

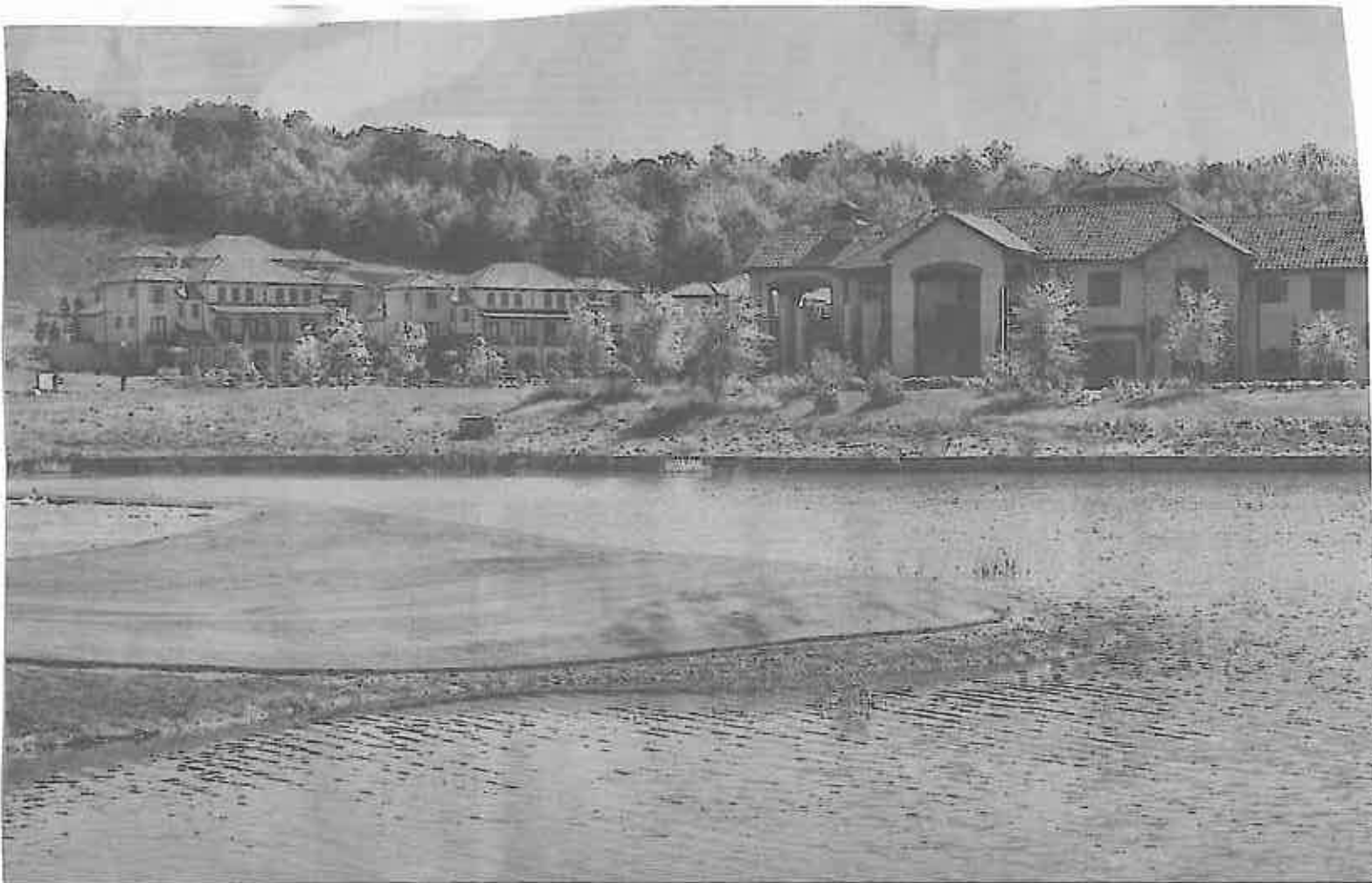


# UNCERTAINTY ABOUNDS

9/9/12

## AS CLIFFS EMERGES FROM ROUGH





When Jim Anthony announced his new project, The Cliffs at Mountain Park, in 2006, it was to going to be his largest community to date. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

**By Nathaniel Cary**

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**J**eff Lawrence stepped onto a tee box at the Cliffs at Mountain Park and surveyed his creation in the mid-morning light. A 13-acre lake glistened in the distance. The North Saluda River split the course in halves and meandered along the former farmland acreage set in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

He stood atop close-cropped bright green diamond zoysia grass and pointed out features of the par-4.

A small bunker lay to the left, a large one stretched down the right, maybe 100 yards long, meant to provide a stark white sand contrast against the backdrop of darker green

native grasses.

"It'd be a perfect day to play," Lawrence said, letting out a low whistle.

This is what Cliffs developer Jim Anthony wanted to capture when he started to build luxury golf communities in the mountains north of Greenville and along the shores of Lake Keowee starting in the mid-90s.

But much like Anthony's dream, the communities — and two of the golf courses — lay incomplete.

The picturesque beauty of mountain and lake backdrops and amenities offered in luxurious golf communities drew hundreds of homeowners to buy into the vision of a golf utopia.

After years of uncertainty, foreclosures, unsold lots and uncompleted

Jeff Lawrence, left, senior designer of the golf course at the Cliffs at Mountain Park, and Scott Ferrell, president of Gary Player Design, review plans for the golf course. KEN OSBURN/STAFF

**GreenvilleOnline.com**  
**THE CLIFFS LEGACY**

See the videos:

» Nick Anastos grew up with the North Saluda as his backyard. He and other trout fishers fear it will be forever changed by development.

» Scott Ferrell, president of Gary Player Design, shares his thoughts about the company, its move to Greenville and the future of the Cliffs at Mountain Park.

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...just been neglected years and it will be... Lawrence said. A signer worldwide, he ze the course. ou can just envision with native grasses," d to visualize ond the rough.

Anthony launched his golf communities in fished a comfortable le set in picturesque settings with a dedi-health and wellness. ide land for nature camping and built e-art health centers. ion for his commenshould ed buyers andwith venerable... moves, along with top gnerners and accolades th locally and from l golf press. e next 15 years he Cliffs communities; at Glassy, The Cliffs e Cliffs at Walnut three communities Lake Keowee that Cliff ed gol azio

...Recession. Anthony hung on. In 2010, he announced plans to borrow \$64 million Cliffs homeowners with a goal to finish amenities, but eventually construction on the Mountain Park course stopped along the banks of the Saluda. Then in February, ClubCo, shorthand for the Cliffs Club & Hospitality Group Inc., a subsidiary of Anthony's luxury-home company, declared bankruptcy. Steve and Penny Carlile of The Carlile Group in Marshall, Texas, who also own a lot at the Cliffs at High Carolina, announced plans to purchase ClubCo and take the reins from Anthony. ClubCo used The Carlile Group's bid as a "stalking horse" to attract more offers, but no one stepped forward by April 23, when a public auction would have been held, said Gary Marsh, debtor counsel with Atlanta-based McKenna Long & Aldridge LLP. The sale is expected to be made official on Tuesday a hearing before Judge John E. Waites the U.S. Bankruptcy ct South Marsh

...Repeated attempts rts up the Carlile the Carliles of the group's become sponsors for on recent developments wreorganization plan unsuccessful. s once the plan is ap- creditors and the the Cliffs at Mountain Park, ClubCo emerges from Marsh said. continue to develop along y 13 the debtors in- ing a plan of reorgani- a disclosure state- sh said. liles were already in- te success of ClubCo Upstate Forever first go- te success of ClubCo kruptcy. They were involved with the Cliffs at Mc- kruptcy. They were tain Park in 2007 when it group of 535 Cliffs came part of a group that ne- who had loaned An- tiated to stop the develop- y in 2010 to keep the from discharging up 175, golf courses opera- gallons of treated wastewat- liles partnered with tain into the Saluda. liles partnered with ana, a primary lot The Cliffs change' p ana, a primary lot and the state Departmen vner of the Cliffs Health and Environmental estate development trol issued permits allow pecializing in golf club to discharge the water of ons in a move that land. e a "viable solution nes current chal- nes current chal- sign plans that conservatio- providing the long- groups feared would change th- ility The Cliffs North Saluda's flow and damage e Carlile said in a one of the top trout streams i- ncrement. the area. Player scaled back in doubt is the fu- plans to alter the river's channe- Tiger Woods-de- and agreed to leave a 25-foot- at Cliffs at High buffer from the river's ed was to be Woods' leaving more trees untouch- course design in North

Conflict with conservationists

Conflict then arose over de- when it was an- 07. Now its future

"We're trying to maintain that ecosystem all through the river and we've really enhanced the river, cleaned it up from what it was," Lawrence said. "There's no doubt the river's an improvement. We've made improvements to what it was during the agricultural days." As part of the settlement with conservation groups, the Cliffs agreed to put \$250,000 into a watershed protection fund and build a public river access point just south of the golf course. So far that fund has received \$40,000, said Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, one of three groups charged to administer the fund. He said he's concerned that the fund hasn't been fulfilled, but hopeful new owners would meet the Cliffs' obligations. The fund was established for projects to protect and enhance the North Saluda and its watershed, Wyche said. No money has been spent yet but an unnamed project is under consideration, he said. John Tynan, deputy director for Upstate Forever, said the group hasn't done a full-scale plan of needs to protect the watershed, but said creating buffers between developments and the river is the key issue. "The main things that universally are understood to protect the health of a watershed are land protection, first and foremost," Tynan said. "Beyond that it really is a lot of site-specific, landscape-specific things."

Cliffs future

Gary Player moved his international golf course design group from Palm Beach to the Greenville mountains in 2008 as he sought to establish a multifaceted relationship as a spokesman, invitational tournament host, course designer and resident of the Cliffs. Player invested millions to build a home that overlooks the course and to furnish the new studio that houses his design team. "Our original objective was to have a showcase to bring clients in from around the world," Ferrell, president of Gary Play-

# CLIFFS

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...the homeowners who the residents who live unfinished develop- and conservationist eager to protect land all untouched are ready ver a new leaf with new wners. They just don't y what that leaf will re- ad of pulling out golf wrence unrolled a map urse design. designer, Lawrence better than most what look like. golfer layer, Lawrence de- that was to be a show- rse just steps from the or of Player's North n golf course design rters. away from manicured es lie wastelands of urf was never planted. d clay dominate where d should fill the bunk- has been moved to e course layout, but haven't been planted, are unfinished and vergreens. Acclaim- eed. Tom F

...courses. Jack Nicholas signed two more. Architects Tom Jackson and Ben Wright each designed a course. In 2006, Anthony announced a new project, The Cliffs at Mountain Park. It was from his largest community to date, 1,500 homes nestled under the trees and along mountain roads set against a backdrop of the Blue Ridge Mountains on Highway 11 just off U.S. 25. He brought in Player to design course that ran its length along the Saluda River. Player, wanting to showcase course show to potential clients, decided to relocate his North American headquarters to the site. Anthony began to build a 30-acre European-style pedestrian village along with the new headquarters for the Gary Player Group as Player began to design and route the course. The headquarters, an immaculately detailed two-story building filled with artwork and memorabilia that overlooks the 13-acre lake and golf course was completed. The rest of the village, aside from a row of condominiums, was not. Cracks had begun to form in s at Keowee's plan when banks be course archi- jobs turned shaky. and two tainty enveloped the housing market, by 2008. De- demand for luxury golf course

...That sets up the Ca- 07. Now its future depth study of the s viability, Carlile Group to become sponsors ClubCo's reorganization and owners once the plan i- proved by creditors and the court and ClubCo emerges t- developments were bankruptcy, Marsh said. l. "On May 13 the debtor, wn in doubt is how tend on filing a plan of reorg- Mountain Park will zation and a disclosure si- develop along the ment," Marsh said. North Saluda Riv- The Carliles were already North Saluda Riv- vested in the success of Clu- prior to bankruptcy. They with among a group of 535 C- onists members who had loaned thony money in 2010 to keep- orever first got in- the Cliffs at Moun- he Cliffs at Moun- 2007 when it be- a group that nego- p the developers ing up to 175,000- ated wastewater a North Saluda. changed its plans e Department of ivironmental Com- mits to allow the ege the water onto and surrounding

en arose over de- hat conservation would change the flow and damage trout streams in yer scaled back e river's channel leave a 25-foot he river's edge, trees untouched

...Cracks had begun to form in s at Keowee's plan when banks be course archi- jobs turned shaky. and two tainty enveloped the housing market, by 2008. De- demand for luxury golf course

er Design, said. "It's unfortunate. I can't say that we can blame anybody other than the economy, but we haven't quite gotten there yet. But I think the recent developments are going to help us get there."

With the course and residential development in a holding pattern, the design group has worked on course designs worldwide, though in a sign of golf's changing trends state-side, the Mountain Park course is its only current U.S. new course project, Ferrell said.

Ferrell said he's starting to believe again that Mountain Park will become the showcase they'd dreamed of.

"We're sitting here today with a major investment in the Cliffs Communities and we want to stay," Ferrell said.

Construction could re-start in the coming weeks or months and may be finished by year's end, Ferrell said.

"We hope to open by the spring," Ferrell said, adding that timing all depends on when bankruptcy proceedings wrap up.

Ferrell said he met with the new ownership group, which raised his hopes that the course would be finished sooner rather than later.

"All indications are one of their top priorities is to finish our golf course as soon as the bankruptcy proceedings are completed," Ferrell said.

From a meeting room inside the Black Knight headquarters, Ferrell looked past Player's Masters Green Jacket and a wall of major championship trophies across the lake and toward the golf course.

"It's always disappointing to look out there and nothing's happening," he said.

### Impact on Saluda River

A yellow rope swing hangs over the Saluda about two miles downriver from the Cliffs at Mountain Park.

It's tied to a tree branch where children have swung from similar ropes and dropped into the water for decades.

Nick Anastos remembers those days. He's grown up on the river. Fished it. Boated down it. Farmed next to it. And he's always lived here, down a private dirt road and across a homemade wooden bridge.

He's watched the river change. Water levels have steadily dropped through the years. Trees that once stood proudly on the banks now lie broken in the water, their roots carved out from under them when the river floods.

The rope swing isn't used as often nowadays. The water's not high enough.

Nearby country churches still march down to the riverbank on occasion to baptize new converts, he said. There's usually enough water.

Five years ago, Nick and his wife Dianne learned of the Cliffs plan from a poster tacked to a telephone pole. They worked with hundreds of locals and assisted other conservation groups to alter the golf course plans.

Then they started their own group of volunteers and Save Our Saluda was born.

The Anastoses have kayaked down the North Saluda a half-dozen times in the past two years and watched as the river

changed.

"If you had kayaked down that river before they got ahold of it, it's a totally different river," Dianne Anastos said. "To us it looks like a very sterile river."

Lawrence, Player's course designer, said they'd made dozens of changes to the course to satisfy conservationists. They raised the height of bridges that span the river because it's considered navigable, he said.

They've also limited the use of the river in hole-to-hole play. The river is used as a hazard on just one hole.

"We've been trying to utilize the river as much as we can as the natural feature of the site," Lawrence said.

The Anastoses said their goals for the river have evolved. They want people to experience the river just like they have. Familiarity breeds love, they believe.

"Once they get out and enjoy it, they're going to want to protect it," Diane Anastos said.

So the Anastoses leave their private road open as one of the few access points that exists on the North Saluda. They call it the Goodwin Bridge Road river access.

On a recent Friday afternoon, a half-dozen vehicles parked alongside the stream.

A pair of neighbors fished from the bridge, their lines dangling and occasionally getting entwined in the rippling brook. Another man sat on the bank below, also with a fishing line in hand.

Across the stream a father, Steven Dunn of Marietta, showed his daughter, Kensley, how to cast. She tried a few times, her sing-songy voice cracking the silence in her first attempt at fishing.

Fishing teaches patience and hadn't taught her yet.

"I grew up fishing here with my buddies," Nick Anastos said. "It's a treasure as far as I'm concerned and most people that come here think that too. So we try to preserve and protect it."

Chief among their concerns is the trout habitat. They still fear sediment from the Cliffs will filter downstream when development picks back up.

Their secondary concern is for the public river access point. It would create a spot for more people to find and use the river, but "we don't know if it's ever going to happen," Dianne Anastos said.

"If they will honor the prior agreement with the conservation groups, it could be a great paddle from that access down here," she said.

It's a slow process, bringing attention to the river. Word spreads from person to person. Paddle Days and trout-fishing competitions have been held.

"The only way we could really go forward with this is to get people to take ownership of the rivers. That means getting people on the water so they can touch it, feel it, understand that it belongs to them," Nick Anastos said.

"It's like trying to push a donkey forward."

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