



CAROLINA IN MY MIND

The title of James Taylor's iconic song sums up the particular attraction of the state of North Carolina. Once witnessed in all its stunning beauty, it will never be forgotten. **PATRICK JONES** reports on the latest golf and real estate developments there

TWO-TIME DEFENDING OPEN CHAMPION Pdraig Harrington still calls his native Dublin home, but when the superstar golfer takes his game to The States, it is North Carolina that has caught the Irishman's fancy.

Harrington's new base in America is **White Oak Plantation** in Tryon, a Blue Ridge Mountain town in the western part of the state. White Oak Plantation features an Arnold Palmer-designed golf course and a slew of additional upscale amenities—an equestrian center, a vineyard, nature trails, an observatory and even an Irish pub among them—that made it an easy decision for Harrington to choose the private community as his home away from home.

"White Oak is one of the most amazing and unique places I've ever set eyes upon," said

Harrington. "The way they've blended modern day amenities with an appreciation for traditional Irish culture is phenomenal. This place really feels like home. I can't think of a better place for my family to base ourselves and enjoy life while in North America."

His White Oak Plantation base of operations allows Harrington quick interstate and airport access to cities including Atlanta, Charlotte and Spartanburg, S.C.

The par-71, 7,200-yard Palmer layout at White Oak Plantation, scheduled to open later on in 2009, features Zoysia fairways and hybrid bentgrass greens. The community's equestrian center is designed by Major Mark Phillips, a member of the British three-day event team that won the Olympic gold medal in 1972. Phillips,

formerly married to The Princess Royal, currently serves as the coach of the U.S. eventing team.

It is no surprise that the beauty and diversity of North Carolina lured Harrington into its clutches. North Carolina proffers a varied canvas of altitudes and topographies on which many of the game's greatest course architects have regularly dabbled. For example, Pinehurst No.2 architect Donald Ross left his imprint on nearly 40 other courses across North Carolina.

Arnold Palmer, a native Pennsylvanian, is another adopted North Carolinian who continues to bestow his gratitude, gifts and genius there more than a half century after he wandered into the state as an accidental student. Palmer moved south to play on the Wake Forest golf team at the urging of his friend Buddy Worsham.



The 4th on Pinehurst's fabled No. 2

It also speaks volumes for North Carolina that golf course architect newcomers Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson chose the state's extensive palette for the first U.S. designs of their respective companies.

The state features mountains along its entire western spine. Mount Mitchell near Asheville, which rises above 6,600 feet, is the highest point in the United States east of the Mississippi River. The cities of Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh are situated in the rolling terrain of the Piedmont region.

The lighthouse-dotted Outer Banks feature adventurous golf opportunities atop the slim remains of ancient coastal sand dunes. Brunswick County and the port city of Wilmington are home to some of the state's finest courses along North Carolina's "Golf Coast."

Pinehurst, located in Sandhills region, has

hosted several men's and women's U.S. Open Championships and many of golf's top amateur events. Massachusetts' businessman James Walker Tufts bought 5,000 acres of scrubby pines in Moore County in 1895 and turned it into one of the world's great golf resorts. Pinehurst Resort now features eight top courses, including Ross's famed No.2. It is a haven for golf enthusiasts seeking second homes and retirement living. The Pinehurst-Southern Pines-Aberdeen area is home to approximately 50 additional courses as well as some of the state's finest golf communities.

Golfers searching for top-notch courses and upscale golf communities in North Carolina face the daunting—but enviable—task of choosing from hundreds of miles of prime real estate

connecting the mountains and the sea.

"We are incredibly spoiled in North Carolina," says Kevin Brafford, director of communications for the North Carolina Association of Realtors and the president of the North Carolina Golf Panel, which annually ranks the state's top courses. "People around the world know how special Pinehurst is, and that leads some folks to believe that we just have Pinehurst. But those who have visited or moved to the state know better. Our mountain golf course communities are filled largely with either full-time residents who have moved from other states or Florida residents who escape here in the summer. I'd put our coastal golf course communities up against any state. And in between those two areas—my gosh. North Carolina is a golfer's paradise." →

A giant wave is poised to strike North Carolina. This is no offshore tsunami rolling in from the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, surging across the Continental Shelf and readying to bash North Carolina's lengthy coastline. Instead, it is the initial swell of the post-World War II baby boomers expected to descend en masse on this diverse and appealing Atlantic state.

Approximately 3.2 million American boomers turned 62 in 2008, making them officially eligible for retirement benefits. Churning in behind them are almost 80 million more of their generation (born between 1946 and 1964) who will opt out of the work force over the next two decades. Most will be seeking temperate climates, sound economic environments, state-of-the-art healthcare facilities and a wide range of entertainment options—golf near the top of that list for many—to spend their newly found free time and accumulated financial nest eggs.

North Carolina fits that bill to a tee.

The boomers represent the most affluent generation ever. There are now more than 10 million people worldwide with assets exceeding \$1 million (home values not included), according to a 2008 story in *USA Today*.

States across the country are positioning themselves to attract and accommodate their retirement needs. Though the current nationwide

housing slump has temporarily dampened the frenzy, North Carolina is one dominion with the unique qualifications to handle its fair share of the retiring and relocating masses. The state has, in every meaning, weathered the downturn better than most.

"North Carolina has been a state that has been growing economically," says Dr. Mike Walden, a professor in economics at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. "That has been due to, quite frankly, weather. I think it has been due to retirees who are footloose and who are attracted to our beaches and mountains. The housing market has slowed, but certainly not to the degree that it has slowed in other areas."

"North Carolina has maintained its stability by spawning growth in industries that fit very well in the modern U.S. economy—technology, finance and healthcare," says Walden.

Jim Chaffin, a partner in Chaffin/Light Associates, developers of communities such as Balsam Mountain Preserve in Sylva, N.C., says: "Yes, [the economic downturn] has had an impact. Anybody who says that these are not challenging times is either lying or not going to the office. People are cautious, as they should be. There was irrationality to the feeding frenzy that was going on. While these are tough times, I view this as a correction that, frankly, needed to happen."

Chaffin, though, like Walden, sees North

Carolina as one of the "well positioned" states in the country as the stumbling economy searches to regain its footing.

In a time when little economic stability exists, North Carolina can boast a more solid base than most states. The Piedmont cities of Charlotte and Raleigh were rated among the Top 10 "America's Recession-Proof Cities" in 2008 by *Forbes*.

There is world-class medical care, including the internationally respected Duke University Health System in Durham.

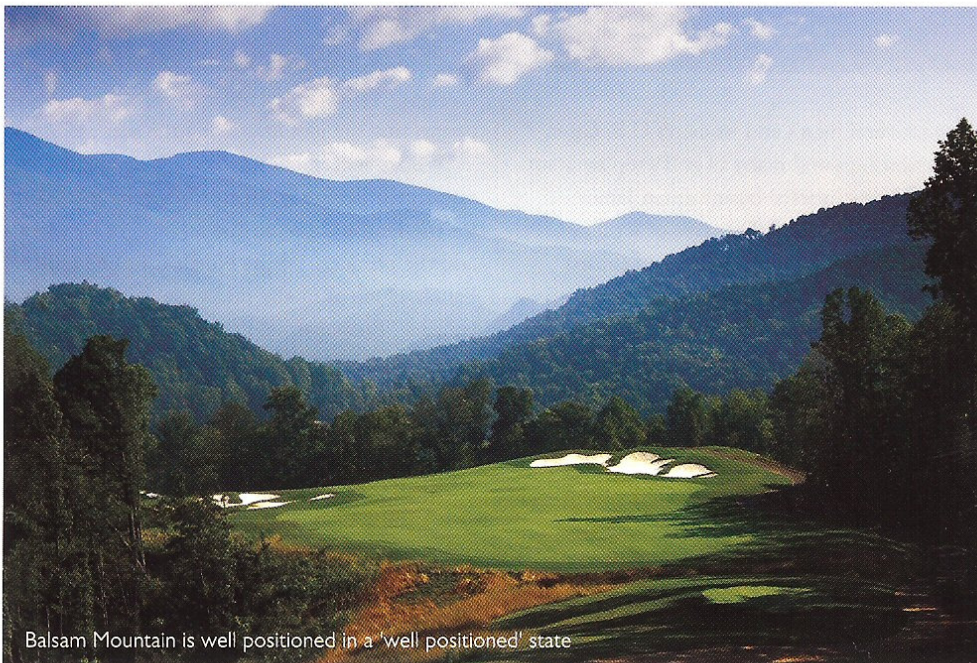
There is quality of life. Asheville and Cary (just outside of Raleigh) were voted first and fifth, respectively, as the "Best Places to Live" in 2007 by *Relocate-America.com*.

There are also the intangibles. "I think the weather is a huge consideration, but there is also the Southern hospitality," says Harry Redfeam, a principal in the real estate firm Private Mountain Communities in Asheville who are developing **Seven Falls Golf and River Club** in Hendersonville. "You go to Main Street in a place like Hendersonville and it has a Norman Rockwell-like, more traditional feel. Folks are gracious. It harkens back to a time that I think that a lot of boomers connect with when they were younger. And they want that quality of life again. They want the simplicity that comes with that."

Seven Falls is a Palmer design as is **Balsam Mountain Preserve**, a 4,400-acre community featuring a mountainous layout with elevations above 4,000 feet. It is a low density community—only 354 home sites—with 50 miles of trails, equestrian facilities, tennis, swimming, a fitness center and even a nature center with an on-site naturalist.

In total North Carolina has more than 500 courses in its rich portfolio and continues to add to the count. One of the most anticipated new additions is **The Cliffs at High Carolina** in Swannanoa, just east of Asheville. It is the location for Tiger Woods' first U.S. course and is still under development. Woods said he would own a home in the private community that sits in the shadows of Mount Mitchell. High Carolina is the latest of several other new golf communities in this region.

For those who would prefer to move to a pre-existing and already thriving community, back in Sandhills, **Carolina Trace** is a nationally-recognized, award-winning, and very well established master-planned



Balsam Mountain is well positioned in a 'well positioned' state

gated country club community with 24-hour security. It covers 2,500 acres of hardwoods, piney forest and rolling hills with creeks, ponds, and a 315-acre lake spread throughout 19 distinctive neighborhoods. Legendary golf course architect, Robert Trent Jones, Sr., designed two championship courses—the Lake and the Creek, in 1971 and 1979, respectively. Central North Carolina's mild climate offers both year-round golf yet four seasons.

Many residents say that is one of the few places that you can experience the best of small-town living but still have big-city easy access—at an ideal proximity. Located about 45 minutes southwest of Raleigh and the Research Triangle Park, and less than 35 minutes from Pinehurst and Fort Bragg, several superior medical teaching facilities, cultural events, spectator sports, and excellent shopping are just minutes from the front gate. You can land your private or corporate plane at the Regional Airport, (20 minutes from the gate) or catch a non-stop flight to London from Raleigh's International airport.

Carolina Trace enjoys more than 30 years of rich history, and yet Carolina Trace Country Club will open a grand, new 30,000 square-foot clubhouse this fall, which will be home to fine and casual dining, a full-service Pro Shop, a

fitness center and exercise rooms, as well as a myriad of social activities. In addition to championship golf, other first-class amenities include a full-length driving range and short-game practice facility, four Har-Tru® tennis courts, swimming pool, and playground.

"But," says Commander Lew Andersen USN (Ret.) "the best part of Carolina Trace is not these exceptional physical attractions, it is the people who choose to live here,"

Most golfers dread being in any sort of water hazard, but if you enjoy golf and like to be in a boat on water then relative newcomer to the state, **Innsbrook Golf & Boating Community** in Merry Hill in the state's northeastern quadrant, maybe particularly suitable. Located 130 miles east of the capital city of Raleigh and 75 miles west of The Outer Banks, Innsbrook features a 7,463-yard Arnold Palmer golf course. Five holes skirt the Albemarle Sound and plans also include a 150-slip boat basin.

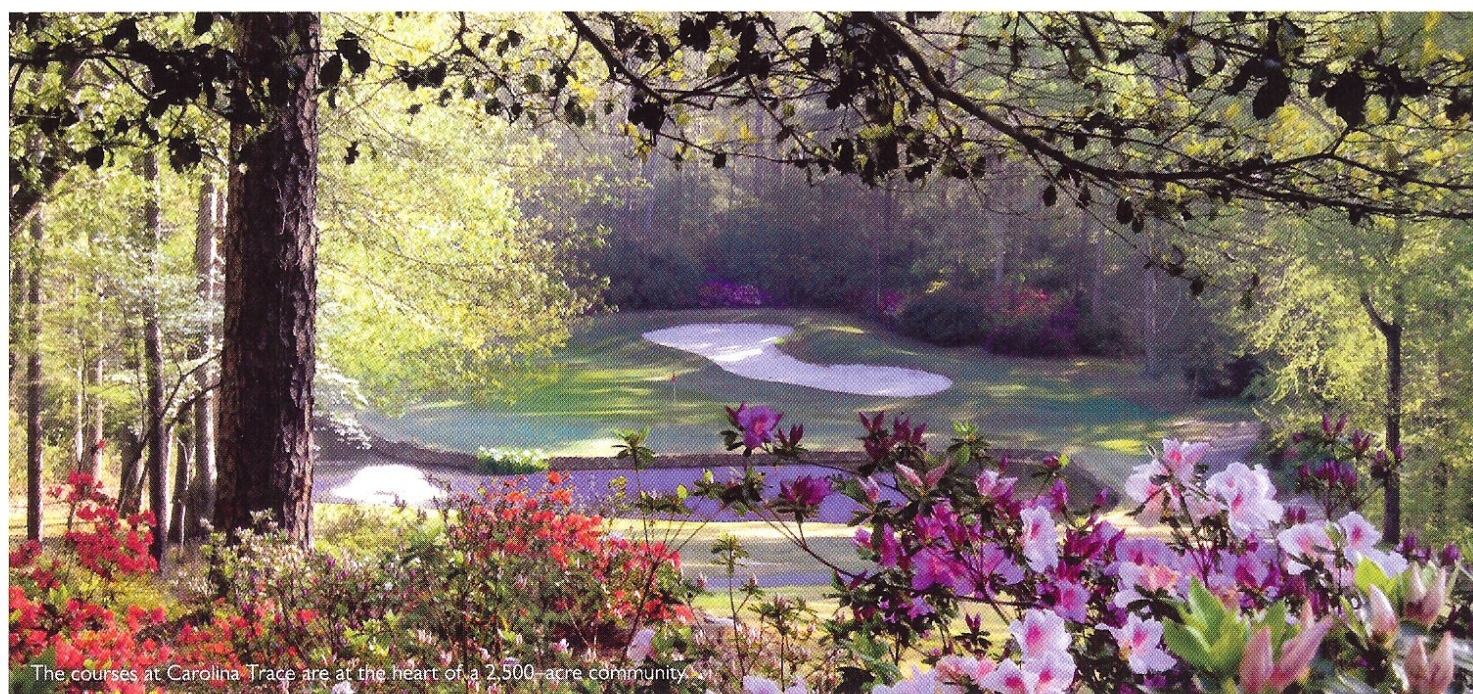
On the coast is another of Palmer's contributions to golf in North Carolina—**River's Edge Golf Club** in Shallotte, located between Myrtle Beach and Wilmington. The layout takes full advantage of some of the low country's finest terrain as it winds through marshlands and along the Shallotte River. The residential community

is still in its early stages, with more than 400 single-family homes in the master plan. The development will also feature 100 townhomes. Additional amenities include three hard-surface tennis courts, a fitness center, an indoor/outdoor pool, and a private library.

Dr. Walden at North Carolina State University has spent his 30-year career with a special interest in consumer economics, including real estate. His academic background demands an objective filter. Based on Walden's research and observations, the future bodes well for the state—he remains bullish on North Carolina.

"When the economy comes back, which it will, and when the housing market comes back, which it will, North Carolina will enjoy the kind of advantages that it has always had and the factors that are attracting people here," says Walden. "We have grown substantially in terms of numbers of people, but we still have lots of room to grow. I have traveled to just about every county in the state in my 30 years with the university. There is a lot of room. There are a lot of beautiful areas that can be developed.

"Weather, water and mountains: I think that is what makes [North Carolina] very attractive," he says. "You can almost pick your climate here. North Carolina has it all." ■



The courses at Carolina Trace are at the heart of a 2,500-acre community.