

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE

After a few tough years, the Club at Ravenna turns things around



BY JAMES RODRIGUEZ AND ETHAN NELSON
Denver Business Journal

Once a victim of the Great Recession, a golf club southwest of Denver has turned things around.

The Club at Ravenna, a 634-acre, 278-member, private golf club, has emerged as a booming development in the midst of the pandemic with increasing membership and home sales fueled, at least in part, by people looking to live in less dense areas.

Construction on the development started about 20 years ago. It filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2012 and emerged August 2013. By then, the real estate market and economy at large had started showing some recovery from the recession of 2008.

“Things were going fairly well for the developments until the Great Recession,” said Kevin Collins, the club’s managing partner, who took over leadership at the club in 2015. “Like many of the developments throughout the country, there were literally no sales, real estate, building, nothing happening at the time.”

DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

At the time Collins took the helm, only 26 of the now 243 home sites were occupied with around 50 members. Now, Ravenna boasts 131 occupied homes, with another 23 under construction and more than 10 breaking ground soon. The club has 278 members and room for 400.

Reestablishing credibility in the marketplace was one of the most crucial things that helped turn things around for Ravenna, Collins told the Denver Business Journal.

“We really needed to be able to show stability and financial strength to potential homeowners, potential builders, potential lenders,” he said. “Ravenna itself has great bones. I mean, it’s a beautiful area.”

Collins, who has lived in the community since 2009 and previously worked in the energy business, purchased more lots to establish a market price and provided incentives to homebuilders to build spec homes. He also streamlined some procedures to help get homes built as quickly as possible. He said he tried to set aggressive prices for home sites to help attract attention from real estate agents.

Also important to Collins’ vision for the development was something a little more tangible: the gated entrance.

“We put a lot of extra time and effort and money into the entrance,” Collins said. “We get one time to make a good first impression, and I think we’ve done that with how we take care of landscaping and our common areas throughout the development.”

The development’s Jay Morrish-designed golf course, one that had a reputation for being a little difficult, also needed some love. The course underwent a major overhaul – the club removed 80,000 square feet of sand, rebuilt or redesigned several greens, expanded the putting green by a third and built a new restaurant, Raphael Grille.

“We addressed the playability of the golf course for players of all abilities,” Collins said. “So we made it softer by reducing the number of traps, created more playable turf, created more playable greens.”

Compared to other private metro-area golf courses, Ravenna’s sits about in the middle in terms of difficulty, according to DBJ research.

In all, Collins said more than \$1 million has been invested in maintenance equipment for the course. Rounds played increased from 6,000 in 2014 to 23,000 in 2020, as the club was able to offer a socially distant experience on the course while other entertainment options around the metro like restaurants and theaters remained closed or at limited capacity. The club, which received about \$700,000 in Paycheck Protection Program loans, was able to keep its staff fully employed, he said.

The entire development has seen over \$19 million invested in it since Collins took over, plus more than \$10 million that went toward the construction and furnishing of a clubhouse that is slated to be finished by the end of 2021.

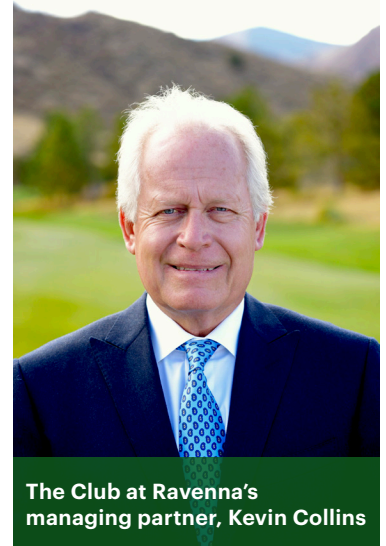
Despite the reinvigoration, Ravenna wasn’t immune to the uncertainty caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Real estate sales were kind of nonexistent for a while during the pandemic, but starting in May, lot sales started to accelerate again,” Collins said. “I think people were wanting to get out of the cities and wanted to get into a more relaxed environment.”

In 2019, the development sold 12 lots. In 2020, 15 were sold. Through April this year, 18 lots have been sold with 16 more under contract. Collins cited an influx of people from Illinois and the coasts as one factor in the increase in sales.

Looking forward, Collins said he’s hopeful the remaining 12 lots will be sold by the end of the year. He’s confident he’ll be able to sell out considering the pace of the metro area’s real estate market.

“We just didn’t sell houses and lots out here,” he said. “We really built a community. I think the community of Ravenna is just a testament of a bunch of great people getting together and living together and supporting the golf club.”



The Club at Ravenna’s
managing partner, Kevin Collins