

REAL ESTATE

Boyle tapped for Spring Creek

Homes will fit in with golf course's nature-preserve character



By David Halperin

Architect James Cutler, who designed the \$100 million Gates House for Microsoft founder Bill Gates, will design Spring Creek Ranch's golf house as well as a few cabins. Ecology is a key theme in the development north of Collierville.

By Jerome Obermark

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Boyle Investment Co. will have responsibility for guiding residential development of about 500 acres surrounding Spring Creek Ranch, a 320-acre private golf club in northeast Shelby County.

Formerly a laboratory farm for genetic engineering and reproductive research on beef cattle, Spring Creek Ranch is best known now for its Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course.

It was rated second-best new private golf club in the country in the January issue of Golf Digest magazine, said Robb Meyer, general manager of Spring Creek Ranch.

The rating is based on several factors, including how it plays, esthetics and architecture, service and how memorable the experience was, he said.

The golf course opened Dec. 3, 1999. It is about five miles north of Collierville on farmland owned by Dr. David Meyer, a prominent eye surgeon and Robb Meyer's father.

After David Meyer completed what he wanted to do with the genetic engineering farm operation in the early 1990s, he knew he didn't want the rolling, wooded land carved up by developers for a lot of cookie-cutter houses, Robb Meyer said.

To preserve its natural beauty, trees, streams, wildlife and environment, he felt there were two options — turn it into a park, or develop it as a golf course.

"What we have done is to develop a golf course that has the feel of a nature preserve, or park," Robb Meyer said.

Each golf hole has been named for a tree near it. The 15th hole is named after a chinquapin oak, he said. The chinquapin oak leaf also is the logo of the golf course.

To continue the environmental feel, Meyer has hired architect James Cutler of

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Creek

Bainbridge Island, Wash., to design a new "golf house," and about eight cabins for members and their guests.

Cutler designed Gates House, an ecology house in the Seattle area that took seven years and more than \$100 million to build for Microsoft chairman Bill Gates.

The Gates house project wasn't the reason Robb Meyer chose Cutler:

"It was the passion he showed when he saw the course," he said.

Design work is under way. Construction is expected to start late this summer or early fall, and it will take about 18 to 24 months to complete.

In choosing Boyle to develop the surrounding land for housing, Robb Meyer said the primary concern was to ensure that the housing developed will have "a seamless fit" with the golf course, its architecture and feel.

"The way we are doing it will not affect the golf," he said:

"We are confident Boyle will develop a carefully planned community that maintains the esthetic value and integrity of this special piece of property."

The land surrounding the golf course has an abundance of mature oaks, sycamores, gums, river birch and other hardwoods, wildflowers, wetlands and streams.

The 500 acres is owned by Spring Creek LLC. Its owners include unidentified individual investors, Boyle Investment Co. and beneficial interests of David Meyer's family.

Boyle has a long record of developing land for residential and other uses.

Examples include The River Oaks area and The Cloisters, both upscale residential developments in East Memphis near Baptist Memorial Hospital-Memphis.

Russell 'Rusty' Bloodworth, executive vice president of Boyle Investment Co., said a guiding principle will be to maintain the "nature preserve" character of the golf course.

Houses built closest to the course will be discreetly buffered so members playing the course will hardly be conscious of their presence, Bloodworth said.

The land does not have sewer lines and probably won't for at least two or three years, Bloodworth said.

However, initial buyers of large tracts closest to the course will have ample space for septic systems, he said.

"The longer-term plan is for some neighborhoods of urban-sized lots, but what we are working on now are large estate pieces adjoining the course," Bloodworth said.

About 500 homes could be developed, but the actual number will probably be much smaller, Bloodworth said.

Bloodworth said he expects to start with two or three buyers of large lots.

"We will work closely with them and customize a world for them," he said.

The initial homes will help set a tone for subsequent development, he said.

Boyle has used that approach in the early development of previous upscale residential communities, and it seems to have worked well, Bloodworth said.

Terrain and vegetation were critical elements of Boyle's development of the Gardens of River Oaks Subdivision.

At Blue Heron Subdivision, an existing lake was the catalytic feature. At Spring Creek Ranch, the golf course developed with sensitivity to the natural environment is the key initial focal point, Bloodworth said.

"People who really love what's out there (at Spring Creek Ranch) want to be part of the community that surrounds the golf course in an intimate and special way," Bloodworth said.

Lot prices for the large lots are expected to start in the \$200,000-to-\$400,000-per-acre range, Bloodworth said.

Paul Boyle, vice president of Boyle Investment, said a number of members of Spring Creek Ranch golf course have shown interest in building a home close to the golf course.

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