the neighborhood to strengthen its ties to the local public university, and next fall 70 UNC Asheville athletes will be paired with a Cliffs at Walnut Cove mentor.

"You work your whole life in a career, and when you retire you want to share those experiences with someone and make them better," Bailey says. "Our members have jumped all over it."

Neighborhoods can be neighborhoods, or they can be something more, as Bailey's story shows.

But The Cliffs Communities near Asheville and Greenville cater to homeowners who value not just top golf but a multitude of other amenities.

Because of the scale created from 3,000 members in seven communities, The Cliffs offers one of the most comprehensive amenity offerings in the U.S. There are seven golf courses, wellness centers in every neighborhood, a marina, an equestrian center, hiking trails and even an organic farm, where residents can dig in the dirt or leave the weeding to staff.

"Our residents come from places where they were involved in their community. They put their energy into what they want to do," says Kent Smith, president and CEO of Cliffs Land Partners LLC.

Many residents are finishing their professional careers while balancing life between a larger city and one of the Cliffs communities. "They don't have to leave the

company they built, but they can transition to a different lifestyle and keep their main clients."

And lifestyle is what The Cliffs offer.

The Cliffs communities are near two of the South's vibrant, culturally rich cities. The communities developed over time with The Cliffs at Glassy atop Glassy Mountain in Landrum, S.C., opening in 1993, followed over the years by six more golf course communities spanning from Lake Keowee to the south, near Jocassee Gorges in the upstate to the Nantahala National Forest near Asheville.

The communities were started by real estate developer Jim Anthony, who like many real estate entrepreneurs, fell on hard times in the recession of 2008 when inventories of luxury homes and lots had no buyers.

In 2011, three groups were vying for ownership of the collection of communities, The Carlile Group, SunTx Urbana and Arendale Holdings. All came together in one entity to buy it that year, but by December 2013, Arendale, which had the most residential experience, bought out SunTx Urbana and The Carlile Group, allowing the Jacksonville, Fla.-based real estate investment and development company to become the sole owner and manager of The Cliffs Communities.

Smith says the benefits of the communities are their accessibility; most are between two and at the most, three hours from Charlotte. The Cliffs at Glassy is the closest to Charlotte at 115 miles. All have interstates 85 or 26 at their front door.

All of The Cliffs Communities offer a year-round environment with the beauty of the mountains without harsh winters. At 3,100 feet of elevation, The Cliffs at Glassy is the highest elevation of the communities.

Though the courses are very near each other, their different geographies but common ties make membership in The Cliffs a valuable experience for golf enthusiasts. "With seven courses it's one of the best multi-course collections in the U.S.," Smith says.

All the courses are within an hour and 10 minutes of each other, and any player can be on another Cliffs course within 30 minutes.

Golf participation is growing at The Cliffs, crossing 100,000 rounds played last year for the first time. A total of 221 new members enrolled in club membership last year, taking it to 2,890 families in 2016.

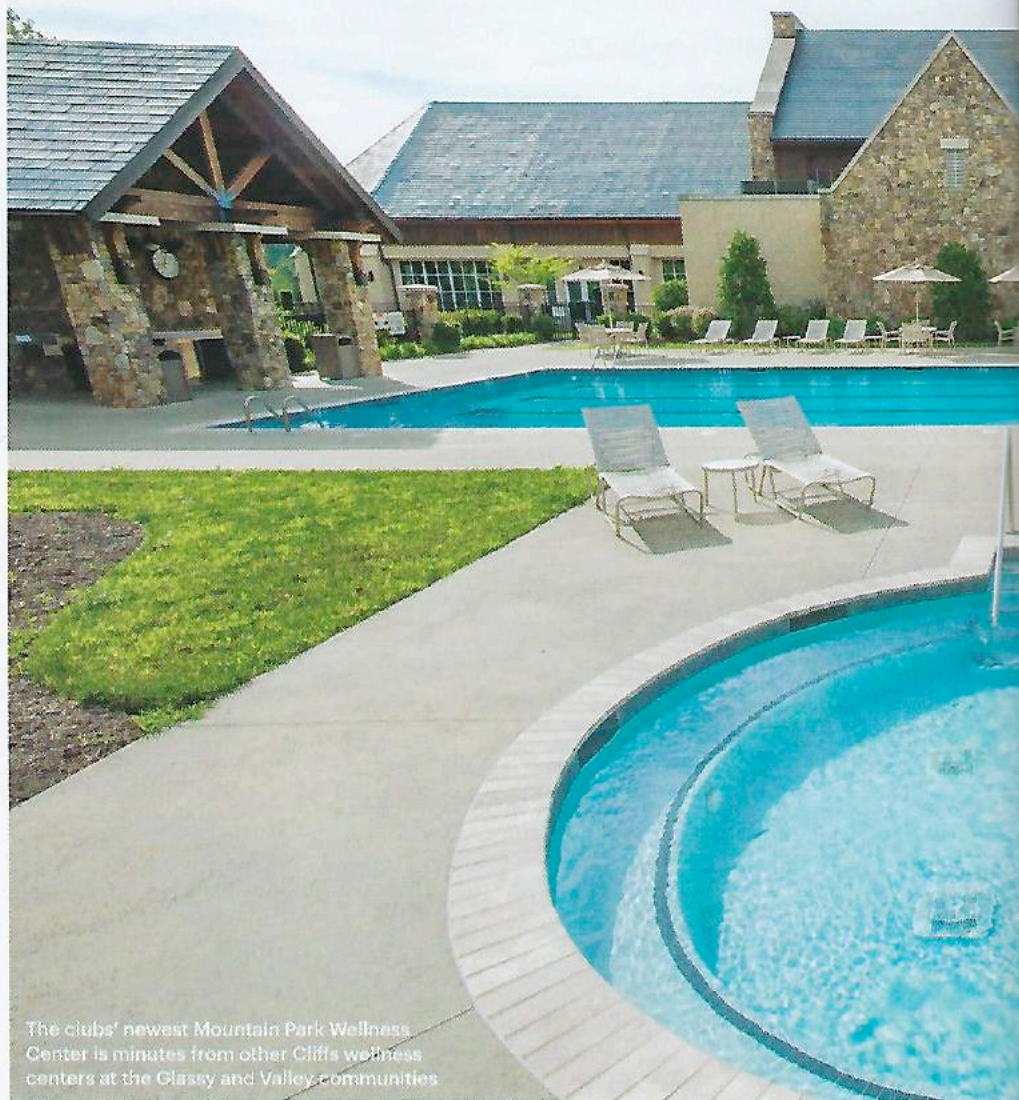
Having seven courses where residents in any Cliffs Community can play boosts each individual community, Smith says. And that benefit extends to other amenities.

There is full-time programming of outdoor recreational activities and as many as 5,000 recreational events on the calendar in any of the communities. Residents can go to any of them. They include cycling outings often led by retired road bicycle racer George Hincappie, a native of the area and a key domestique of Lance Armstrong, the only rider to assist Armstrong in all seven Tour de France victories.

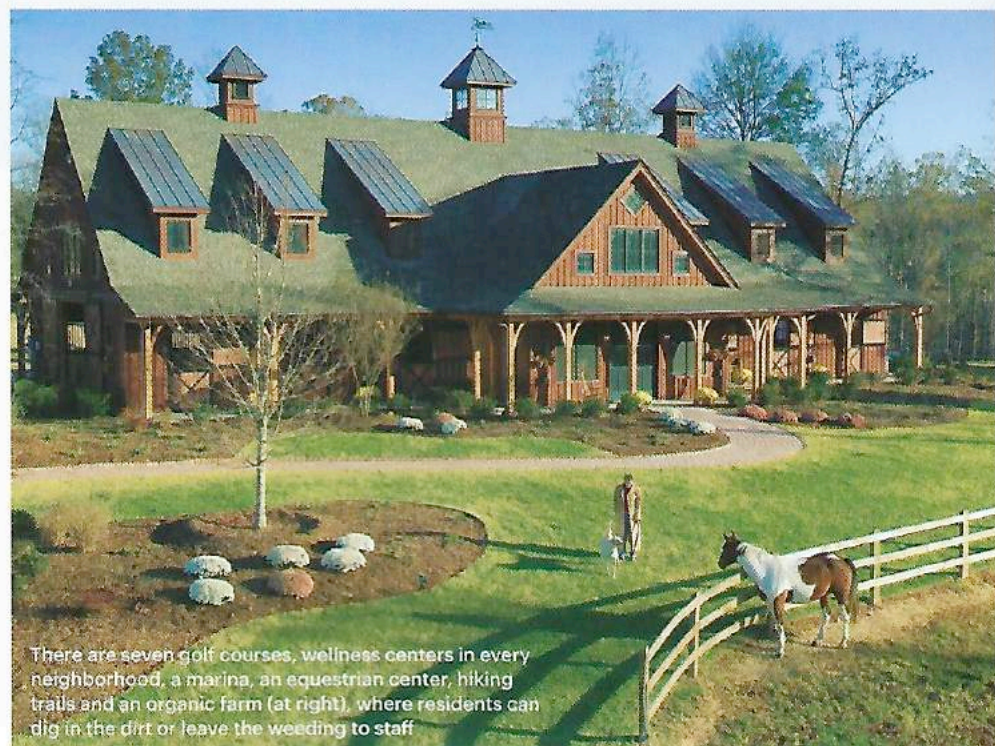
For those slightly more sedentary Cliffs residents, there are cooking classes and wine tastings led by the clubs' five level-two sommeliers.

"What do we not do? We try to push new boundaries in a way that is intelligently planned," says Ryan Kamszik, senior wellness manager for The Cliffs.

Organized hikes might include botany lessons. A kayak and paddle-board trip on



The clubs' newest Mountain Park Wellness Center is minutes from other Cliffs wellness centers at the Glassy and Valley communities



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Lake Keowee might be punctuated by a yoga lesson on an island in the lake.

The challenge for The Cliffs' wellness programs is to offer diverse programs that still have an impact for membership.

The clubs' newest Mountain Park Wellness Center is mere minutes from other Cliffs wellness centers at Glassy and Valley, and Kamszik says The Cliffs has worked to ensure the centers complement one another so all members find a place where they are most comfortable with the wellness challenge.

"We didn't want to replicate the other facilities so Mountain Park is predicated on the most innovative fitness techniques and methods in the industry. It allows us to be a strong partner to Glassy and Valley wellness."

The Cliffs at Mountain Park also features the first organic farm where property owners can design their own garden and leave it to others to tend if they are traveling. Any over-production goes to local restaurants or to charities.

"The gardens have been going for a couple of years, and it's working so they are taking it up a notch. It's a farm-to-table mindset," Smith says.

Indeed not just with crop production but also homebuilding production is on an uptick at The Cliffs.

Smith began as a consultant with The Cliffs in 1993 with the original owner. During the recession Smith took over resales at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove, selling bank-owed inventory, resales and new inventory.

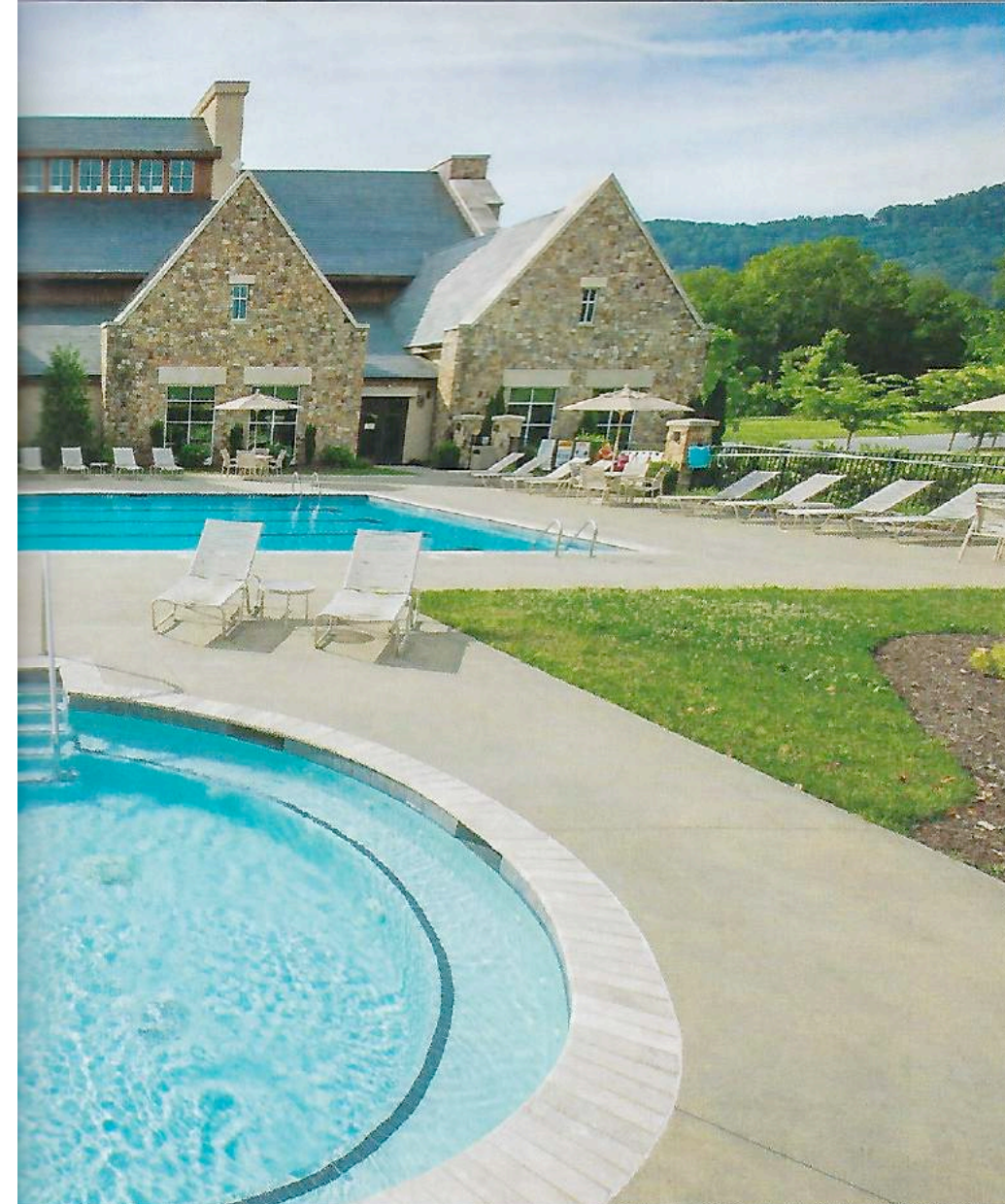
As the economy recovered, The Cliffs assets were in good shape, Smith says. With the luxury market returned to strength, Smith says the neighborhoods are working hard to keep up with demand.

Last year, The Cliffs completed 228 real estate transactions for \$119 million in total sales. Since 2014, sales throughout the communities totaled 538 contracts, nearly doubling from the 127 in 2014 to 228 in 2016.

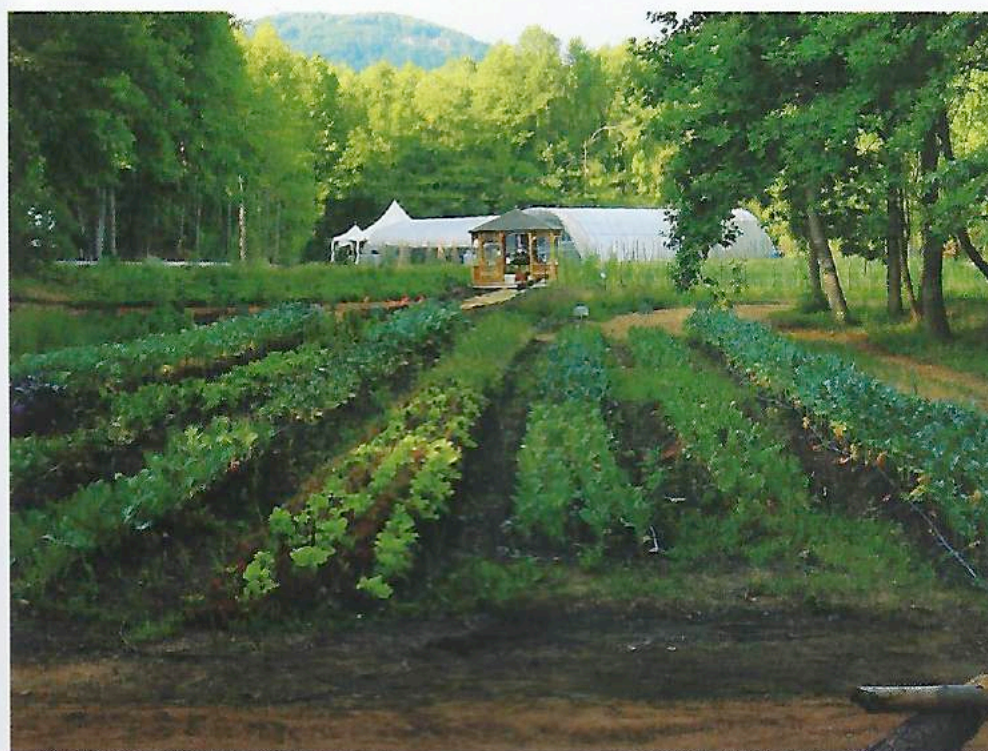
Smith says last year's total sales were the strongest the communities have experienced in many years and represent a 40% increase from 2015, a sign that growth is accelerating.

The communities are working with 18 preferred builders and releasing undeveloped lots. Speculative homes are selling from \$825,000 to \$1.6 million.

"People are realizing they are at that point in their life of why not do it now," Smith says. "They are buying property and realizing it takes two to three years to build a custom home. If they are 60, by the time they finish they will be 63 and ready to retire. The time is now." ■



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THE CLIFFS COMMUNITIES