

GARY PLAYER SEES PROJECT REALIZED

Gary Player was on hand Friday morning for the official opening of the Cliffs at Mountain Park Golf Course that his company designed. Player conducted a golf clinic as part of the day's events. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

BACK ON COURSE

Marc Player hopes to keep office despite changes at Cliffs

By Rudolph Bell | Staff writer

When golf great Gary Player came Friday to Greenville County for the official opening of the golf course that his company designed for the Cliffs at Mountain Park development north of Travelers Rest, the setting was very different than seven years ago when he arrived by helicopter to make the first announcement.

The Great Recession decimated the luxury real estate business and took away some of the hopes and dreams.

However, Player was on hand Friday to announce that the golf course was finally ready, and his son said he has moved his family to Greenville County and hopes to remain here.

The 78-year-old Player, one of five golfers to win all four major professional tournaments, spoke with reporters, conducted a golf clinic and joined a small charity tournament at Mountain Park.

See PLAYER, Page 3A



Gary Player said he wants people to come out and enjoy themselves on the new course. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

"There are enough pressures in the world today — wives, businesses, grandparents, mothers-in-law. We all have problems. So we want people to come out here and really enjoy themselves and come home in a good mood."

PLAYER

Continued from Page 1A

"We want people to come out here and enjoy themselves," he told *The Greenville News*.

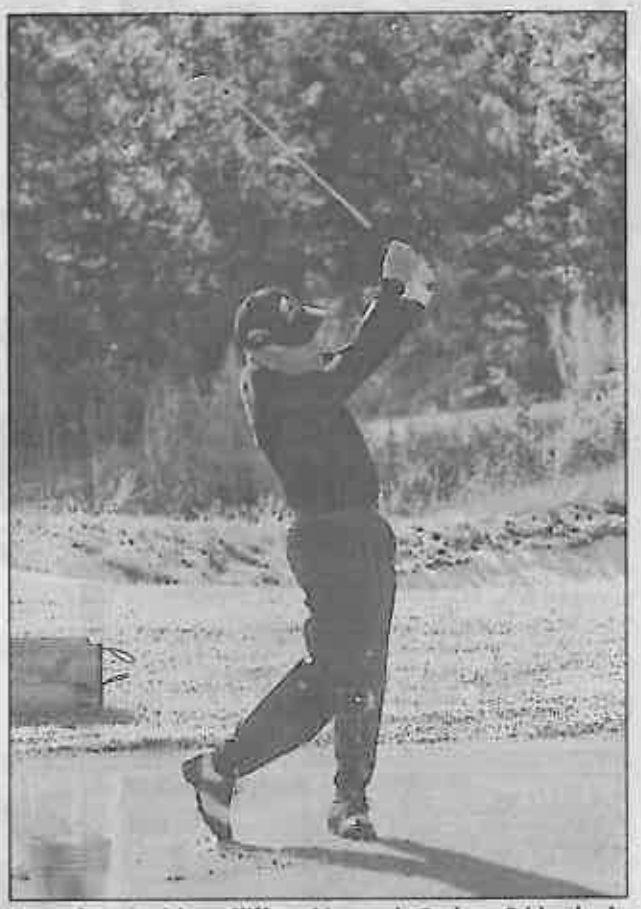
"There are enough pressures in the world today — wives, businesses, grandparents, mothers-in-law. We all have problems. So we want people to come out here and really enjoy themselves and come home in a good mood."

During Player's visit in 2006, he and Jim Anthony, the original developer of Mountain Park and six other luxury real estate communities marketed under the Cliffs brand, unveiled a big role for the famous golfer and his company at Mountain Park.

They said Gary Player Group would design the golf course, open a headquarters office, build a showcase home, organize charity tournaments and help to develop an especially exclusive portion of the mountain acreage along State 11.

In addition, the deal called for Player to promote all seven Cliffs communities in the Upstate and western North Carolina.

On Friday, however, Marc Player, son of the golf great and chief executive of his global business interests, said the arrangement fell apart after the recession decimated the luxury real estate business and Anthony lost control of the Cliffs.



Gary Player's visit to Cliffs at Mountain Park on Friday had a different tone than his 2006 trip. A much larger role for the golfer's company was once planned. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

Now that the Mountain Park golf course is complete, the Gary Player Group has no ongoing business relationship with the Cliffs' new owners, Silver Sun Partners, Marc Player said.

He also said his company's market has changed dramatically as a result of the recession.

While North America used to account for about 40 percent of its business, it accounts for 10 percent now, he said.

"So really what I should be doing is I should be moving everyone to Shanghai," he said. "But we prefer Greenville to Shanghai."

He said he and his family have enjoyed living in the Greenville area since moving from Florida last year and taking up residence at Mountain Park.

"I moved my family up here because I got a hell of an offer for my house in Florida from a wealthy Russian, and I wanted to get out of the rat race of Palm Beach," he said.

They have enrolled their children in Greenville's Christ Church Episcopal School.

Marc Player said he and his youngest son went Thursday on a field trip to an apple orchard along with fellow students from Germany, France and India.

"Who would have thought that I'd have to come to Greenville to get the diversity and the standard of education that you have to offer," he said.

"So we're very happy. My wife has settled down well. I love being in the mountains. I don't really miss the heat and the beach."

He said he also appreciates Greenville's values.

"The people are much more real and friendly," he said.

"We're really enjoying it. We've only been here a year so I can't talk long term. But I'm very excited about being here. And I hope that the Cliffs figure things out. And hopefully I'll continue to keep this office open here. I don't intend to move back to Florida."

Marc Player said his company has kept the 26-employee office open, even though the location is remote and many of Anthony's plans for a surrounding commercial village, such as a boutique hotel, never materialized.

"None of that happened, but I'm here," Marc Player said. "I said I'd build a house. I built it and I'm living there. I said we'd design a golf course, and we have. And I think it's very special. I honestly believe it's very different from the other Cliffs courses. And we're very proud of it."

He said Gary Player Group has brought visitors to Greenville from 47 countries since the local office opened. The company flies potential customers in through the Atlanta or Charlotte airports and holds out the Mountain Park course as an example of its design work.

"If I can continue to do that as a sales pitch presentation, and close deals from here in Montenegro, in Russia, in Brazil, in South Africa, in the Middle East, in India and in China, then I'll stay," Marc Player said.

"If my clients say, 'Well, we're not flying to America to come and look at how you live, work and play,' then I have to regroup and reconsider."