

Where Second Homes Come With a Guide

By Amy Gunderson

Last summer, as Geoff Jones prepared for his annual fly-fishing trip with his teenage son, he didn't turn to a guide service or ask fishing buddies for their advice. He called the "adventure concierge" at Iron Horse, a second-home community in Whitefish, Mont., where he owns a house. Through Iron Horse's Outdoor Pursuits program, Mr. Jones, a hedge-fund manager from New Vernon, N.J., booked a trip to the Elk River in Canada, with prime fishing spots and overnight accommodations all picked out.

"The guides zero in on the best fishing all around the state and up through Canada," said Mr. Jones, who has also gone with his family on half-day snowmobile rides, hiking expeditions and whitewater rafting trips that were arranged by Iron Horse. The Joneses spend more than nine weeks a year at Iron Horse and "between the four of us we interface with Outdoor Pursuits two or three times a week," Mr. Jones said.



PROFESSIONAL MENTOR Alan Williamson of the Greenbrier in West Virginia helps 6-year-old Brenden Horst with his casting.

For developers of vacation-home communities, the thinking used to be: "Build a golf course, and they will come." But that's no longer enough. These days, developments are doing more than simply offering 18 holes designed by Tom Fazio or Jack Nicklaus or pointing guests toward local hiking trails. Adventure programs are the latest high-end amenities, and ones that blend concierge-level service with a dollop of outdoor activity are turning up nationwide.

"People are looking for more than just golf, they are looking for family activities," said Michael Meldman, the founder and chief executive of the Discovery Land Company, which is the developer of Iron Horse and 11 other properties in the United States and abroad. "They want to justify the cost. It's expensive. If I'm buying a place to golf for \$1 million, it seems almost selfish. But if there are other things to do, all of a sudden I look at it as an investment in my family."



AIM Mr. Williamson instructs a shotter.

So at Teton Springs, a two-year-old development in Victor, Idaho, buyers have access to a fly-fishing outfitter and a heli-skiing company. Concierges at the Roaring Fork Club in Basalt, Colo., set up paragliding trips off Aspen Mountain and overnight hiking expeditions using the 10th Mountain Division hut system. And home buyers at the Greenbrier Sporting Club in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., will soon be able to go on camping trips arranged by Alan Williamson, the director of outdoor activities. "There are families coming in for two or three days who want to go camping but don't have the camping gear or the know-how," said Mr. Williamson, who will arrange 24-hour adventures combining a float trip down the Greenbrier River, fishing, a nighttime hike and dinner whipped up by a chef.

That kind of backwoods service is just what many wealthy second-home owners are demanding. "It's an added benefit but also an expectation. Guests just don't want to read a brochure left on the desk - it's a more personalized approach and it is working," said Scott Berman, a partner in the hospitality and leisure consulting group at PricewaterhouseCoopers. "Developments need to differentiate themselves from the competition, and having those services available is very attractive and frankly very helpful."

In most cases homeowners pay extra for their outdoor adventures, though some developments offer a few free activities, especially to new members.

At Bear Lake Reserve, a new development being built in the North Carolina mountains, the activities program will be heavy on fishing and hiking. "Rather than going with a traditional concierge program, we are recruiting people with experience as mountain guides and fly-fishing instructors or even those who have worked for Outward Bound," said John Clifford, vice president for resort operations at Centex Destination Properties, the developer.

ANNE HOSTETTER and her husband, Michael, owned a second home on golfcentered Hilton Head Island in South Carolina for 11 years before buying a place at Oldfield, an 860-acre development in Okatie, S.C., three years ago. Among the draws: the Outfitter's Center at Oldfield, which can arrange everything from a half day of saltwater fly-fishing with the staff river pro, Dave Murray, to duck hunting nearby at Turkey Hill Plantation. "Usually these types of plantation vacation areas are just golf and tennis; this is so much more," Ms. Hostetter said. "My husband is addicted to golf, but now he will actually come fishing." The couple make it down from Indiana once a month and pack their days with plenty of kayaking and fishing trips. Ms. Hostetter has already arranged for one of the river pros to take her cobia fishing along the Okatie River when she returns in May.

Developers say adding adventure as an amenity helps attract younger buyers. At Pronghorn, a new second-home community in Bend, Ore., the offerings at Pronghorn Adventures include snowshoeing, camping and moonlight canoe excursions. Among its 200 families, the resort counts 180 people younger than 23 and 85 under 12 years old. According to the National Association of Realtors the average age of vacation-home buyers is 55, and most buyers don't have children under 18. Pronghorn also has two golf courses.

"The majority of guests are attracted to great golf," said Riley Cranston, director of outdoor activities at Pronghorn, "but the idea that they are able to do family adventures is definitely attractive. It's a key incentive in their decision to purchase."

Given the cost of houses in many of these communities, as often as not, the adventures tend to be fairly luxurious. The Ritz-Carlton Club at Aspen Highlands, a fractionalownership development in Colorado where the smallest share of a two-bedroom residence starts at \$180,000, has a staff of about a dozen concierges whose responsibilities include outdoor activities. Last summer, when one couple wanted a strenuous hike, a concierge arranged a 5.5-mile guided trek on the East Maroon Trail to nearby Crested Butte. But rather than hiking back or spending hours returning on rough roads, the concierge arranged for them to fly back to the resort.

Jill and Richard Carpenter, avid golfers who spend part of the year on a golf resort in La Quinta, Calif., have bought a lot in Pronghorn and have already gone on a moonlight dog sled tour and a snowshoe trip capped off with hot chocolate and s'mores served in an igloo. A recent hiking trip wrapped up with a lakeside white-tablecloth dinner.

"If this is camping," Ms. Carpenter said, "this is the way I want to go."

Houses That Get Beyond the Fairway



WHERE White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.

WHAT 3-bedroom house

HOW MUCH \$2.2 million

This new 3,340-square-foot cedar-sided house is in the Greenbrier Sporting Club, where bass fishing, hunting and rafting trips can be arranged by Greenbrier staff. The house has three and a half bathrooms and a stone fireplace. It is offered furnished.

Agent: John Klemish, the Greenbrier Sporting Club, (888) 741-8989, www.thegreenbriersportingclub.com.



WHERE Okatie, S.C.
WHAT 4-bedroom house
HOW MUCH \$995,000

Thirty minutes from Hilton Head, this 4,202-square-foot house sits on half an acre in the Oldfield development. The Oldfield Outfitter's Center can arrange fly-fishing lessons and excursions along the Okatie River with a staff river guide. There is also kayaking, canoeing, bird-watching and dove and quail hunting with the Oldfield staff. The house overlooks a nature preserve and has four and a half bathrooms. Contact: Oldfield Sales, (866) 653-3435, www.oldfield1732.com.



WHERE Whitefish, Mont.
WHAT 5-bedroom house
HOW MUCH \$2.45 million

This house is at the Iron Horse Golf Club, which offers fly-fishing, white-water rafting, horseback riding, mountain biking, kayaking and other outdoor activities in addition to golf. Hiking trips to nearby Glacier National Park or skiing at Big Mountain are also available. The house is 5,000 square feet and has four bathrooms, two fireplaces and a deck with views of Whitefish Lake. Agent: Jeff Wirth, Sotheby's International Realty, (406) 863-3060, www.ironhorseproperties.com.

Information was provided by the listing companies.