

This stunning stretch of land at the Seven Falls Golf and River Club will soon be transformed into an Arnold Palmer Premier Golf course.

A Natural Side

North Carolina's great outdoors offer endless views and fun for the entire family

BY ANGIE NEWSOME



Maybe you want the peaceful music of a mountain stream to lull you to sleep at night. Or maybe you crave the feel of the morning sun as you take a run along a sandy beach. In North Carolina, there's room for both.

With verdant mountains in the west and serene coastal beaches to the east—and charm-filled cities and towns in between—most North Carolinians love the state's natural beauty. "We've been in multiple magazines, and they all say we have tremendous quality of life," says Danny Brock, president of the North Carolina Association of Realtors.

It's hard not to brag considering the state's relatively mild climate, classy cultural centers, deluxe spas and world-class golf courses. And people are taking notice. Last August, *Outside* magazine ranked Asheville—a nearly 73,000-person outdoorsy mountain town—as the "Best Southern Town." In 2006, *Money* magazine ranked Cary—whose more than 112,000 residents live close to the state's capital—as a top five best place to live.

This may be little surprise to the growing number of property owners investing in the state's second-home market. Like Floridians discovered long ago, more and more people from states such as California, Texas and Colorado are planting roots here, says Harry Redfearn, a principal with Private Mountain Communities. Homeowners often search for a family-oriented vacation property to later make their primary residence, he adds.

And in North Carolina, developments catering to

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the luxury, family-oriented lifestyle are hot as developers build communities that offer golf and more to active families seeking natural beauty and enviable amenities. Seven Falls Golf & River Club, located close to the mountain town of Hendersonville, will have the first Arnold Palmer Premier Golf Course to break ground in the country, but it will be more than a one-dimensional golf course community, says Redfearn, who handles the development's marketing.

With 900 homesites on 2,000 acres, prices range from \$300,000 to \$700,000 per lot. But Seven Falls features \$70 million in amenities catering to the entire family, including the 50-acre Town Village with retail shops and restaurants, a River Lodge and fitness facilities.

Family fun also takes center stage at the 4,000-acre Rutherford County development called Queens Gap, says General Manager Burt Baine. The gated, primarily second-home resort community offers a Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course and amenities such as a fishing outfitters lodge and hiking trails. Developer Devin McCarthy and his family chose the property because of its pristine natural beauty. The mountain development features

1,200 homesites for between \$200,000 to more than \$1 million. Residents will be surrounded by natural beauty, but the cities of Charlotte, Asheville and Greenville, South Carolina, are still within driving distance.

"We say we're kind of out of the way, but in the middle of everything," Baine says. "We're the place where people who have done well enough to afford that type of lifestyle can go with their family and ... enjoy the things that western North Carolina offers."

As family activities reign at many developments, so does the state's environment. Legasus Partners located its River Rock development on 3,500 mountain acres on the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau—one of the most ecologically diverse areas on the continent, says spokeswoman Jessie Rice. Details are under development, Rice says, but the

From far left: The cozy boarding house at Balsam Mountain Preserve serves as a gorgeous gathering spot for the members and guests; A boat dock at scenic Lake Glenville located in River Rock, a private community in Cashiers; The interior patio of a private home at The Lodges at Eagles Nest; This 34-foot high waterfall greets golfers on hole No. 9 at the Arnold Palmer Premier Golf course at Seven Falls Golf and River Club.



This private home, located at The Lodges at Eagles Nest, boasts spectacular views.

project will have about 1,500 homesites priced between \$300,000 and \$800,000. Near the western North Carolina town of Cashiers, the development offers unique views and amenities ranging from fishing and tennis to golf and riding. But the development, Rice adds, stands for more than beautiful views and luxury.

“We really bring an ethic of preserving the land as much as possible, preserving Appalachian culture and history, understanding our roots—and the roots of the land—and integrating that in a more modern way into a development,” Rice says.

But that natural beauty and peaceful seclusion doesn’t mean isolation. The Lodge at Eagles Nest in Banner Elk, for example, offers enviable on-site entertainment at its more than 1,400-acre venture. For example, its Independence Day Festival included a performance by popular singer Edwin McCain. Designer and developer John Turchin says that instead of a stuffy, formal environment, he wants the 250-homesite resort community to have a fun, summer-

camp atmosphere. His desire is certainly backed up by a long list of amenities like an archery range, motocross track, fine dining and art studios.

“I’m developing a community where three to five generations can live and grow young together and be surrounded by arts, music and youth,” Turchin says.

For those wanting to be closer to the action, Crescent Resources is creating Hidden Lake in Wake Forest to offer residents an active lifestyle just 20 minutes from Raleigh, the state capital. Located on a private 75-acre lake, the 600-acre development will have less than 125 homesites ranging from the low \$200,000s to the mid-\$500,000s. “Anybody who comes out to the property has said, ‘Oh, my gosh, this is like a hidden wonder,’” says spokeswoman Angela Koch. “It’s a breathtaking piece of property.”

And with so many new developments showcasing the state’s quality of life and weaving natural beauty with luxury, that’s a sentiment surely echoed all across North Carolina. ■

SOURCES: Balsam Mountain Preserve, (866) 452-3456, www.balsammountainpreserve.com; Hidden Lake, (866) 337-2041, www.crescent-resources.com; The Lodges at Eagles Nest, (828) 898-8965, www.eaglesnestbe.com; Mountain Air, (800) 247-7791, www.mountainaircc.com; Queens Gap, (888) 388-4640, www.queensgap.com; River Rock, (828) 252-2885, www.riverrocknc.com; Seven Falls Golf and River Club, (866) 47FALLS, www.sevenfallsgolf.com