

LINKS

THE BEST OF GOLF®

® JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2004

\$5.00/\$7.25 in Canada

www.linksmagazine.com

discovering
ROSAPENNA
IRELAND'S NEW
NORTHERN STAR



blue ridge **BRIGADOON**

How a former telephone lineman turned his love for rugged landscapes into a mini-empire where fine golf and gorgeous views are just the beginning

By David Gould

THE LIFESTYLE PHENOMENON THEY call The Cliffs owes a lot to the Southern Escarpment and a little something to Southern Bell. The former is a geological feature that cools summer air over the western Carolinas and fills its vistas with forested buttes and ridges. The latter is Jim Anthony's erstwhile employer, for whom the unlikely real estate magnate climbed utility poles while slowly evolving from phone-line repairman into founder and chief executive of a golf-community juggernaut.

Anthony's ascent calls to mind the school days of Robert Trent Jones Sr., who organized his own curriculum at Cornell to prepare for a career few in the university knew to exist: golf course architecture. The difference is that Anthony's training ground was the raw land itself and his classwork the careful process of moving from small, straightforward development deals to the shaded, sprawling empire he now nurtures along the border of South and North Carolina.

Anthony's uncle, a minister and part-time real-estate speculator, invited his nephew to buy in on some land. "We got it for \$100 an acre and sold it not long af-

ter for \$600 an acre," recalls Anthony. Inspired by this arithmetic, he sat down one night and compared real estate profits with the ROI of line-splicing work. "I calculated I would have to climb 3,635 telephone poles before I could match that income," he says with a wink. The path he was best off following came clearly into view. So far it has led him to the top spot in a thriving enterprise with more than \$400 million in real assets, an aggressive growth plan and a staff of people who know they are onto a good thing and bring dedication to seemingly everything they do.

One of Anthony's star salespeople, Dotti Smith, recently oversaw renovation and decor work on a Cliffs at Glassy home Anthony had repurchased from one of his residents because its site made it ideal for the new, vastly improved sales facility Anthony wanted to create.

"What other developer would buy a \$1.5 million finished home from a community resident and add \$50,000 in custom furnishings to create a sales center?" Smith wondered aloud as she pointed out locations for the lavish furnishings workers were wheeling in.

Lest you wonder, the owner whose



Tucked into the Upstate topography: Cliffs Valley clubhouse and the par-4 first hole at Cliffs at Glassy.



site lines: the cliffs

home is now Glassy's sales center promptly selected a new residence within The Cliffs. People who fall in with the wiry, down-home Anthony tend to maintain the relationship. The PGA Tour, with its Nationwide BMW Charity Pro-Am quickly proving itself a financial hit, shows every intention of keeping that event at its Cliffs Valley/Cliffs Keowee Vineyards home. When the tournament comes to town, life in the shadow of the Escarpment briefly turns big-city. At a tented street festival with a tickets-only crowd last spring, celebrities like Cheech Marin and Kevin Costner beamed for local TV cameras. At a block party under vast tents along Greenville's beautifully treed main boulevard, Costner provided a world-premier screening of the trailer for his 2003 Western, "Open Range."

At other times of year, rural serenity pervades. On the drive from one end of the five-community constellation to the other, there are stirring views of hilltops and ravines in the near, middle and long distance, varying in color like painted panels in a stage set. Cliffs at Glassy and Cliffs Valley are centrally located, but a

potential lot buyer's tour from Keowee Vineyards (and now Keowee Falls) through those two properties and up to Walnut Cove would take two hours.

Assets of The Cliffs include an affiliation with a what's-this-doing-here French country inn called La Bastide, modern but impressively authentic, with luxurious rooms and real-deal provincial cuisine. Property-shoppers who would balk at a local motel stay are delighted at the luxury and sophistication of the 14-room inn.

Anthony had to buy the Cliffs at Glassy property piecemeal, knitting together parcels through patience and tenacity. His last piece of land was acquired from an elderly single woman who operated a shrub nursery. The rest of the families he bought from on Glassy Mountain were moonshiners, their way of life fading in the face of stepped-up law enforcement.

Of all the layouts under the Cliffs aegis, Glassy's most demands local knowledge, with bluffs of mowed fairway heaved up in the landing areas and round-the-corner shots to green sites you are relieved to finally espy. When the communities stage their annual inter-club tournament, the Glassy group usually comes out on top, leveraging its significant home-field advantage to the fullest.

Down the road, the 18-hole course at Cliffs Valley feels both member-y and menacing, depending on which shot you happen to be playing. The opening hole is lightly downslope, spacious and free of trickery. But the shot into No. 4 green is a needle-threader where even your match opponent will urge your ball to "catch a piece." Course designer (and LINKS contributing editor) Ben Wright secluded some holes and arranged others in small clusters with longer, more open views of fairways, ponds and green sites.

Tom Fazio's design at Cliffs at Keowee Vineyards also swoops high and low between hilltop and lakefront, but its pay-

The Cliffs' Rural Realm

CLIFFS AT GLASSY

Landrum, S.C.

18 holes · Tom Jackson

CLIFFS AT KEOWEE VINEYARDS

Sunset, S.C.

18 holes · Tom Fazio

CLIFFS VALLEY

Travelers Rest, S.C.

18 holes · Ben Wright

CLIFFS AT KEOWEE FALLS

Sunset, S.C.

(Jack Nicklaus course, in planning)

CLIFFS AT WALNUT COVE

Asheville, N.C.

18 holes · Jack Nicklaus (spring 2005)

For more information,
call (800) 884-2958 or visit
www.cliffscommunities.com.



off holes along the water are likely the most memorable in the entire Cliffs portfolio. The next golf project to come online will be a Jack Nicklaus course at The Cliffs at Walnut Cove, over the border in Asheville, N.C. Anthony's team has also tabbed Nicklaus to build the golf amenity at its Keowee Falls community, which kicked off lot sales in mid-2003 with a tremendous initial burst.

One key point about the golf—it stays in company hands. As a Cliffs property owner, you won't become a committee slave encumbered with helping operate a golf facility. "We manage the golf," says Anthony flatly. "We're never going to deed the courses back."

Within the Cliffs portfolio, there are now five distinct communities, staffed by 350 employees who serve 1,800 property owners. After September 11, 2001, Anthony made a decision to assemble all 350 for an outdoor meeting that had the air of a spiritual retreat.

"I told them our country has changed," Anthony recalls, "and we need to change how we think and work. I said, 'I'm hereby volunteering for active duty. Will you volunteer with me?'" By this he meant a rededication to the company's service mission, which includes motivating residents to get physically and socially involved in community life. One mark of this ethos is the Wellness Center at Cliffs Valley, a \$6.7 million amenity Anthony is sure will receive heavy use. "We are held account-



Cliffs hospitality, spearheaded by Anthony (with Jack Nicklaus) hits high gear during the BMW Nationwide. Top: No. 17 at Keowee Vineyards.

able by our property owners to produce and manage a world-class environment," he says, "but we hold them accountable, too. This isn't the place to be if your chosen profession is couch potato."

Jim Anthony is part free-thinker, part strict believer. In the early days of the Cliffs, the Sierra Club hit Anthony with an environmental lawsuit, initially boiling his frontiersman blood. But he listened. "My nature is to try and solve problems, not make them worse. Even though we were adversaries in the suit, the Sierra Club changed my thinking," admits Anthony. "They made me more preservation-minded." In that spirit, Anthony has turned his sights to wild lands the world over. "Your best chance

site lines: the cliffs

of protecting pristine lands is to own 'em," says Anthony, whose Legacy Project is a preservation-oriented club with an international membership and large land holdings in far-off places like Chile, British Columbia and Scotland.

Anthony is prone by nature to set aside prime land for common use. On a stunning promontory along Glassy's main access road stands a fieldstone chapel built partly as an amenity, partly as inspiration. There is no set liturgy or congregation at the Glassy Chapel, but residents freely wander in for moments of prayer and quiet reflection. It's also used for special services and nuptial vows.

Along with newly opened Keowee Falls, the group's recent residential offerings include the Marina Cottages at Keowee Vineyards, a sea-captain village with Nantucket influences and boating at either Lake Keowee or Lake Jocosee, each with its own Cliffs-managed marina. "When we design a clubhouse or a pavilion or any focal point in a community," says Anthony, "we're always envisioning places where people can be at ease and enjoy each others' company."

Pinnacle Point, an Anthony-led project to create a permanent facility and program for summer adventuring and Christian teachings, comes by its name metaphorically. To Anthony, "pinnacle" represents the point in the life of any person of faith when he or she is able to give back from the blessings and wealth they have received. He discusses Pinnacle Point's goals in his trademark style: citing the importance of the work without taking himself too seriously.

No matter how many Cliffs projects or outside matters there are to oversee, he still finds time each week to hit the roads and trails in search of land to develop and nurture. "I'm fortunate to make a living walking around outdoors," declared Anthony, during last year's BMW Nationwide event. "I've got it almost as good as these tour players." ■