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The future of Heather Ridge Country Club

Contributed by: Van Lewis on 9/3/2008

Citizens want more info; offers to help and support the club!

On July 30, 2008 Heather Ridge Country Club (HRCC) owner Dick Jorgensen died of an apparent suicide. The country club near I-225 and East Iliff Ave in Aurora, CO is now under court-ordered receivership (Cordes and Co.) pending legal and estate matters. Reputable sources close to the club describe its operation in recent years as struggling due to declining membership and management issues.

A Brief History

Environmental Developer, Inc. (EDI) built the Heather Ridge and Heather Garden communities in the early 1970s. Their previous project was Windsor Gardens, an age-restricted community near Lowry AFB. EDI's Heather Ridge project was patterned after California's Mission Viejo concept to be Colorado's first master-planned community. When EDI zoned the golf course, it was designated R-2 High Density because golf zoning didn't exist then. In theory, development of the course was possible.

According to recorded public documents, Jorgensen purchased the club for \$2.7M in 2002 from American Golf Corporation; he subsequently sold its outdated five-acre racquet-tennis building land for \$850,000 (now Country Club Ridge condos). Jorgensen soon announced the remaining country club land for sale. At the time of his death, it was listed for sale at \$6.4M.

In response to zoning issues in 2005, surrounding communities formed the United Associations of Heather Ridge (UAHR) which spearheaded the creation of Heather Ridge Metro District-01 (HRMD-01) to influence the golf course open space. It passed in November 2006 by an 86 percent plurality sending a clear message about development: "We're organized, we're involved, and we're ready to listen and act!"

Current Situation

Dick Jorgensen's death ends one era and begins another. At this time D&G Golf, LLC owns HRCC under Arapahoe County District Court Order 08CV1672 appointed receivership. Cordes and Company, the receivership company, is operating the golf course. Merchants Mortgage & Trust holds a \$3.275M note from D&G Golf dated October 31, 2007 secured by the country club. For more information, go to www.uahr.org and click on Cordes & Co top of the page. That links to their website: click Active Receiverships and then Heather Ridge. A PDF of the Court Order is posted.

The private golf course is now temporarily open to the public. Non-member golf costs \$50 for 18-holes and cart. Residents of surrounding ZIP Code 80014 pay \$40. For more information, call the club at 303-755-3550.

Most likely the country club will be sold once legal issues are resolved. Any ownership is subject to zoning enacted in 2006: the golf course land is designated open space, and the 5.1 acre club house site is commercial to include restaurants, high-rise condos, and retail stores. Rezoning occurred when the UAHR, Dick Jorgensen, and a potential buyer all worked together for Aurora City Council passage which voted unanimously for it. The rezoning was successful but, sadly, the sale was not completed.

Adjoining Development

Within a one-mile radius of the country club, significant economic activities are underway. A light rail station is planned for I-225 at Iliff. Nine-Mile Station at Parker Rd. and I-225 hopes to expand to Regatta Shopping Center (anchored by King Soopers) with commercial, office and retail spaces. King Soopers could move ¼ mile north on Parker Rd. into the old Safeway shopping center. Adjacent to it on Dartmouth Ave. sits the immense and empty AT&T Long-Lines building awaiting future development.

Heather Ridge Apartments recently sold (renamed Sanctuary at Heather Ridge) and is being remodeled into luxury units. Located across from the Double Tree Hotel at Iliff Ave. and I-225, its seven buildings on S. Xanadu Way and S. Vaughn Way include 358 units, swimming, and underground parking. Rents will range from \$530 for a studio, to \$1661 for a penthouse.

Country Club's Future

Who might purchase Heather Ridge Country Club? The ideal buyer would promote its golf course and rejuvenate the club house (redevelopment?). It could remain a private club, go public, or both! Should Aurora consider buying it? City officials say no, citing present city budget issues and golf usage. Some residents think ownership should be with a local citizen, community, or metro district, but it's too early for that discussion.

Could country club members buy it? The possibility exists given renewed interest by past and present members. Since Dick's death, volunteers have joined together to sweep the club's parking lots and sidewalks and have formed a 'goose patrol' to chase away grass-gorging birds leaving their calling cards on the course. Renewed maintenance is very evident, and because of recent rains the course is Irish green and filled with golfers and mushrooms! Members say optimism is in the air!

The Heather Ridge Metro District-01 is a government with powers to promote and fund its public interests as defined by its Service Plan and Inter-Governmental Plan (IGA). To date, its only comment has been sympathy and support for the family of Dick Jorgensen. It was with Dick's help the UAHR and the HRMD-01 were created, something few people knew about.

The UAHR and HRMD-01 can only influence country club events, not control them. Club ownership will need to increase membership, upgrade features, and develop a marketing plan to include neighborhoods and non-club members. It will require vision, leadership, and money to make this happen. The surrounding residents and communities are eager to help and participate in any win-win proposals. They want the country club to once again be Heather Ridge's crown jewel.

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