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Spring 2008

People from all over are
discovering the charm of
mountain communities in
the Tar Heel State



Hot Spot

North Carolina Mountains When the thermometer climbs into the upper 80s and above throughout the South, when the sweat is trickling and the bugs are buzzing and biting, the mountains of North Carolina have long been a popular and cooling respite. General Wade Hampton and golf champion Bobby Jones escaped the heat for the Highlands and Cashiers area of southwest North Carolina. Bankers and lawyers from Raleigh and Charlotte trekked to the northwest corner and the towns of Banner Elk and Linville to find

STORY BY LEE PACE

Arnold Palmer (above, left) designed the course at Balsam Mountain Preserve for developer Jim Chaffin. The community has spectacular vistas (right) and 80 percent of its land is deeded to a nature conservatory.



COURTESY OF BALSAM MOUNTAIN PRESERVE



The Balsam Boarding House (dining hall, above) is a fractional ownership option at Balsam Mountain Preserve. There are also 350 homesites, some with mountain or golf course views and others among tall trees in secluded woodland settings.

breezes and solitude, prompting one regular visitor to mount a sign beside the 13th hole at Linville Golf Club reading, "When we come to Linville, all troubles fade away."

The mountains are indeed a feast for the senses—riveting panoramas to tantalize the eyesight, fresh air funneling down from mountain peaks, the melodious songs of birds filling the trees enveloping emerald fairways.

And they are becoming a magnet to golfers, hikers, fishermen, naturalists, and all and sundry looking for primary residences, vacation homes, and retirement destinations.

"Going to the mountains is like going back to nature to some extent, back to wide open spaces," says Barton Tuck, developer of Bright's Creek, a community near Lake Lure with a Tom Fazio-designed golf course. "It's a mindset. People love the mountains and are discovering them."

Pam Frey is a Charlotte banker who grew up in Winston-Salem and had the good fortune as a child to camp with her family in each of the 50 states as well as travel within North Carolina to summer camp near Asheville, and enjoy holidays in Banner Elk.

"I saw the most amazing sights across this country," she says. "But the mountains of North Carolina feel like home, they speak to me in a way no other place does."

Which is why she and husband Mike are building a vacation and future retirement home at **Balsam Mountain Preserve**, a community half an hour west of Asheville. Balsam Mountain is the brainchild of development partners



Balsam Mountain Preserve's golf course features a total elevation change of some 500 feet. Designed by Arnold Palmer and his late partner Ed Seay, it was the last course Seay worked on.

Jim Chaffin and Jim Light, who enjoyed great success with South Carolina Lowcountry communities Spring Island (with an Arnold Palmer/Ed Seay designed course) and Chechessee Creek (a Ben Crenshaw/Bill Coore course), carefully constructing those communities with an eye toward nature preservation and conservation. They noticed many of their members and residents leaving in May and June for Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket in Massachusetts, northern Michigan, even west to Colorado and wondered if some would be interested in staying closer to the Hilton Head/Beaufort area by traveling only as far as the North Carolina mountains.

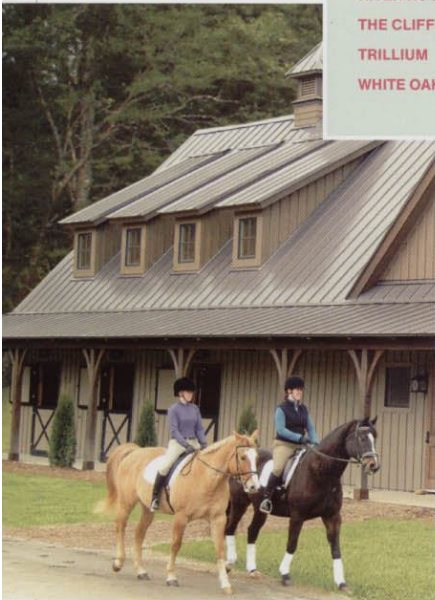
They found 4,400 acres near the town of Sylva and set out to create a "Spring Island in the sky" community at Balsam Mountain Preserve. Palmer and Seay designed the golf course, which opened in the fall of 2007, and it was the last one

Seay worked on before succumbing to cancer in August 2007. There will be only 354 homesites in the preserve, and more than two thirds of the land is deeded to a nature conservatory.

"The vistas are intoxicating," Chaffin says. "But more than the views is the way the golf experience fits within a contextual relationship to the nature around it. That has always been more important than simply playing down res-

North Carolina Mountain Guide

MOUNTAIN DESTINATION	WEBSITE	PHONE
BALSAM MOUNTAIN PRESERVE	www.balsammountainpreserve.com	866-452-3456
BRIGHT'S CREEK	www.brightscreek.com	866-302-7335
MOUNTAIN HARBOUR	www.ridgeslife.com	866-997-0700
MOUNTAINTOP	www.mountaintopgolfclub.com	866-743-7353
QUEEN'S GAP	www.queensgap.com	888-388-4640
RIVER ROCK	www.riverrocknc.com	888-743-2975
THE CLIFFS COMMUNITIES	www.cliffscommunities.com	866-435-5123
TRILLIUM	www.trilliumnc.com	888-464-3800
WHITE OAK	www.whiteoaktryon.com	800-544-6516



An equestrian center is among the amenities at Bright's Creek (above). It also features a Tom Fazio-designed golf course, with a fishing and shooting club and swim and tennis center on the way. Mountain Harbour Drive in the Ridges Resort Communities (right) showcases the beauty of the mountains.

idential canyons.”

The Freys visited in early 2007 with the idea of scoping out the community and wound up buying a homesite before they left.

“We loved the fact the community is within a nature preserve, rather than having a preserve or a park within a community,” Pam says. “You go there and feel like you own the mountain. There’s a sense of respect for the mountain and nature.”

Golf began in Western North Carolina with the 1894 founding of Swannanoa Country Club near Asheville, and the famed architect Donald Ross traveled from his Pinehurst base to the mountains frequently, designing courses in Tryon, Asheville, Hendersonville, Linville, and Highlands through the 1920s.

Today nearly every architect of any renown is represented in Western North Carolina, and Tiger Woods made a splash in August 2007 when he announced his first course design in the United States would be at **The Cliffs at High Carolina**, a community planned just east of Asheville. It will be the eighth private Cliffs community, including **The Cliffs at Walnut Cove** near Asheville and six in upstate South Carolina.

“You have to experience the property,” Woods says. “It just screamed that this decision was a no-brainer. Everything was so tranquil, breathtaking, and remarkable. All you hear is the birds in the trees and a few streams. This felt like a place where life slows down.”

That kind of atmosphere is attractive not only to Southerners. Developers have seen a pattern among newcomers they refer to as “half-backs”—people who lived in the Northeast or Midwest, moved to Florida, and now are returning halfway back.

Tuck is a Greenville, South Carolina, businessman and developer who

The Jack Nicklaus-designed course at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove opened in 2005 and has already served as one of the host courses for The Cliffs event on the Nationwide Tour. The Cliffs has another North Carolina community on the way, and the big news is that Tiger Woods will make The Cliffs at High Carolina his first course design in the U.S.

has specialized in creating residential and private golf clubs and communities. **Bright's Creek** is located just east of Hendersonville and opened its Tom Fazio course in May 2006. The 5,000-acre community also has an equestrian center and hiking trails and will have a fishing and shooting club and swim and tennis facility.

"When I started in this business the only thing you had to have was the best golf course in your market," says Tuck, who has also developed Forest Creek Golf Club in Pinehurst. "That set you at the top. Now your prospective members and homeowners want to know what your health center looks like, how many miles of trails you have. The golf doesn't just jump straight out at you any more."

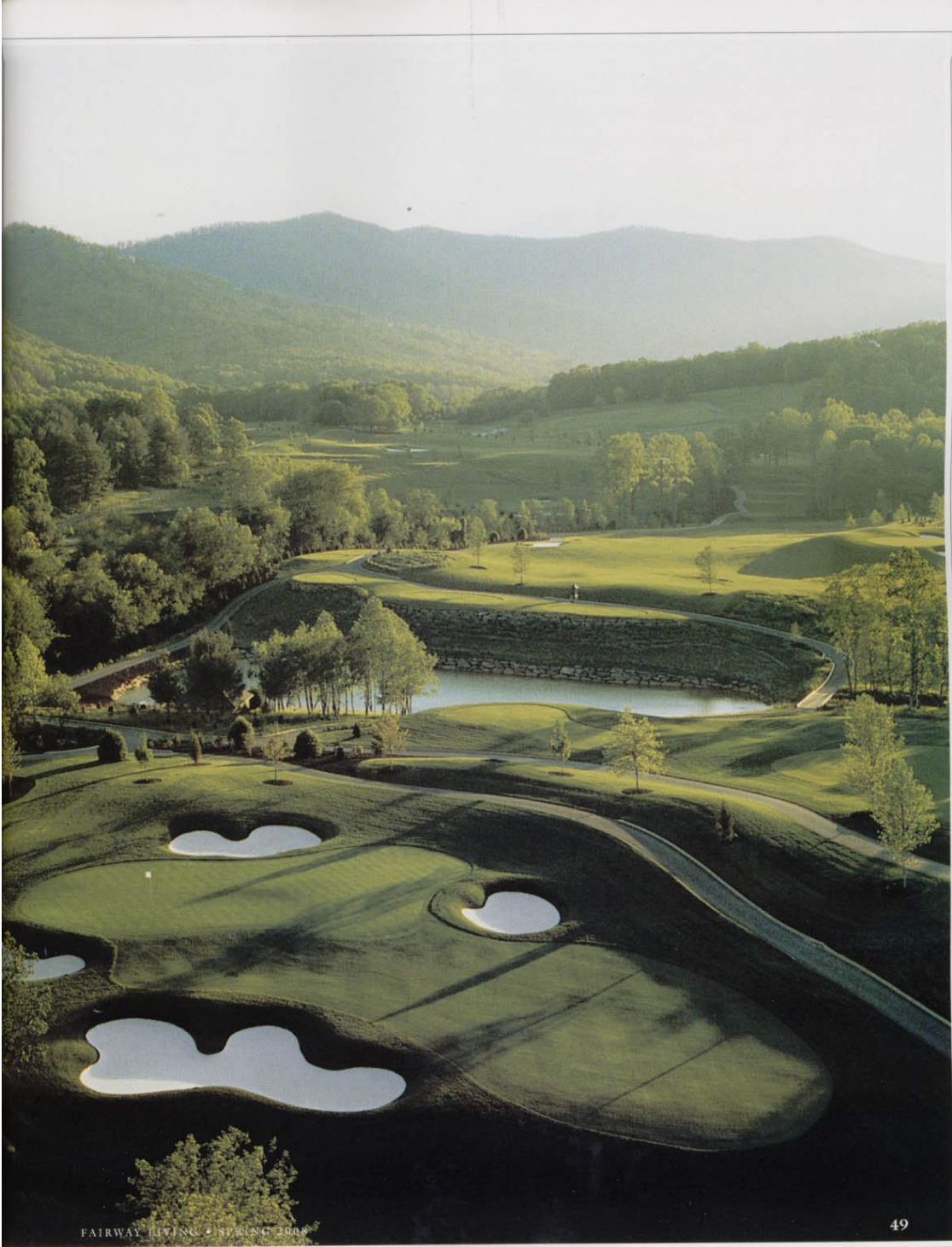
On the other side of Lake Lure from Bright's Creek is **Queen's Gap**, a 3,500-acre community conceived by Devin McCarthy, an Ohio businessman who traveled to Western North Carolina frequently on business over the years and canvassed the region for land suitable for a multi-faceted residential and recreational community. He remembers the spring day when he first saw the property and the crescendo of sensations the higher in elevation he got.

"More than just beautiful, the longer we stayed, the more it had something like a spiritual effect," says McCarthy.

Jack Nicklaus is designing the course at Queen's Gap, scheduled to open in 2009. General manager Burt Baine says the community's other amenities, including an equestrian center and spa, will be designed and executed at the level of a Nicklaus golf course.

White Oak Golf & Equestrian Community is located about a dozen miles east of Tryon, just north of the South Carolina border, and will have an Arnold Palmer-designed course that could open as early as late 2008 but certainly by 2009. Among the ownership team is the Kinsella family of Ireland, and White Oak will have a variety of Irish touches—from the home that will serve as the U.S. base for British Open cham-









COURTESY OF THE CLIFFS COMMUNITIES

Real estate options at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove include The Meadows, a European-inspired community located along the first fairway of the Jack Nicklaus course. Each home offers views of Pisgah National Forest and estate homes have natural stone terraces overlooking the golf course. Homes in The Meadows collection start at \$1.3 million, or at \$2.3 million for Estate homes.

pion Pdraig Harrington to the ornate stone walls reminiscent of the Irish countryside.

Bright's Creek, Queen's Gap, and White Oak will have the most convenient access to Charlotte and the Piedmont region , while the phalanx of upscale communities in the southwest corner around Cashiers have traditionally pulled more from the markets of Atlanta, Birmingham, and the Deep South.

The extreme western corner of the state is home to Hayesville and the Ridges Resort Communities. **Mountain Harbour** is the Ridges' gated golf community with a Willard Byrd-designed course. The 600-acre community and golf course are built around Lake Chatuge, and the club offers an array of recreational amenities including horseback riding, fishing, boating, rafting, and biking.

Cashiers is home to one of the region's first upscale golf communities, **Wade Hampton Golf Club**, which was developed by the McKee family and opened in 1987. Fazio was working on the Wade Hampton design in the mid-1980s when he and wife Susan decided to move their family to Western North Carolina from South Florida. Another new Fazio design in the Cashiers area is **Mountaintop Golf & Lake Club**, which features 251 estate lots between Cashiers and Highlands.

Phil Mickelson is diving into the Western North Carolina golf pool with his design at **River Rock**, located north of Cashiers between the Tuckasegee River and Lake Glenville. The course is the first from Phil Mickelson Design and is routed on a site that features dramatic vistas and elevation changes, including a 65-foot drop on the par-three second and a 104-foot drop on the third hole.

Rusty Culbreth grew up in Greensboro, spent two decades in business in Florida, and was a next-door neighbor in Daytona Beach to PGA Tour veteran Morris Hatafsky. When Hatafsky's Tour career wound down in the early 1990s, they dreamed of doing a development somewhere with Hatafsky designing the golf course. Culbreth was interested in returning



The centerpiece of The Ridges at Mountain Harbour is the new Grand Lodge Clubhouse, which features fine dining in the elegant Sequoyah restaurant (above inset). The community sits in a serene setting near Lake Chatuge (above), with opportunities for fishing, boating, and other recreational amenities.

to North Carolina and the mountains had a strong pull.

“Our concept was to do a family-friendly golf community in the mountains,” says Culbreth, who then conceived and executed the **Trillium** community near Cashiers with Hatalsky and a third partner, Dan Rice. “Our brand has been, ‘Where families belong.’ That’s what we’re about. Golf is one of our amenities, but the main thing is the family.”

The Trillium development team is currently at work on a new community, **Chinquapin**, which is located next door and will have 200 homesites on 2,000 acres. Hatalsky is designing a nine-hole course geared towards walkers and a state-of-the-art teaching and practice facility (members of Trillium and Chinquapin will each have access to the others’ facilities).

“When we moved here 10 years ago a lakefront lot on Lake Glenville was \$50,000,” says Culbreth. “Now it’s \$600,000-plus. This area is very, very hot and attractive. Years ago, people would stay here three months a year. Now they’re staying six to eight months. We’re bringing fiber optics to Trillium and Chinquapin because some people want to be here year around.” ■ *

Lee Pace covers the North Carolina scene from his home in Chapel Hill.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RIDGES AT MOUNTAIN HARBOUR