

Worlds collide

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A rendering shows some of the features at the planned Guy Harvey Outpost Club & Resort Tarpon Springs. Construction is expected to begin this summer.

Guy Harvey Outpost already has hotels in places like the Florida Keys, St. Pete Beach and the Bahamas.

Yet the outdoor-centric brand started by prominent artist, conservationist and sportsman Guy Harvey wanted to better reach freshwater anglers who make up a big part of its customer base. “We decided to start looking at how to bring the brand in-shore, away from the beaches to rivers, lakes and streams,” says Guy Harvey Outpost President Mark Ellert.

That led the Fort Lauderdale-based company to launch the Guy Harvey Outpost Club & Resort Tarpon Springs in south Pasco County. The project is Guy Harvey Outpost’s first outdoor hospitality resort community.

It also marks the brand’s first foray into the recreational-vehicle space, a sector that’s seen some dramatic growth. According to the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association, RV shipments totaled 430,691 units in 2016, up 15.1% over 2015. RV ownership has also reached record levels: more than 9 million households now own an RV.

Guy Harvey Outpost targets sites near freshwater access already zoned for RV use. There’s a big void of luxury projects in that market, say company officials.

“A lot of RV parks are aging, under-amenitized and not professionally run,” Ellert says. “People are beginning to apply hospitality expectations to their travel experiences, including outdoor active camping and the like, and for the most part the RV industry in our opinion has done a very poor job of reacting to the needs of this new marketplace.”

The 66-acre site sits adjacent to Anclote River Park, about 8 miles north of Tarpon Springs. A popular fishing and boating spot, Tarpon Springs proved a picturesque, Old Florida–style community that could appeal to outdoor enthusiasts interested in either purchasing a spot at the resort or taking advantage of its vacation rentals.

The company began taking deposits in May for the community’s planned 70 cottages and 270 paved RV lots. The 400-to-500-square-foot, one- and two-bedroom, solar-paneled cottages are priced from \$250,000. The 3,200-square-foot RV lots start at \$150,000 and come with 100-AMP electric service, cable, water and sewer. Planned community amenities include a clubhouse with restaurant and pool, biking trail, dog park, nature discovery center with an observation tower and boat and RV storage. Construction is set to begin this summer with a planned spring 2018 opening.

Several thousand people have already expressed interest, split roughly in half between cottages and RV sites.

Ellert puts the price tag for the project in the \$35 million range — so far. “But it could be substantially above that depending on the demand for the cottages,” he says. “We’re pretty excited about them, and we’ve found so far there’s been a lot of interest, so we may expand from the initial 70 we had budgeted to maybe 100.”

Ellert expects to grapple with the typical risks and challenges that come with real estate development, such as financing. “But the nice thing about this type of project is it can be done in phases,” he says.

There’s also the challenge of introducing a new concept to the marketplace.

“We’re bringing the hotel business to the RV world and the RV world to the hotel business,” says Ellert. “The product’s a little new, but it’s only new because they’ve never really been put together before. I think there’s a huge new market of travelers looking for authentic outdoor experiences, and there’s not a lot of product out there that serves their needs.”

The location is likely to be the first of many Guy Harvey Outpost Clubs & Resorts. The company owns a site at Lake Okeechobee and hopes to build something similar to the Tarpon Springs development there. Ellert has been approached by entities for other locations, too.

“Given the great outdoor resources of Florida, and since it’s our home and a very popular tourist and RV destination, our goal is to try to emulate this product in a handful of locations,” says Ellert. “We’re excited about the opportunity to do more than one of these.”

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