

The Ritz-Carlton, long rumored, is going up in Marana

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It's official: Marana will have a place where fashion sits — its very own Ritz.

Developers and officials with The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. LLC are publicly confirming what has been perhaps the worst-kept secret in Pima County — that a Ritz-Carlton is coming to Dove Mountain.

"Although it's been the worst-kept secret, we're still very pleased to have it finalized and have construction commenced," said David Mehl, president of Cottonwood Properties Inc., which has teamed up with Greenbrier Southwest Corp. and Ritz-Carlton to develop the project.

When complete, the 850-acre development will boast two Jack Nicklaus Signature golf courses, a 250-room hotel and spa and about 325 residences, Mehl said.

Dove Mountain is a 5,600-acre development on West Tangerine Road, west of North Thornydale Road.

Golf course construction has been under way for about a year, he said. Work on the golf clubhouse began about a month ago, and hotel building began just a few weeks ago.

Homes are expected to sell for \$1.5 million to \$3 million, he said.

"Even within the Ritz-Carlton system, this is a very highly regarded project," Mehl said.

The golf and residential parts are due to be completed in January 2009; the hotel is expected to open that fall. Plans include hosting the World Golf Championships-Accenture Match Play Championship beginning in February 2009, he said.

One reason it took so long to confirm the company's presence, Mehl said, is that Ritz-Carlton will be a financial partner in the project, which is unusual for the firm.

In the continental United States, "this will be the largest project that combines golf, spa, resort and residences together," said Vivian Deuschl, a Ritz-Carlton spokeswoman.

The company currently has 67 properties around the world and expects that number to increase to 100 within the next two years, she said.

Ritz-Carlton considers hundreds of properties each year but was drawn to the Dove Mountain site because of its natural beauty, she said.

"Everything just came together. We don't just go into projects as complex as this one before every I is dotted and every T is crossed," Deuschl said.

Ed Stolmaker, president and CEO of the Marana Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the progress.

"From an economic standpoint, it will bring in additional revenue for the town," he said. "It will bring in a different level of hospitality in the area. It's definitely a different level than what we have presently, not only in Marana but also in Tucson."