

Match Play's future home will bear the mark of Nicklaus

Ritz-Carlton's Tortolita Course on target for '09

By Ryan Finley

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 02.17.2008

Walk the back nine at The Gallery Golf Club, and you'll see the future of WGC-Accenture Match Play Championship being built all around you.

The \$60 million Ritz-Carlton Golf Club is expected to open in November just northwest of the Gallery on Dove Mountain Boulevard. It will become the new home of Match Play in February 2009.

The two-course system was part of the plan when the PGA Tour agreed to move Match Play to Marana. The Gallery hosted in 2007 and will reprise its role again this year. After that, the tournament will belong to the Ritz-Carlton.

Here are five things you need to know about the future home of Match Play in Southern Arizona:

1 It will bear the mark of a legend. Jack Nicklaus has worked with Tucson-based Cottonwood Properties, Greenbrier Southwest Corp. and the Ritz-Carlton to design two courses on the property. Nicklaus is the standard-bearer among course designers.

He has conceived 261 courses since 1969, including Tucson's La Paloma Country Club and the Kierland Golf Club in Scottsdale. He currently is developing golf clubs in 40 countries.

"Golf course design has been a blessing for me," Nicklaus said. "It has allowed me to take what I learned playing the game of golf and apply it to a piece of ground. ...

"If I can design the Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, Dove Mountain to take advantage of its spectacular high-desert setting and beautiful vistas, while integrating solid strategy and good, fair golf shots, then I've done my job."

2 It will play long. David Mehl, president of Cottonwood Properties, said he expects the Ritz-Carlton to carry the trademarks of a typical desert course. Like The Gallery Golf Club, the new Ritz-Carlton courses will be a target-golfer's dream.

"The greens will be real challenging, and there will be some wide fairways," Mehl said. "For the tournament, it will play at about 7,850 yards. It will be a solid challenge for the world's best."

The Gallery is pretty long itself, but markedly shorter at about 7,400 yards.

3 It will bear a distinctive Southwestern name. The Tortolita Course will host Match Play starting in 2009; another course, tentatively named Wild Burro, is scheduled to open in 2010 but will not host the tournament.

4 It will be expansive — and expensive. The golf club will mark the heart of the Ritz-Carlton's 850-acre, \$500 million community-development plan. The plans include a 250-room resort, a comprehensive spa and a 300-home residential development. Design directors say the Dove Mountain project is the most comprehensive Ritz-Carlton construction in the continental United States.

5 It will be the home of Match Play indefinitely. The Ritz-Carlton Golf Club will host Match Play in 2009 and 2010, but wants to become the permanent home of the annual tournament. The PGA Tour has the option to extend its relationship with Marana for another four years, through 2014. Tournament and local officials are confident that an extension is imminent.

Match Play chairman Michael Garten told the Star's Greg Hansen that he has "every reason to believe we'll be here through the next contract period, from 2011 to 2014. Tucson has been good to us; we plan to be good to Tucson."