

Amenity upgrades aim to ‘deliver on the dream’ of The Cliffs

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Expected to be completed in 2023, the Lake Club will add two pools, racquet courts, a fitness center and additional lake access to The Cliffs at Keowee Springs near Six Mile. The Cliffs/Provided

Right now, the site is a maze of concrete retaining walls and overturned mounds of red earth. Pieces of heavy equipment leave tread tracks in the soft soil, while construction workers navigate staked-out foundation areas and piles of landscape stone. The only hint of what this place will become is the view—a sloping vista down to the sun-dappled waters of Lake Keowee.

Sometime in late 2023, this worksite will be christened the Lake Club, the newest amenity at The Cliffs at Keowee Springs near Six Mile. Set in the development’s tony Landing area—the \$6.2 million home that recently set a sales record for Lake Keowee is not far away—the Lake Club will be an oasis with two pools, racquet

courts, a fitness center, and of course that priceless view of the lake. It will complement the community's existing Beach Club, where kids zip down water slides while parents sip concoctions like a Springs Sunset or a spicy Paloma.

Not far away, there's another construction zone at Keowee Springs, this one laying the groundwork for the kind of grand clubhouse this golf community has never had. That follows extensive renovations of the clubhouse complexes at two other Cliffs properties, The Cliffs at Walnut Cove near Asheville, N.C., and The Cliffs at Mountain Park near Marietta. Another clubhouse renovation is planned for The Cliffs at Keowee Vineyards near Sunset. New wellness centers are coming for several communities, new pickleball courts are being installed, and The Cliffs' signature golf courses are being refurbished from tee to green.

Indeed, it's been a whirlwind of activity at The Cliffs communities since South Street Partners of Charleston and Charlotte bought the mountain and lake properties in March of 2019. "They're making a difference, for sure," said Tim Enterkin, sales manager for the lakes region at Cliffs Realty, where he's worked for 13 years. "They're doing some good things."

Placing an emphasis on operations

When developer Jim Anthony opened his first Cliffs community in the early 1990s, The Cliffs at Glassy near Landrum, it seemed like a can't-miss prospect due to the soaring views afforded by its Tom Jackson-designed golf course. Six more communities followed, ranging from the mountains to the shores of Lake Keowee, all of them anchored by golf courses designed by the likes of Jack Nicklaus, Gary Player and Tom Fazio.

But in the wake of a Great Recession that hammered both the golf and real estate industries nationwide, The Cliffs filed for bankruptcy protection. When South Street bought The Cliffs from Florida-based Arendale Holdings for an undisclosed price, it discovered millions of dollars in deferred maintenance and facilities that had seen better days.

“We saw that The Cliffs was always focused on real estate and marketing, and they never really delivered on the dream,” said Rob Duckett, president of operations at South Street Partners. “(They) said a lot of nice words, showed a lot of nice pictures, and were focused on selling real estate, but somebody’s got to deliver on that. In the lifespan of developments like these clubs, at some point, they have to mature. And they never matured.”

As remote as some of The Cliffs properties are, club membership—which allows access to golf courses, racquet facilities, clubhouses, dining options, pools and more—are viewed

by many residents as requisite when purchasing a home. South Street’s initial focus, Duckett added, was to soften the focus on real estate sales and strengthen the focus on operations, beginning with the implementation of a new organizational model that allowed individual clubs to make more decisions for themselves.

After that, it attacked what Duckett called a long history of deferred maintenance. “The facilities, I mean, they were just falling apart,” he added. “That’s because there wasn’t a sustainable financial model to support them, and keep them relevant and current. When you walked in, you saw that the facilities were aging. So we devised a capital plan to address all of the deferred maintenance, all of it from water pumps that fed the golf course to paint on the exterior of a clubhouse to new carpet, to fixing a roof.”



Rob Duckett

The golf facilities needed attention, too. Duckett said South Street replaced all the cart paths at The Cliffs at Glassy, and then renovated the bunkers at Keowee Springs and three greens at Keowee Vineyards. Comfort stations with food and beverage options are being installed at all six courses. Next year will bring a bunker renovation at Walnut Cove, along with work on more greens. And as for pickleball courts? There were none at Cliffs properties when South Street bought them. There are 19 now, and more on the way.

“It’s all designed to raise the bar in quality,” Duckett said. “Not just handling deferred maintenance, but also improving it.”



A golf community founded in 2008, The Cliffs at Keowee Springs is finally getting its own clubhouse, which will include a dining room, bar and lounge, golf shop and wellness center when it opens in 2023. The Cliffs/Provided

Adding activities beyond golf

Hard to believe a golf community founded in 2008 doesn’t have its own clubhouse, but that’s been the case with The Cliffs at Keowee Springs.

It’s particularly a head-scratcher given that a subsection of the development called The Landing is home to some of the most expensive real estate on Lake Keowee, including a house (\$6.2 million) and a lot (\$3.4 million) that hold their respective sales records for the lake.



A rustic facility known as “the Cabin” was expanded and renovated to provide a clubhouse for residents of The Cliffs at Mountain Park community near Marietta. The Cliffs/Provided

After Arendale bought The Cliffs in 2013, the holding company intended to finish the major amenities left to be completed in the set of communities, but never got around to all of them. One of four major Cliffs projects underway—along with the Lake Club, construction of a wellness center at Mountain Park, and renovation of the clubhouse at Mountain Park—the Springs clubhouse designed by Hart Howerton will feature open-air breezeways, interconnected pavilions, a dining room, bar and lounge, a golf shop and wellness center when it opens in 2023.

At Mountain Park, South Street expanded and renovated the rustic facility known as “the Cabin” to provide the community with its own clubhouse. At Walnut Cove, a Tudor-style facility known as “the Turnhouse” with its adjacent tavern were also renovated in order to also serve as clubhouse facilities.



A renovation of the Tudor-style clubhouse facilities at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove near Asheville, N.C., is part of a company-wide amenity upgrade being undertaken by Cliffs owner South Street Partners. The Cliffs/Provided

Up next is a renovation of the clubhouse at Keowee Vineyards, the oldest Cliffs development on the lake, which Duckett said will involve removing walls, putting in a new bar, and new paint, carpet and furniture.

In addition to revamping the organizational structure and whittling down all that deferred maintenance, South Street Partners is also working to make The Cliffs more family-friendly, with more amenities like the Lake Club for those who don't play golf. Why? Just check out the Beach Club on a summer Saturday afternoon, when the pool area is overrun by school-aged kids in water wings and goggles. No wonder, then, South Street is eyeing a potential Beach Club for Mountain Park.

“We’ve sent that out to bid,” Duckett said. “What that does is it give us an alternative amenity for folks who are not interested in golf or tennis or pickleball. Our goal is to offer as many activities as we can to serve the whole family, whether they golf or not. Golf is a big part of who we are. But we have 3,200 member families, and 1,400 of them are not golfers. That’s why our culinary programming is important, because

everyone eats. That's why outdoor pursuits are important. We have a shooting program at Keowee Springs, and we'd like to expand that. So there are a lot of events and activities we can do that serve everybody in the family."

