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**Many state residents benefit from building boom**

Source: Charleston Gazette, The (WV) (KRT)

May 1--WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS -- Let's say you are visiting your new multimillion-dollar home at the swank Greenbrier Sporting Club.

It's been a while since you've been there -- after all, you're there only about 40 days a year. But not to worry.

When you arrive, your refrigerator will be stocked with fresh milk and perhaps cold beer. Steaks may be in the freezer, awaiting the grill. The house will be spotless. The porch furniture uncovered, the plants watered.

"What we do, honestly, are all the things that we would love to have done for ourselves. We make sure it really is a vacation for our clients," said Rebecca Winebrenner, who with her husband started Resort Home Services.

Resort Home Services is one of the cottage industries that have sprung up to cater to the residents of the private club and residential community near The Greenbrier resort.

And although few West Virginians will ever own a home there, many are prospering from the building boom even as far away as Charleston.

In a little more than four years, nearly 300 sites have been sold, and 111 houses have either been built or are under construction. The sites now cost from \$400,000 to \$1 million, with the houses ranging from \$1.75 million to \$5.8 million.

For many sporting club members, this is their third home, said John Klemish, director of sales for the club. He estimates that the average age of homeowners is 48; their average stay is 40 days a year.

He lists those who benefit from the development: builders, plumbers, stonemasons, electricians, painters, decorators, gardeners, cleaners. "It's endless," he says of the beneficiaries.

According to the plans, 500 homes will eventually be built in 17 "neighborhoods" on the 6,500 acres set aside for the development.

Construction began this month on the most recent neighborhood on top of Greenbrier Mountain, where building sites will range from \$750,000 to \$1 million.

"Any state in America would love to have this," said Patti Spaniak, director of marketing for the club. "It's putting people to work."

Interior designer Lesia Campbell won't provide the hard figures.

She will concede, though, that The Greenbrier Sporting Club has been very good for her business, Lesia Campbell Interiors of White Sulphur Springs. How good?

"It's at least tripled in two years," said Campbell.

One of the 20 ongoing projects that Campbell's firm is now involved in is a 5,000-square-foot stone and cedar two-story home owned by a Pennsylvania company.

"They use it for conferences and to entertain clients," she said.

Over the past two years, Campbell has completely decorated and outfitted the house. She picked the apple green paint for the walls. She chose the geranium-print wallpaper for the mud room. She ordered the furniture. She selected all the rugs, pillows, towels and sheets for the house. She made sure the kitchen was well-stocked with pots, pans, dishes, glassware, placemats and all the appliances.

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And in the process, she's passed on a lot of work to area artists, craftsmen and other businesses.

She pointed to the ogee edge of the granite countertop in the kitchen. That detailed work was done by Campbell Tile in Oak Hill, which also cut the tile and granite for all the baths in the house.

She designed all the window treatments, from the turquoise silk drapes in the upstairs balcony study to the pleated and buttoned valance for a bathroom.

They were constructed and sewn, though, by Virgil Ivy of National Drapery Work Rooms in Scarbro, Fayette County.

Frank Hedgecock of Beckley created the wrought-iron fireplace screen.

The pull knobs on drawers in the kitchen and bath were hand-painted by local artist Monnie Bare, as were several mirrors and pieces of furniture. The ceiling medallion in the master bedroom was painted onto canvas by Bare, then installed.

For something playful, she picked a watercolor of a big bug by Sita L. Stedding, a Lewisburg artist who has other paintings hanging in the house.

"I try to use as many local people as I can," said Campbell, pointing out that she has worked with the same people for years.

She has been in the interior design business for 20 years. It is, she said, something she always wanted to do.

"As soon as I could hold a crayon in my hand, I was drawing floor plans."

She commuted from Beckley for the first two and a half years after The Greenbrier Sporting Club development began. She now has a home in Lewisburg and a showroom in White Sulphur Springs.

"It is such a different market here," she said.

She employs three full-time and two part-time employees, and plans to add another of each.

Her work at the sporting club has helped her nationally as well, she said. "If people tend to like and trust you, they take you with them to their other homes."

Campbell has worked for the same company on a condominium in the Ritz-Carlton and a beach house, both on Florida's Amelia Island.

Tom Cullen and Paul Loos know it's not going to last forever. Eventually, houses will sit on all 500 building sites.

"But it's wonderful right now," Cullen said of the ongoing construction boom.

Cullen is a stonemason from Frankfort. Loos, his partner, is from Alderson and has been a contractor for 25 years.

The two men decided to get in on the action by financing and building their own spec house.

It took them three years to get the project together. They found a financial backer in City National. They secured the services of a Cincinnati architect to design the 5,200-square-foot house on Tyler's Ridge.

"There's 15 of us in the company. That's what makes us different. All the profits go to the working guys," said Loos.

A month after they broke ground on the house last spring, it was sold to a New Jersey couple. The wife plans to bring her horse and board it at the sporting club's stables.

Once this house is finished, they will tackle another one that is already on the drawing board.

"We're bringing people on and can give them steady work," said Cullen, praising the talent and ability of the local crew.

"Quite frankly, it is the single biggest impact on our business in over a decade," Rob Stepp said of the residential development. The owner of Creative Kitchens in Huntington and Charleston estimates his company has done or is doing work in 21 homes in the sporting club.

He said some days there are 40 people on site working on a new house. "It's amazing."

"What I am most proud of is the quality of work that they produce," Stepp said. "Ninety percent of them are West Virginia craftsmen."

Stepp added eight employees since he began installing cabinetry, countertops and custom built-ins in the multimillion-dollar houses in the development. He now employs 49 people in Charleston and Huntington.

And the additional work has enabled him to make capital improvements at his Huntington facility. "When I consider how much I've spent on building improvements I never did before, I've put a lot back in the local economy," Stepp said.

Greg Thaxton of Sunset Structures, which recently moved from Elkview to the West Side of Charleston, said the club development has "allowed us to work closer to home."

Thaxton's company has provided the exposed timber beams for the sporting club's lodge and for half a dozen houses.

He said that less than 15 percent of his work used to be done in-state. He expects that percentage to at least double in the next couple of years because so many of the upper-end houses in the sporting club will use the kiln-dried Douglas Fir that Sunset Structures provides.

In a recent speech to the Greenbrier Chamber of Commerce, sporting club general manager Larry Klein reported that more than \$70 million has been spent on infrastructure and club amenities.

"Over the next 15 years, over \$1 billion is expected to be spent on development at The Greenbrier Sporting Club, leading to a total economic impact of over \$5 billion on the West Virginia economy," Klein said.

Established in 2000, The Greenbrier Sporting Club is being developed by CSX, which owns The Greenbrier resort, and Dolan, Pollack & Schram Development Co.

A member of the sporting club must be a homeowner. Those members have access to many of the offerings of The Greenbrier hotel as well.

For instance, Spaniak said residents have several options for dinner. They can cook a meal in their own kitchen; call Greenbrier room service to have dinner delivered; take a courtesy van to dine at the hotel; or eat at the sporting club's year-old lodge.

The lodge's wood-paneled dining room overlooks the 18-hole Snead golf course and the sycamore-lined Howard's Creek. The dining room contains only nine tables, a massive stone fireplace and a stained-glass chandelier in the shape of an acorn with wrought-iron leaves extending from it. A cozy lounge bar is off of the dining room.

Upstairs are locker and dressing rooms -- the men's contains a pool table. And, of course, the complex includes the fitness center (referred to as the sports barn), a separate spa facility and swimming pool.

Such amenities are the No. 1 reason people are buying homes at the sporting club, said sales director Klemish.

Other reasons buyers cite include a sense of community and the security and safety that The Greenbrier offers. Most residents want their second home to be close enough to drive to, Klemish said.

Thirty West Virginians own homes there, giving West Virginia and Virginia the highest percentage of homeowners. Klemish said the sporting club also draws from Ohio, Maryland, New York and Florida.

Many of those buying want to diversify their financial portfolio, said Klemish. "That's a driving force in the second-home community. It's a very big deal."

Roger and LewAnn Cerisoli of Chadds Ford, Pa., gave up a home in Florida to build on a wooded hillside overlooking The Greenbrier golf course.

"Florida is still accessible," said Cerisoli, pointing out that there are lots of fancy accommodations to rent in Florida if the need comes to escape to a warmer climate. That's not the case in West Virginia.

"This is going to be our center of activity," he said.

The couple, who will soon be married 42 years, said the equestrian center was a big draw for their grandchildren.

Residents like the idea that their children can cross the two-lane highway to play tennis, bowl, or watch a movie at The Greenbrier, said Jerry Wayne, vice president of sales. "The club's very family-oriented."

A recent travel article in The New York Times mentions that The Greenbrier Sporting Club will soon offer camping trips to its members.

"There are families coming in for two or three days who want to go camping but don't have the camping gear or the know-how," Alan Williamson, director of outdoor activities, told the Times.

The sporting life is a theme of the properties under development by The Greenbrier and its partner. The resorts are "designed to appeal to families who share common interest in land preservation and love of the outdoors," says a brochure on The Greenbrier Sporting Club.

Other new residential developments include Snake River Sporting Club in Jackson Hole, Wyo., and the Turks and Caicos Sporting Club in the British West Indies.

The Greenbrier Sporting Club is the fifth such development that Klemish has been involved in. They all, he said, have resulted in more employment and more taxes for the local economy.

Property tax rates in Greenbrier County have remained unchanged, according to the assessor.

Still, just one \$2 million house brings in about \$12,000 a year in property taxes, according to Michael Burke, the assessor's chief appraiser.

Greenbrier County Commission President Betty Crookshanks said sporting club officials have predicted that because of the increase in land values, the county's tax revenue will double over time.

That extra money will fund a Tax Increment Financing program for the city of White Sulphur Springs and the surrounding area.

County officials say the money has been earmarked for water and sewer projects, both for the city and for about a dozen miles north along W.Va. 92.

And unlike the Eastern Panhandle, where growth has had its costs, the Greenbrier development has had no impact on school enrollment. Sporting club homeowners are either older or have their main residence elsewhere.

So between more jobs and more tax money, Crookshanks couldn't come up with a downside to the development. "No, I really can't," she said.

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