

# The Post and Courier

## Tee To Green: Area golf resorts entice visitors, buyers with stellar links while touting beaches

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These days, Dick Casey manages Wild Dunes' homes sales wing. But he's had close ties to the Isle of Palms resort for decades.

"I grew up on the island. We joined (in the 1970s) when it was beach and residential," he says. Members would purchase property, build a fancy home and enjoy the ocean and top-notch tennis courts.



Photo by Jim Parker

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The Harbor course is one of two championship golf layouts at Wild Dunes, a golf resort that also has companion amenities such as the beach.

Since then, "It's kind of evolved," says Casey, broker-in-charge of Wild Dunes Real Estate.

The resort gained two championship golf layouts decades ago, one skirting the Intracoastal Waterway and the other, the Atlantic Ocean. The public Harbor and Links courses get play from thousands of vacationers and locals. Just last year, prestigious Links course designer Tom Fazio returned to revamp the eroded 18th hole at its original length as a par 5.

While still known for some of the country's best tennis facilities, sandy beaches and community swimming pools, Wild Dunes is broadly considered a golf resort.

The allure of driving, chipping and putting on top-notch courses has played at least an indirect role in Wild Dunes becoming home to some of the choicest properties in the Charleston area.

“I think a major component will be missing from the resort without golf,” Casey says.

Similar stories can be told at Kiawah and Seabrook islands, likewise known for oceanside settings and other perks such as bike riding, beachside lodging and an equestrian center but widely noted as resorts where golf is a destination.

Seabrook Island touts its pair of courses as exclusive, with only members and guests permitted to play.

Alternately, Kiawah Island is the classic golf venue, home to the famed Ocean Course that hosted the 1991 Ryder Cup pitting golf pros from the United States and Europe and site of the 2012 PGA Championship late next summer. The island has six more courses, all top-of-the-line caliber.

Whether or not golf is a catalyst, Kiawah Island has some of the plushiest houses in the Charleston area.

A mansion on Ballybunion Drive — a tip to the renowned Irish course — sold for \$14 million in summer 2010, the largest residential real estate transaction ever recorded in Charleston County.



Provided

Kiawah Island has seven golf links including the famed Ocean Course. Villas are for sale at various courses, including here at Turtle Point.

A few other Charleston area locales such as Stono Ferry, Daniel Island Park and Patriots Point contain elements of golf resorts.

Not everyone is convinced of the local resorts' golf magnetism, however. “I have always believed that at Wild Dunes, and Kiawah Island as well, the real driving force is the beach, both from the (home) purchase standpoint and the vacation standpoint,” says Jeff Akers, partner in Akers and Ellis Real Estate, which specializes in resort and other high-end properties.

A resort such as Pinehurst, N.C., is all golf. But the Charleston area resorts showcase the Atlantic Ocean. “That’s why the South Carolina coast is so popular,” he says.

Research studies usually look at golf as a whole rather than the resort impact. For instance, a two-year-old report by the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism on the economic impact of golf in South Carolina showed that the 368 courses statewide generated more than \$2.7 billion in sales and produced 33,535 jobs in 2007.

But the report also found that the average revenue at resort courses statewide from dues, greensfees and cart fees was \$62.72. Based on the 35,567 average number of rounds per all 18-hole courses in the state, that would amount to \$2.2 million a year generated from each resort layout.

There were 785,000 trips to South Carolina in 2007 that included a round of golf, the report noted. Just 12 percent of trips were by groups from elsewhere in South Carolina, with another 12 percent from New York and 10 percent North Carolina. The median age of golf visitors was 50 with a median household income of \$80,000 to \$85,000. Figures did not include the impacts of real estate sales in golf communities.

When it comes to golf impact, a sizable share of the income derives from accommodations, including beach house and villa rentals.



Photo by Jim Parker

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St. Christopher Oaks is one of the established course-side neighborhoods on Seabrook Island.

Wild Dunes, for instance, advertises three golf packages. The Fazio Sampler served up rates as low as \$270 per night based on two people for two nights at a 30 percent savings. Another plan is Ladies on the Links, which costs from \$579 a night, based on four people for four nights. The charge includes accommodations, 9 holes of golf on the Links course and one “Out the Door” express manicure-pedicure per person.

Seabrook Island, in turn, bills itself as Charleston’s only private oceanfront community and showcases the exclusive aspect in Crooked Oaks and Ocean Winds courses designed by Robert Trent Jones and Willard Byrd.

The resort adheres to standards of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program aimed at keeping golf courses eco-friendly. It is the only member in South Carolina and one of 75 nationwide.

About 350 of the 2,600 properties on the island are rented out to golf vacationers, says Joe Salvo, broker in charge of Seabrook Island Real Estate.

“It’s an important piece (of business),” he says. In many cases, “The visitors turn into residents eventually.”

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