Hopes are soaring for The Cliffs Communities

Properties under new ownership could create 'vitality'

BY MIKAYLA KREUZBERGER
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SALEM — It's no secret that The Cliffs Communities didn't take well to the recession in 2008.

Four years later, however, there are organizations and people in this area who still are confident this community will thrive within Oconee and its surrounding counties. And they are putting money where their faith is.

Recently, real estate capital provider Worthington Hyde Partners, of Norcross, Ga., took over titles to several properties within the Cliffs Communities in Oconee, Pickens and Spartanburg counties.

According to Worthington Hyde spokesman Rob Kincheloe, the company provided a loan to Cliffs Communities Inc. in 2008, which was secured by 240 platted lots, more than 2,300 undeveloped acres and certain rights and improvements.

In 2010, Cliffs Communities Inc. defaulted on that loan and Worthington Hyde filed a foreclosure action for non-payment, Kincheloe said.

Now, Worthington Hyde owns those collateral properties at The Cliffs at Keowee Falls in Salem, The Cliffs at Keowee Vineyard in Sunset and The Cliffs at Glassy, located along S.C. Highway 11 in Landrum.

Kincheloe said these are currently the only assets Worthington Hyde owns in the Upstate.

"We are exploring various strategies to best position the property for long-term value creation," he said. "We are excited about the long-term potential for The Cliffs Communities, and accordingly for our investment."

Looking outside of the private Cliffs community, local towns could benefit from the new ownership, as well.

"As they (Worthington Hyde) sell these lots, the effects could trickle down to the Salem community," Salem Town Clerk Kim Alexander said. "Not only would out-of-town visitors boost the local economy, but construction and landscaping opportunities could create jobs."

Lake Keowee Real Estate Realtor and developer John Hamrick said that new ownership often brings vitality and a new perspective to a community.

"(The Cliffs Communities founder) Jim Anthony had a wonderful vision for this area, but the economy hit everyone hard," Hamrick said. "As the economy improves, you'll see The Cliffs become viable once more in the community like it was in the late '90s and early 2000s."

Hamrick noted that the job market would certainly increase as homes are built within The Cliffs Communities, especially if construction increases.

Zone 7 Nursery and Landscaping owner Lance Yuda said his Seneca business is greatly impacted by the communities along Highway 11.

"The Reserve (on Lake Keowee) is doing quite well because of it's management, and we've had a lot of business up there because of the growing number of homeowners," Yuda said. "Without a viable management company, it's hard to draw people in.

"The Cliffs' new property ownership definitely means more jobs, whether you're a homeowner or a landscaper. For a landscaper, there are opportunities for design and, later on, maintenance, and then clients are drawn to our nursery in Seneca. Continued growth on Lake Keowee is critical to our economy," he said.

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Michael McCloskey, right, and his wife, Ronnie, stand in front of Keowee Towne Market in Salem. Michael McCloskey recently purchased the Market earlier this year in hopes to revitalize The Cliffs Communities that were hit by tough economic times.

CLIFFS: 'It's a great place to live'

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The Cliffs at Keowee Falls South homeowner Michael McCloskey is a community member who believes in the potential of the area and backs up that faith with twin investments.

"We built a home here because my wife and I fell in love with the lakes and mountains and Southern hospitality," he said.

McCloskey also purchased Keowee Towne Market, 15740 N. Hwy. 11, in March when it went for sale at an auction.

The Market currently houses a café, grocery and liquor store, a real estate office and wellness center for The Cliffs Communities, as well as an Ace Hardware store.

"It's great because it appeals to the local community, as well as to The Cliffs community," McCloskey said. "There are confident people who work within the Market who will continue to help this community thrive."

McCloskey said the Market hosts events, such as live music concerts that attract guests, too.

The Market will host a wine tasting from 3 p.m. until 5 p.m. Saturday, and live entertainment begins on the patio at 5 p.m. after the wine tasting.

As a homeowner, McCloskey said Worthington Hyde's investment in The Cliffs Communities creates a stability and confidence that wasn't always there during the recession.

"Sales will increase and more people will feel secure about investing in this area," he said. "It's a great place to live."

mikayla@upstatetoday.com | (864) 973-6684