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BIG CONDO PROJECT BRINGS CHANGE TO A SMALL TOWN

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Illustration: Photo by Roger Jensen - The Oregonian

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Summary: Collins Lake Resort, an ambitious development at Government Camp, sees its first 26 condos sell out in two hours

Just under the profile of Mount Hood rises the biggest thing to hit Government Camp since U.S. 26.

The Collins Lake Resort will bring rows of condos to the town of 150 full-time residents, as well as the promise of hundreds of visitors and development on the mountain. Developers hope their gated community will begin a new era in Government Camp, which has no sidewalks, no streetlights and no sushi bars.

In November, the first phase of condominiums sold out 26 units in two hours. The rows of condos are on the north side of U.S. 26, a short walk from the commercial core of Government Camp. Owners chose their \$189,000 units at a wine-and-cheese party in Portland's Pearl District. Builders are hoping the three-level units will be ready for occupancy early this year, but the biggest chunk of the development is years away.

The complete plan for Collins Lake Resort could develop 28 acres and calls for 171 condos with an outdoor pool, clubhouse, fire pit and neighboring hotel and convention center. The hotel and convention center is still in the development phase and would need government approval.

The residential units are moving ahead quickly. Few of the condo owners plan to live in them. Most are buying second homes and see the development as an investment.

"There's really no place to stay here," said Dennis Gaffney, vice president of construction for Joseph Hughes Construction, which is working on the project. "This is the first of its kind. It's close to Portland. It's near the ski resorts. I think that this is the next Bend. I really do."

Gaffney bought one of the units himself.

Owners will be able to rent out their units with the help of a rental management agency.

The project is being developed by Mt. Hood Ski Bowl owner Kirk Hanna. Crews laid foundations last year but didn't start building up until August. This fall, businessman Junki Yoshida joined the project to help with financing, said Robb Hutson, marketing director for Ski Bowl and Collins Lake Resort.

"It's going to make a huge difference in Government Camp," Hutson said. "The construction has already had an effect with more business for local restaurants."

The residential phase alone is valued at \$41 million, Hutson said. The late start this fall has meant crews are working in snow this winter. In December's storms, construction workers had to brush snow from buildings to finish roofs. Tarps have been hung over building skeletons to keep wind and weather out. Workers continued, warmed by heaters.

"This is the most difficult project I've been involved in, and I've been in construction 20 years," Gaffney said. Some workers have quit because of the conditions.

Developers said they still expect the first residents to take possession by the end of February. A second phase will begin in the summer. It will include at least 29 units but could have as many as 102 if reservations are strong, Hutson said.

Clackamas County helps

People from Georgia, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Illinois, California and Washington, as well as Oregonians, have signed up to buy. Prospective buyers put down a refundable \$2,000 to hold a spot. If they're still serious come February, they'll be asked for another \$3,000 to secure their condo.

Each unit will have two bedrooms, 2-1/2 baths and corner fireplaces, and some will have mountain and creek views. Each condo has three floors, including the garage, with 600 square feet on each level. Garages are deep enough to hold two cars, bumper to hood.

"The largest SUVs can have a ski rack on them and still fit in," Hutson said.

Developers say they owe it all to improvements to the sewer system in Government Camp. Before Clackamas County put in a new system in November 2000, there was no capacity for new construction.

"To get those basic services at an adequate level was critical," said David Queener, project manager for Clackamas County's development agency, which has been working to improve Government Camp.

The county helped propel the Collins Lake development in other ways, too. The development agency, which oversees urban renewal areas such as Government Camp, has helped finance utilities, fire sprinklers and architectural upgrades to building facades.

The county also is hoping to acquire land from Hanna to construct a 125-space public parking lot.

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