

Gated community in Westlake offers greens, security

Fazio golf course neighborhood to feature million-dollar estates

BY JOSH SHAFFER
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WESTLAKE - It used to be an oil baron's estate, all rolling hills, roadrunners and post oaks.

But soon, golfers will walk the southeast corner of Circle T Ranch, riding down from million-dollar houses.

Its name is Vaquero, where the ultra-rich will play golf.

The gated golf course community is exclusive even for Westlake, where a private hangar is as common as a two-car garage in some parts of town.

When it opens next fall, the 18-hole course will sprawl across 425 acres of the ranch, part of the development that is changing Westlake from a town of 250 to a home for corporate campuses and high-dollar golf.

Lots in Vaquero start at \$150,000 for golf villas and climb to \$1 million for estates, and that's before the custom-built house, which will cost about \$600,000.

They are selling without a penny spent on advertising - about 70 commitments so far, said Mike Lorence of Discovery Land Co.

"We're lucky," he said. "It's all by word of mouth."

Part of the appeal is the security. Vaquero will have a meandering wall 6 to 8 feet tall and be guarded 24 hours a day.

But the real attraction is golf course designer Tom Fazio. His name appears three times on Golfweek magazine's list of the nation's top 10 modern courses, along with golf giants Jack Nicklaus and Ben Crenshaw.

The chance to shape the hills of Circle T Ranch lured him to Westlake. "When I first went out and looked at the land, with the contours, the view, the gorgeous trees and the sandy-based soils, I was impressed immediately," Fazio said.

The course will have about 60 acres of native grasses, and many of the post oaks will be saved. Lorence said about 200 trees will be planted before the course is finished.

The houses will sit far enough from the greens that only the worst golfers could hit them, Lorence said.

One of the course's most unusual features will be a sand trap that covers a whopping 3 acres and borders the No. 6 fairway.

"I think I could play nine holes of golf in that," Alderman Fred Held joked.

But for all its charm, most golfers will never see Vaquero.

The club will be open only to members and their guests, and for at least several years, memberships will go exclusively to residents of Vaquero. Members will pay a \$60,000 initial fee and monthly dues of about \$500.

Vaquero's walled-in, members-only quality is attracting some criticism.

"I am adamantly opposed to gated communities," Westlake Mayor Scott Bradley said. "I don't like them. I think it sends the wrong message. They're elitist, and there's no evidence that they're safer."

Bradley said he would rather the houses be less clustered in the golf villa area, but understands that the market

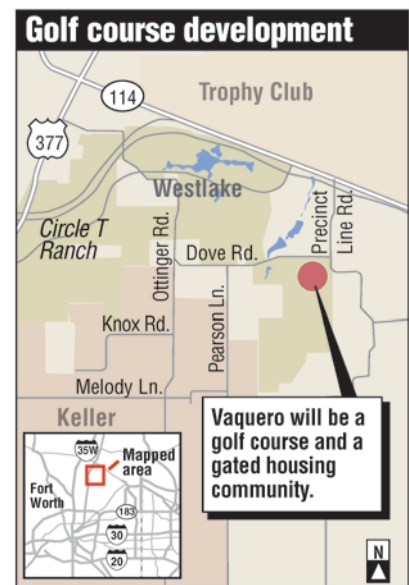
demand that kind of density. He cannot, however, understand the need for gates and guards.

"It's not like you're trying to wall yourself off from a trailer park or anything," he said.

Most of Fazio's courses are private, said Brad Klein, architecture editor for Golfweek. Fazio's strength is his ability to shape and rework a landscape, Klein said, from the cactus land in Arizona to the Rocky Mountains in Montana. "His courses are attractive," Klein said. "They're pretty. They're player friendly and they have a lot of visual pizzazz and eye appeal."

But, Klein said, they do not offer much variety from course to course.

"I've played 30 of them, and they're all the same," he said. "It's like going out with a stunning model, and after a while you get bored to death." Fazio shrugged. He bets that golfers will enjoy Vaquero when it is finished next spring, variety or not, and he added, "I'll never get tired of going out with a beautiful girl."



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