

Cyclist George Hincapie will offer Cliffs residents and prospective buyers eight private rides a year under a new deal made with The Cliffs communities. The Cliffs will encourage its residents to patronize Hincapie's Hotel Domestique. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

HINCAPIE, CLIFFS TEAM ON DEAL

Cyclist to offer private rides to buyers, residents, hotel to be promoted in turn

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The seven luxury real estate communities in the Upstate and western North Carolina known as The Cliffs each have golf courses and have long been marketed within the golf world.

Now their new owners see an opportunity in associating with another sport — cycling.

The Cliffs has enlisted champion cyclist and Greenville resident George Hincapie to lead its residents and prospective property buyers on eight private rides a year.

As part of the deal, The Cliffs has permission to use Hincapie's name in marketing materials, said David Sawyer, an executive vice president with its country club business.

In turn, The Cliffs will encourage its residents and prospects to patronize Hotel Domestique, the boutique hotel with a restaurant in northern Greenville County owned by Hincapie, his brother and a Canadian investor.

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A Cliffs official says the chance to ride with Hincapie will be a great marketing opportunity. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

"I think The Cliffs is realizing just how big cycling is becoming."

GEORGE HINCAPIE, cyclist and co-owner of Hotel Domestique



Hotel Domestique, which caters to cyclists, could get additional traffic from the deal with The Cliffs. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/STAFF

DEAL

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The Cliffs has also agreed to sponsor The Gran Fondo, an annual cycling event in the Upstate led by Hincapie.

It doesn't hurt that the Upstate enjoys a growing reputation as a great place for cycling.

Hincapie and others who know the sport well say the region's mild climate and little-traveled country roads in the Blue Ridge foothills provide an excellent environment for riding.

Greenville has become a perennial host for professional cycling competitions, and Bicycling Magazine named it one of the "Best Small Cities for Cycling."

Hincapie rode in the Tour de France 17 times and won three U.S. National Road Race championships before admitting to using banned substances during part of his career and testifying in the United States Anti-Doping Agency's investigation of former teammate Lance Armstrong.

His deal with The Cliffs comes as his new book, "The Loyal Lieutenant," is being released.

"I think The Cliffs is realizing just how big cycling is becoming," Hincapie told *The Greenville News*.

Sawyer said giving customers a chance to ride with Hincapie is "going to be a great experience and a wonderful marketing opportunity for us," though it's too early to say whether it will lead to increased property sales or club memberships.

It's not the first time that the Hotel Domestique property, nestled among vineyards and mountain views off U.S. 25, has been affiliated with The Cliffs.

Cliffs founder Jim Anthony used the property to put up potential property buyers when he owned it and called it La Bastide.

In downtown Greenville, cycling is already boosting business at the Westin Poinsett Hotel and restaurants owned by the Table 301 Restaurant Group.

Trek Travel, a cycling vacation company affiliated with the Wisconsin bicycle manufacturer of the same name, has offered "camps" in Greenville for the past three years, working from the Westin, said Dave Edwards, tour leader.

The week-long tours occur over several months in the spring and fall and draw groups of six to 30 from such places as Florida, New York and Canada, he said.

The cyclists pay $1,300 a head for rides to Paris Mountain, Caesars Head, Hagood Mill and destinations in western North Carolina.

They head out each day on the Swamp Rabbit Trail riding carbon-fiber bicycles with electronic shifting, sleep at the Westin and dine at Nose Dive, the Lazy Goat, Soby's and Passerelle.

"Downtown usually impresses them," Edwards said.

A longtime tour guide for Trek Travel who has worked around the world, Edwards called the Upstate an "absolute dream for a cyclist."

"I'll go out for a 50-mile ride and see five cars," he said. "There's just not a lot of places in the country where you can do that."