

Longtime Gateway golf club gets new owner, big improvements

Casey Logan, CLOGAN@NEWS-PRESS.COM Published 1:42 p.m. ET June 1, 2018



Mary Ann Dominiak has been intrigued by the Fort's history and citizens' commitment to the golf course, even during the Depression.

Craig Handel

While golf may still be the star, a Lee County club will soon offer a much stronger supporting cast.

A club in Gateway is under new ownership, with plans for major upgrades on the drawing board.

What's been Gateway Golf and Country Club since it opened in 1989 is now [The Club at Gateway](#). Donald Garrett, via Club at Gateway LLC, bought it for \$5 million from club members on March 30.

"It's a careful balance," Garrett said of the name change, noting Gateway's griffin logo remains. "We wanted to give the club somewhat of a new look without it being a major change. We thought the name change here gives a feeling of more of a community golf club."

Garrett, who owns Naples-based [D. Garrett Construction](#), has worked in the construction industry for 37 years, specializing in clubhouse and golf course projects.

The club's signature feature is the 18-hole Tom Fazio-designed course. Plans call for surrounding it with more amenities to appeal to a variety of people.

"You start with a great golf course to sustain the game of golf," Garrett said. "You supplement that with other activities such as bocce, pickleball, a resort-style pool, wellness and fitness. So you build around a great golf course and that's what we're doing."

In its first season, the course debuted on the Golf Digest list of Top 100 Courses. That allowed it to host events from the Ben Hogan Tour Gateway Open to the Gateway Senior Invitational. It has also hosted many United States Golf Association qualifiers and PGA chapter and section events.

The course plays over 7,000 yards from the longest tees, with a par of 72, featuring stands of native cypress trees. It has six sets of tees.

The club was envisioned as the centerpiece of the Westinghouse Gateway Development. In 2002, its ownership was transferred from the developer to the members.

Jimmy Lynn, the club's general manager from 2010-13, is now its operating partner.

"Tom Fazio did an incredible job, plus he had a good piece of property to work with," Lynn said. "It's a long, hard course if you want it to be, but it can also be short and friendly. There's something for everyone. On the greens, there's not too much movement, but just enough. It's fair, but challenging."

*Jim Jasenak of
Fort Myers practices
on the range at
The Club at Gateway
on Thursday, May 31,
2018.*

(Photo: Amanda Inscore/
The News-Press)



Lynn and Garrett recently formed Life Style Management Group of Florida, a company for managing golf clubs. Lynn is president of the entity, which aims to manage other golf clubs beyond this one.

A complete golf course renovation at The Club is expected in 2021. That will include new cart paths, a new irrigation system and renovation of greens, bunkers, tees, fairways and roughs.

First off, though: pickleball and bocce courts are being built this year.

In 2019, plans include doubling the size of the banquet room, adding a second-story wellness center and building a display kitchen to enhance the 4-year-old Grille & Pub, which added more than 4,500 square feet of casual indoor/outdoor dining.



*The chipping green
overlooks the new
addition to the
clubhouse at
The Club at Gateway.*

(Photo: Amanda Inscore/
The News-Press)

These plans follow industry trends, which call for more of this type of dining, as well as additional wellness programs. The upgrades are designed to create a more social, family environment.

"It's not dad's club anymore," Lynn said. "It's also about mom, the kids, everyone."

Those amenities will enhance what's already there: including a "golf improvement practice facility," which is a fancy way of saying a driving range and practice holes with a two-sided design.



The Griffin Grille added seating to the clubhouse at The Club at Gateway.

(Photo: Amanda Inscore/The News-Press)

In 2013, Fazio returned to oversee minor improvements. That's also the time when Ron Garl, another notable course architect, came in to redesign the driving range.

"We have a big, 20-acre driving range," Garrett said. "It also has two practice holes. That's very unique," adding the entire golf course spans 223 acres.

Today, The Club has nearly 500 members, through a mix of membership types. It employs as many as 70 people during peak season, then scales back for the summer months.

The Club also offers six Har-Tru clay tennis courts. The planned upgrades are designed to help grow membership, "but not to the point it affects the member experience," Garrett said. "We do not want to dilute the value of the membership, we want to make it more valuable. It's a private club, and members expect certain privileges."

A Top Golf location expected to be constructed near I-75 and Colonial Boulevard is no competition, Garrett and Lynn said. If anything, such ventures help to attract more people to the game.

[Gateway always meant community, now it also means jobs](#) (link)

Gateway's demographics, as well as business and residential growth there, played a role in the buying decision.



Renovations are planned for the front entrance of The Club at Gateway in Fort Myers.

(Photo: Amanda Inscore/
The News-Press)

"There's a lot of good things going on in the neighborhood," Lynn said. "Gateway is our largest market. Any more than a 15-minute drive is probably outside our wheelhouse. The majority are going to be right here in our backyard because it's convenient."

They are in the process of putting together corporate membership packages, wishing to partner with local businesses on corporate functions. It was a long process, however, for them to acquire the club, which attracted interest from many other parties. The board gave its unanimous support, with a presentation to the membership garnering 98 percent approval.

"In this industry, that's unheard of," Lynn said. "The members have been very welcoming."

They think it was a combination of factors, from members' familiarity with the pair to their strong reputations, that allowed them to emerge as the winning bid.

"We're thrilled to be here," Lynn said. "We're very excited to be a part of the community."

Residents weigh in

Robert La Belle of Downing-Frye Realty, who lives in the community, also handles many listings there. He confirmed that members were almost unanimous in their support of Garrett's plans.

"All country clubs are a little bit in trouble because of the membership," he said. "Golf courses are less and less. We had different offers of \$4.5 million to \$8 million for the club and golf course. Everything he wants to do makes a lot of sense to attract the younger people. We're very happy about it."

The United States built golf courses at a rate of 400 a year during the 1980s and 1990s, but it has since declined from a peak of 16,000 courses. The nation has lost 800 courses in the past decade, according to the National Golf Foundation, which says the number of U.S. players dropped from an all-time high of 30 million in 2005 to 24.1 million in 2015.

La Belle thinks it's smart to focus on amenities beyond golf, and believes the upgrades will be a hit.

"When this is all complete, the one big difference is it's going to increase the value of the properties in Gateway," he said. "It's going to be very spectacular. This is a good thing for the new buyer and present members here ... it'll be so much more than just golf."

Terry Dwyer lives across the street from the club, in Hampton Greens.

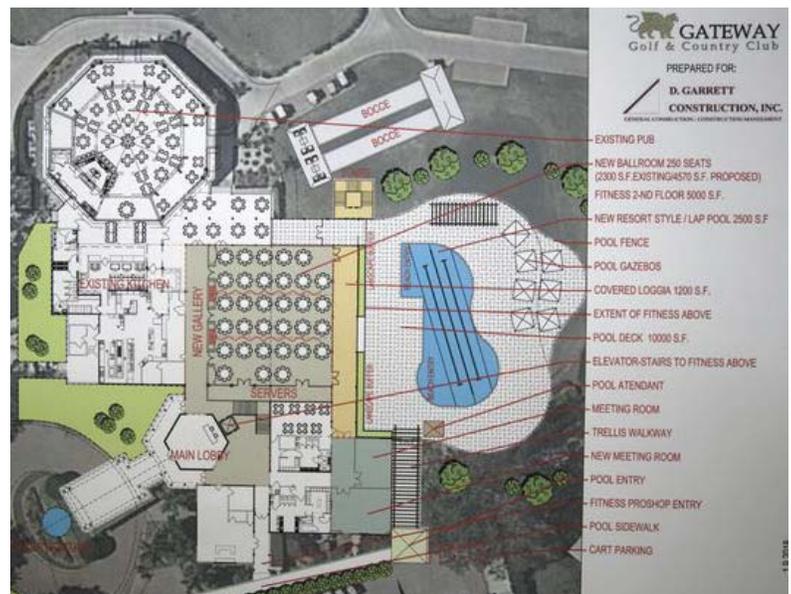
"I'm thinking good things," said Dwyer, who had just finished a round of golf Thursday. "It's going to be good for people who live here and for people who use the golf course. It makes sense to me."

Jim Jasenak lives in Gateway's nearby Waterford Village.

"I think the plans are good," said Jasenak, who also had just finished playing golf. "You've got to bring it into the 21st century. It's exciting. I think the upgrades to the clubhouse are the most important. You have to be more things to more people these days."

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email clogan@news-press.com and follow on Twitter @caseylo



Plans for expansion of The Club at Gateway.

(Photo: Special to The News-Press)

About The Club at Gateway:

Conveniently located near the airport, shopping, beaches and entertainment, The Club at Gateway is a private, yet casual country club, known as having the friendliest members. The Tom Fazio Signature course features six sets of tees, playing over 7,000 yards with a par of 72. Meticulously maintained and included in Golf Digest's list of "Top 100 Private Courses," Tom Fazio rates the 10th hole as one of the top four greatest golf holes he has ever designed. With a 20-acre trend-setting "Golf Improvement Center," it's also the home of the Golf Channel Academy and testing facility for Wilson. Created by course architect Ron Garl, this first-class facility features a double-sided range, four short-game areas, fantastic putting green, and two practice holes, a par 3 and par 4. Club amenities include The Griffin Grille & Pub offering panoramic views of the course is just steps from the tee box. The Tennis Center is home to 6 lit Har-Tru clay courts and offers comprehensive programs for players of all ages and abilities. Members have access to the Fitness Center, Pool and can participate in array of clubs, classes, games and social events. Under new ownership, with the Club renovations and additional amenities, Members will not be required to pay any future assessments.

For a tour or information on Membership Opportunities at The Club at Gateway, please contact M.J. Chappy at (239) 561-1012, email Membership@GatewayGCC.com or visit www.GatewayGolf.com.