

Project on course Peters Township developer ready to start on housing project at Lone Pine Golf Club

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In the near future, golf enthusiasts will have a short walk from their front door to the clubhouse and first tee at the Lone Pine Golf Club.

After a nearly two-year delay, developer Williamson and Jefferson Inc. of Peters Township is moving forward on a \$100 million housing project on 150 acres of the Lone Pine Golf Club's Hillside course.

Developer and builder Jeff Thomas of Williamson and Jefferson and JT Thomas Homes Inc., said the company received preliminary approval and is awaiting final approval from the state Department of Environmental Protection to install an on-site sewage treatment plant to serve the development.

Thomas and his wife, Patty, owner of Wellington Real Estate, said plans call for a 458-unit development that will include a combination of single-family homes, duplexes and townhouses, built in a traditional style, on the golf course.

The community also will include a swimming pool, children's pool and exercise room to be built behind the clubhouse.

The Thomases believe the golf course community will appeal to a broad range of homeowners, including empty-nesters, professional couples and families.

"We think we have a great location," said Patty Thomas, noting both the beautiful setting and the proximity to Pittsburgh, and Wheeling and Morgantown, W.Va.

A factor in their decision to build the golf community is growth in the southern part of Washington. They noted the development of Washington County Airport, Consol Energy Park and remodeling at Washington Crown Center.

"The main thing is we're selling views here - the topography keeps going up so that everyone is going to have panoramic views - and we're hoping people want to golf," said Jeff Thomas. "There isn't anything like this around, and McGuffey is a good school system. The market is steering not so much toward square footage, but well-built homes and amenities. And we're good at well-built."

Thomas, whose father, William, is a builder and co-owner of Williamson & Jefferson, and whose son, Jesse, has joined the award-winning family business, specializes in upscale housing projects, including the Fox Chase and Tall Trees developments in Upper St. Clair, and Crossgates in Peters Township. They have received the University of Pittsburgh's small family business award, and pride themselves on quality homes, the relationships they build with customers and people in the trade, and repeat customers.

Terry George, who has been the head golf professional at Lone Pine for 34 years and serves as mayor of Green Hills Borough, where the course and proposed housing plan are located, is enthusiastic at the prospect of homes along the course.

"People love to live on a golf course. Golfers love to live around golf. You can come home from work and get your 18 holes in," said George. "We're quite excited. With Jeff, the development is in good hands."

Houses will be priced starting in the \$200,000's.

The stalled housing market does not worry the Thomases.

"It's really not a concern for us. We're creating a market," said Jeff Thomas.

A recent study by Longitudes Group, a company that specializes in the role sports plays in the real estate market, shows golf course homes tend to hold their value more than other real estate.

Also, points out George, southwestern Pennsylvania does not have a market that swings as dramatically as it does in areas like Florida and California.

"There really wasn't a housing boom in the Pittsburgh region like you saw in some places, so there's no bust like some areas are going through," said George.

Jeff Thomas said groundbreaking is slated for sometime this spring and the company intends to start construction before the end of the year.

"Golf used to be our escape from work," said Patty Thomas of the couple, who have been members at Lone Pine for several years. "Now, we're bringing our work to the golf course."