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## VIDEO SERVICES

# Houses Next to Golf Courses Prove Popular

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By [Jeremy Lydic](#)

Jeremy Mollenkopf doesn't play much golf. When he and his fiancée, Saesan Covert, were looking for their first home, they visited Westford Lifestyle Community in Canfield and "just sort of fell in love with the development," he says.

"I wouldn't say we were searching for a golf community, but we wanted a quiet, nice development," Mollenkopf says. "You drive through it and it's just so clean and well-kept."

Most of the married couples they met in Westford are in their mid-30s and have children, Mollenkopf says. Being 30 themselves and hoping to have children within a year of their wedding this July, they are satisfied with the community, he says.

DeLucia Construction Inc. of Canfield is building their \$400,000 house on Kyleridge Pointe; it will be complete this month, says one of its partners, Steve DeLucia. The company finished two houses earlier this year at Westford, DeLucia says, and will begin construction on another in a month.

Housing construction in golf communities in "the last two years has been slow and steady," but DeLucia expresses optimism that the market will jump sooner rather than later.

Despite the recession, golf communities are "one of the developments where, in a slow time, it's holding its own," DeLucia says. Having a golf course near or abutting a property "is definitely something that draws people here," he says.

"It's a tough market right now, so any advantage you can get to make it appealing to somebody, that's where those people are going to go," DeLucia elaborates.

The price of a house depends on its location in the development as well as its size and the materials used. Most houses are built to the customer's specifications, but Westford has some restrictions. Houses must be built with James Hardie siding products, or the exterior must be all-stone or -brick. High-end materials must be used in the amenities inside, such as granite countertops, and each house is built with a security system. Westford also has size restrictions.

"You can't build a 1,700- or 1,800-square-foot home here," DeLucia says. "That right there dictates the price. Because you're building higher-end homes, you have a higher-end clientele."

The prices of single-family houses can run as high as \$500,000 and most condos cost around \$185,000, says Westford's developer, Chuck Whitman, president and chief executive officer of CTW Development Corp. in Boardman.

Westford received 17 of the 35 permits Canfield issued for housing starts last year and will get three of four such permits issued so far this year, Whitman says. Five condo units and five single-family houses are under construction, and Whitman looks to eventually build two five-story, high-rise condo buildings with 32 units each.

He also hopes to build an assisted living center and a banquet center, the latter of which will seat up to 850. About 35% of Westford's 400 acres is built out, he reports, and it will have "more than 400 units of housing when it's all said and

done.

"People want to live on the golf course because of the openness," Whitman says. "Nothing is really tight. You have that open feeling that people like to have in a lot of rural areas."

Westford also has shopping and dining within walking distance or a short drive "with golfing as the nucleus," Whitman notes. "It's the shop, work and play theme."

"Some people that come there aren't looking for a golf course, but they like the floor plan," says Donna Buzulencia, a real estate agent with Coldwell Banker First Place Real Estate in Youngstown. "If the buyer can afford a high-end home, then they're going to buy."

Coldwell has a four-bedroom property on (Kylaridge) listed at \$475,000, Buzulencia notes.

Golf communities are maintenance-free, which is "perfect for young professionals that don't have time to mow the grass," even if they don't play golf, says J.V. Ferrara, who owns Pine Lakes Golf Club & Estates in Hubbard. Ferrara likens it to buying oceanfront or lakefront property without having a boat.

"They love the view," Ferrara says. "They enjoy the beauty that's out there without having to maintain it. It's estate lifestyle at a price that's affordable."

Since 1999, Ferrara has invested at least \$1 million in preparing the 245-acre course for building an initial 96-villa residential area, but had to stop before building "because of where we're at in the economy," he says. The property is shovel-ready, and some 25 customers are interested in building, he says. "We hope to start digging by fall."

Pine Lakes anticipated building when it got final clearance from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency in early 2008, but "walked headlong into a total fallout in the housing market," says its general manager, Jason Alford. The company has been told to expect a rebound in the fourth quarter, but "it's a Catch-22," Alford says.

"Do you invest another \$1.5 million and hope [for the rebound], or wait until the resurge and do the work?" Alford says. "We were not willing to risk the whole project on a risky financial endeavor."

Alford is hoping that by creating a new entity in Hubbard where property values are "historically less" than other areas, Pine Lakes will have a competitive edge when the rebound comes, he says. "Golf course communities in this part of the world is a different animal, but you can get the same quality of life for half the price," he says.

While the buyer's age dictates the kind of product available in a golf community, "it's more the income level of the area" that supports such a community, says Bob Brennan, president of Brennan Builders Inc. of Evans City, Pa.

"The community has to have a professional enough level of income to warrant things like a golf course community," Brennan says.

Brennan's golf community projects in Ohio are fewer compared to his Pennsylvania market, where houses are selling at the rate of one per month, he says, but he is confident the Ohio market will bounce back. So far this year, Brennan has built three six-unit condos along Prestwick Court at Firestone Farms in Columbiana and plans to build three more, but "we'll build them out as the demand warrants," he says.

"With the aging population, you're going to see more of the baby-boomer generation want to downsize into condos for the maintenance-free lifestyle," Brennan says. "Some won't even golf. You definitely don't have to be a golfer to live in a golf course community."

The buildings are built "right between two beautiful holes on the golf course, and every unit has a view of the golf course out the family room window," Brennan says. Location is important when building on a golf course, and ponds separate living space from the field of play, he says.

"It takes a really, really bad golfer to infringe on the lawns of these buildings," Brennan says. "There's no need to wear a hard hat when out on your deck."

Condos range in price from \$279,000 up to \$399,900, and Coldwell is offering a one-year free golf package, says Caryn Pantaleo, a real estate agent there. Retirees are common buyers for condos, but "with General Motors on the fence, people are still waiting," she says. "I'm sure they're wondering if their pensions are safe. I think that's been a holdup."

Wayne Bacon bought the 1,100-acre Firestone Farms in 1986 and decided to develop real estate there in the early 1990s. Bacon, a farmer by trade, started Meadowbrook Development and contracted an architect to plan a golf course and residential area at the northern end of the property, he says.

"I figured if I was going to sell real estate, I was going to build a golf course first," Bacon says. "I wanted as much development around it as I could get."

The project, built in 2001, takes up 850 acres of the property, 200 of which are the 18-hole golf course, Bacon says.

Firestone's residential area is split into four neighborhoods with houses, condos and villas. It will have 500 units when complete, Bacon says.

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