



## Beacon in the hills

### Ritz-Carlton adds to luxury corridor in Marana

Ty Bowers February 13, 2008

The best is yet to come, he might say.

It took about four years for David Mehl and his Cottonwood Properties to ink the deal for a Ritz-Carlton resort in Dove Mountain. When construction of the 250-room structure and the golf courses and multi-million-dollar homes surrounding it is complete, it will become a sort of beacon in the hills, marking the height of luxury in Marana.

“From the beginning, we knew we had this spectacular setting, sort of tucking into the two canyons there,” Mehl said this week of his development in the foothills of the Tortolita Mountains.

Building a resort there always had been part of his plans, ever since his company bought the Dove Mountain property in 1985.

He and others have high hopes for the community off Tangerine Road, which in recent years has become a luxury corridor in the Northwest.

Last year, the PGA Tour moved its World Golf Championships’ Accenture Match Play Championship to Dove Mountain, where it will stay at least through 2010. But, after the tournament moves to the Ritz’s two, Jack Nicklaus-designed courses in 2009, officials and organizers hope to retain the event through 2014.

“We hope it will be there for quite a while,” Mehl said.

A long-running tournament, with its huge crowds, could prove a boon to the shops and other businesses throughout Marana, according to Town Manager Mike Reuswaat.

“Where else can you get that kind of international exposure?” he said last week.

Hopefully, it’s the kind of exposure that will create investment in the community and add jobs. “It’ll

show we pretty much have every option available in Marana,” Reuswaat said. “You hope you get the credit for the environment you helped create.”

In addition to Dove Mountain with its Ritz-Carlton resort, the area north of Tangerine Road also includes Saguaro Ranch, which plans luxury homes and a guest ranch.

In the same area, the town has entitled 50 acres for yet another resort, according to Reuswaat. “It’s reasonable to expect three hotel resorts.”

While the resorts and related amenities in the area will provide consistent long-term economic benefit to the town and region, the Accenture tournament adds an as-of-yet incalculable bump to local coffers once year.

“We’ve never done an economic impact study on this particular event,” said Mike Garten, executive director of the Accenture tournament, which draws the world’s top 64 golfers to Marana.

The PGA Tour has done such analyses. At the highest end, a golf tournament can mean as much as \$125 million in economic activity. The low-end figure is near \$25 million. “Every place is different,” Garten said. “I would say we would fall somewhere in the middle. Again, we haven’t done a study.”

That added economic activity, of course, occurs throughout Tucson. But, as Marana continues to develop, Reuswaat said, the town should capture millions of those dollars.

One key to the economic picture, however, is keeping the pro tournament at Dove Mountain. Local officials, and Mehl, expect the event to remain in the area for the foreseeable future.

Accenture is “an umbrella sponsor,” and the title sponsor at Dove Mountain.

“Seventy five percent of the money comes from two sources — television revenue, some of it at large” from PGA Tour television contracts, “and Accenture,” Garten said. “The last 25 percent comes from sales, more regional or local.”

This is the second year of a four-year contract for WGC match play in Marana. Contract length mirrors the television contract. The first two years, the tournament takes place at The Gallery. The next two years, it moves to the two new Ritz-Carlton courses now under construction at Dove Mountain.

“They’re moving warp speed” at the new developments, Garten said. “They’re doing good.”

He is optimistic about the match play event’s future at Dove Mountain.

“I have every reason to believe we’ll negotiate a new deal” covering the tournament from 2011 through 2014, he said.

The tournament should continue to show the world Marana’s luxurious Tortolita foothills and Ritz-Carlton and surrounding development should keep the area at the forefront, local officials said.

“It’s international exposure that Tucson hasn’t had before,” Mehl said.