

New Owners Plan Major Changes At South Seas

by Kathy Kurtz Ferrari

South Seas Island Resort has a long and storied history on Captiva. Occupying nearly a third of the island stretching from beach to bay, the resort has hosted generations over its many years.

New ownership intends to begin a new era for South Seas, as the aging island beauty is getting a facelift.

The resort was sold last year to a group of three investment companies, and managing partner Timbers Company is making plans to bring the resort back to its former glory.

Timbers, which owns resort destinations throughout the U.S., Mexico and Italy, recently moved its headquarters from Colorado to Winter Park, Florida. The company was looking to expand in Florida, and CEO Greg Spencer, a native of Tallahassee who has fond memories of visiting our islands as a child, thought South Seas would fit nicely into the company's portfolio.

In researching the property, Spencer and his staff felt South Seas had lost its allure as a family vacation destination.

"I want to make this the No. 1 family resort in the country," Spencer said. "Why wouldn't that be the goal? I want to celebrate the specialness and uniqueness of the property."

Spencer was on property last week to meet with a team of experts to discuss renovations, although the company has yet to submit plans to Lee County.

"While I can't get into all the details, one of the things I want to share with you is we're going to make the investment jump not just in capital but in elbow grease," Spencer explained. "That's what I think has been missing at the resort. It's kind of like everybody out there was doing their own thing and there was no common vision."

Conversations have been initiated with the resort's many homeowners and their associations about planning. Unit owners will be asked to make investments in their own property, such as updating appliances and cosmetics to raise the quality of the overall product. Timbers is allowing amenity access privileges solely to owners who rent their units through the resort's rental program. An access program will be extended to Captiva residents outside



South Seas Island Resort will see improvements as new owners take charge
photos by Kathy Kurtz Ferrari



Timbers Company CEO Greg Spencer looks over the yacht harbor and marina at South Seas Island Resort



The golf course at South Seas will be redesigned with stormwater management techniques the resort.

Some improvements have already been made to the property, including replacing docks at the two marinas and new landscaping.

"It takes a while to plan out construction activities and it takes a while to get it approved. We never want to talk about something that hasn't gone through the county and gotten approved yet," said Spencer.

Chadwick's Square, the retail area outside the resort's gate, will see cosmetic updates, including the

expansion of Starbucks.

The check-in area, now located inside the security gate, may be moved to conference space outside the gate. The parking lot will be reconfigured. Captiva's weekly farmers market has already been moved to Chadwick's Square in preparation of those changes.

"I think you'll start to see some significant changes within the first 24 to 36 months," Spencer said.

The company intends to add more amenities to the south end of the property to entice more guests to stay

there. Rumors have suggested a new water attraction may be added there. Pools will be improved throughout the property.

Employee housing is an immediate concern, as the new ownership condemned the former building that will be demolished in the next six to eight months. Condominiums may be built in that area.

"Look, I'll own it. I was the one that made the decision and recommend to my partners to condemn it because,

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Magazine Sponsor Returns



From left, Marly and Brenda Marly, Kelly Furell, NCCF CEO James Evans, Celia Mitchell and Joe Marly.

Doc Ford's Run Bar & Grille is a returning sponsor for the upcoming winter issue of the South Seas Island Magazine. NCCF's Connecting You to Nature magazine.

The magazine is a great resource for our residents and neighbors to take a deep dive into the nature that surrounds

us and the work NCCF does to protect it," said NCCF CEO James Evans. "It's just terrific that Doc Ford's has returned as a leading partner for this vital issue."

The magazine is mailed island-wide twice annually, in the winter and spring. It is intended to give readers a greater understanding of how the land, water and wildlife on and around South Seas

Captiva depend on NCCF's stewardship. "Doc Ford's has partnered with NCCF since the first year we opened our doors," said Marly Marly, proprietor of Doc Ford's Run Bar & Grille. "They have been the consistent demands for our island for more than 50 years, and we're proud to return as a sponsor for this very worthwhile publication."

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As for the issue in 2023, The South Seas Captiva Trust Company joins Doc Ford's in underwriting this issue. Companies interested in future underwriting opportunities can contact NCCF Development Director Cheryl Gaffney at 822-4121 or

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frankly, I was embarrassed when I walked through it. It was bad," Spencer explained.

Vans are currently being used to shuttle workers to and from the island. Some workers have been scrambling to find housing. Plans to purchase an off-island complex fell through in December. Spencer stressed the company is committed to finding another option.

Truck traffic is a major concern, both for the resort and the Captiva community.

"It's crazy. We've never seen anything like it. Every delivery truck shows up whenever they want and what you get is a lot of vehicular traffic when people are trying to ride bikes or walk on the road. We're going to try to tackle that," he stated, suggesting a delivery schedule for vendors.

Inappropriate use of golf carts is another problem.

"There's golf carts all over the place. There's 8- and 9-year-olds in golf carts driving around. And we're going to put a stop to that," Spencer emphasized.

The Captiva Community Panel has been discussing a switch to all electric golf carts. The resort is planning the same which will be equipped with GPS to control where and how the carts can operate.

The golf course itself will likely be closed before the end of the year for redesign. Storm water mitigation is a major part of the plan as heavy rain floods that end of the resort. Environmental engineers and conservation experts are being consulted. Some trees on the course will be saved in a temporary nursery during the project.

Timbers has brought in the golf course designer who worked with Tiger Woods on the new par 3 course at Pebble Beach. A new clubhouse and oceanfront dining may be added.

"I'm not going to lie. Some of the stuff will be impactful while we are doing it," Spencer admitted. "But we'll try to communicate it. We'll obviously have it screened off. I ask people to be patient, because the end product will be far superior to what we have today."

"One thing I would just ask folks is to be patient with us. This property didn't get in disrepair overnight. So it's not going to get fixed overnight. But we are definitely committed to making the investment, not just dollars but also through leadership and effort, and just trying to do the right thing for everybody."

South Seas Offers Captiva Residents Amenity Access

South Seas Island Resort will

continue to allow access to Captiva residents.

Rather than the previous annual tiered memberships for use of amenities such as golf, tennis, restaurants, beach, trolley and main pool, a new resort amenity access program has been created for the remainder of 2022.

The announcement clears up some confusion conveyed in January stating access would no longer be extended to previous members living outside the resort.

A premiere access program for a fee of \$6,000 plus tax will give full use of all the resort's amenities until the end of the year. It includes discounts at all restaurants, retail stores and vendors, as well as 30 percent discount on golf cart and club rental.

A social access level for an annual fee of \$2,000 plus tax will include golf, tennis, fitness center and some restaurants, as well as discounts to some rental vendors.

According to Austin Watkins, managing director of hospitality sales for Timbers Company, the resort may offer a limited number of outside opportunities as South Seas staff studies overall density of use at the resort.

Extended family cards are available for \$25 per day on a limited basis when resort occupancy levels are below 80 percent.

South Seas homeowners who do not participate in the resort's rental program will also need to pay to use amenities.

The cost of the access program is higher compared to the previous membership. Watkins said that is likely a result of the rising cost of goods and services across the board.

Last year's memberships were extended for the month of January as South Seas' new owners worked on details for the program. Pricing covers February through December.

The program will likely be altered in the future, as Timbers is looking to close the golf course for redesign. The timetable is unknown for that project. According to Timbers CEO Greg Spencer, the resort will ultimately see upgrades to all amenities.

"It's not like we are going to use existing amenities and charge more. We are going to have brand new amenities," Spencer said.

Watkins noted the resort is also upgrading its high speed cable and Internet service, which should benefit the entire community, not just the resort.

Kathy Kurtz Ferrari is a journalist who splits her time between Captiva and the Boston area. If you have any questions or comments, email Kathy.islandsunnews@gmail.com.✱




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Created by Artist Rena Martinson
for CHR's Manatee Madness!



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2440 Palm Ridge Rd. #5

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Nancy Johnson
Broker/Associate
njohnson@kw.com
(239) 485-4802



Chris Strohman
Broker
cstrohman@kw.com
(239) 476-4600