

Keowee Key Celebrates 50 Years Young

by JG Walker

This year, the Keowee Key community in upstate South Carolina is celebrating its 50th anniversary and a complete renewal accomplished without increasing assessments. Having finished a dozen new projects over the past four years with an investment of \$16 million, Keowee Key has enhanced its standing as one of the South's premier lakeside private communities.

The Creation of the Lake

Duke Energy dammed the Keowee River in the early 1970s to create the 18,500-acre Lake Keowee, and bring reliable electric power to the Upstate region. Recognizing its new recreational potential, the company worked with state and local officials to stock the lake with fish and pave access roads to

the area. To ensure high-quality residential development, Duke subsidiary Crescent Land Company set aside 1,600 prime acres for the Keowee Key master-planned community along 15 miles of the lake's southern shores.

The Lakeside Course

Construction of the first neighborhoods began in 1972 around what would become the community's signature amenity—the Keowee Key lakeside golf course by acclaimed architect George Cobb. Praised for the quality of its design and scenic waterfront setting when it opened in 1977, the Keowee Key greens were renovated in 2006, but that was just the start. Driven by member committees and supported by the entire community, a \$5-million expenditure was made that significantly upgraded the entire course and a grand reopening was celebrated in September of 2019.

Keowee Key Community Involvement

Those recent enhancements of the golf course and all of the other amenities at Keowee Key are directly related to the community's culture of involvement. Today, there are just over 1,600 developed properties at Keowee Key, mostly single-family residences with about 300 condominiums and townhomes. Somewhat unique is that all property owners share in the ownership of all of



the amenities. Seven volunteer directors are elected to work with a professional management team that oversees a staff of more than 100 employees. They, in turn, manage the day-to-day operation of the amenities, common areas, roads, and other infrastructure, including the community's own water distribution system and sewer treatment plant.

"Perhaps the most important community asset enabling us to be what we are today is the Keowee Key Utility System," says Community General Manager Kevin McCracken. "Without it, we would not have been able to develop at the housing density and with the array of amenities we have."

While there are many other member-owned communities, Keowee Key has taken the idea of active engagement to a new level. Hundreds of members serve as volunteers on dozens of committees that take a close look at the details of their respective operations. In addition to routine maintenance, new projects are listed and prioritized within a strategic five-year planning schedule. Through this process, an annual budget that includes capital purchases and assessments is developed and voted on by all of the members.

"Our mission at Keowee Key," says Board Treasurer Joanne Heintz, "is to offer all-inclusive amenities, an active lifestyle, a vibrant social fabric, a diverse arts culture,



and modern facilities balanced by financial stability and affordability for our members."

Improving with Age

The cornerstone of that financial stability is the club's Single Amenity Support concept, where property owners equally pay for the net operating costs of all of the amenities. While some communities offer a more "a-la-carte" structure, all of the amenities at Keowee Key are supported by the members as a total package. That broad support ensures adequate funding to maintain and improve each of the facilities for the benefit of everyone.

As a result, all of the amenities have been enhanced in the last four years. In addi-

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tion to the golf course itself, the Keowee Key Clubhouse has a fresh new look with vaulted ceilings in the atrium, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the golf course in the Vista Ballroom, enhanced casual dining space, and an enlarged member bar/lounge with covered outdoor seating.


Updated Fitness Options Abound

The Keowee Key Fitness & Racquet Center has also increased in size. It now includes modern features like a virtual workout room with a digital screen for instruction, Peloton training cycles, and Kaiser air weight strength training equipment. There's also a spa/sauna in each locker room and a heated indoor Junior Olympic-size pool for year-round swimming and water aerobics. Seven personal trainers offer a large selection of daytime exercise classes, while massage and physical therapy services are available on-site.

Just outside are even more new fitness options. In addition to the 14 lighted tennis courts, the number of pickleball courts has

doubled to eight, along with new shuffleboard and bocce ball courts. The dedicated outdoor exercise area has been a popular addition, as well as the new Northside walking/jogging trail that leads from the fitness center to the Leisure Trail and meanders around the lake. And for those members who love their water sports, complete marina services include more than 300 boat slips and storage/launch facilities for kayaks and paddleboards.

All of those shared facilities are just a part of the active social life that Keowee Key residents enjoy. Nearly every week, there's a special gathering at the clubhouse, from dinners and dances to guest lecturers on timely topics. The community event center features a library, a large conference room, and smaller meeting rooms for the scores of interest clubs that include games, hobbies, music, books, gardening, cooking, and so much more. Members also donate their time in a variety of volunteer activities, and in 2018, created the Keowee Key Community partnership that has raised \$1 million to support local charitable organizations.

With a strong system of self-governance, enhanced amenities that are shared by all, and social activities that include reaching out beyond the gates, Keowee Key runs like a small town where everyone is involved. That culture of engagement has made Keowee Key a successful community for the past 50 years, and with work on the next five-year plan already well underway, Keowee Key members will tell you that the best is yet to come. 



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