

POPULAR UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD HAS ACTIVE CLUB COMMUNITY AND ABUNDANCE OF NATURE

Sarasota Herald Tribune Feature Article Market Snapshot:
Laurel Oaks Estates & Country Club
By Chris Angermann / Correspondent
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From its beginnings in the late 1980s, Laurel Oak Estates and Country Club has been a popular neighborhood. The upscale community, located two miles east of Interstate 75 and north of Bee Ridge Road, is gated with guards on duty round-the clock. Covering 813 acres, it has 406 homes in an attractive golf course setting and beautiful natural surroundings.

Originally, Laurel Oak was a cattle ranch with large wetlands and hammocks, and the developers preserved as many of the trees and shrubbery as possible. They also created 26 ponds and lakes. As a result, wildlife abounds, from otters and pelicans to bald eagles, herons and cranes. There are foxes and bobcats. Many residents wake up to deer in their yards and on the fairways.

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The community was built out in 12 phases. Early plans called for townhouses and golf villas, but buyers preferred the larger residences, so there are only 60 maintenance-free club homes. The rest are estate mansions ranging in size from 3,000 to over 10,000 square feet. The lots are big, too, from a half to three-and-a-half acres, providing plenty of privacy and space.

International sports legend Monica Seles, winner of nine Grand Slam tennis tournaments, built a house there in 1991 and lived there until 2016. The 5,871-square-foot mansion sits on 1.5 acres, has its own security gate and two private tennis courts.

The architecture in Laurel Oak is varied. One- and two-story houses in Florida modern, Mediterranean and

New England designs with brick, stucco or other finishes reflect the work of different custom home builders.

The country club boasts two 18-hole championship golf courses, laid out by Gary Player. One of them was redesigned in 2005 by Reese Jones, a famous golf architect. There are 12 Har-Tru tennis courts, a junior Olympic-sized heated swimming pool, and a 45,000-square foot clubhouse with dining facilities overlooking the putting green, fairways and a picturesque lake. Reciprocal privileges with the Bird Key yacht club allow members to enjoy boating as well.

Residents are not required to join, but many do, taking advantage of the club's active social calendar. About 30 percent of the 600 members, whose average age is 60, don't live in the community.

According to Elizabeth Van Riper, a Realtor with Michael Saunders and Company, "In the early days Laurel Oak used to be considered 'way out east,' but that is no longer the case because there has been so much new development around here since then," she said. "The widening and finishing of Bee Ridge Road helped, too."

"We're undergoing a transition," she continued. "As some of the original residents are downsizing, moving to where their kids are, or passing on, we're seeing an influx of new owners. A lot of the homes are being updated and getting new roofs."

Yet the population profile has remained the same. Surprisingly, for a golf course community, Laurel

“WE’RE UNDERGOING A TRANSITION,” SHE CONTINUED. “AS SOME OF THE ORIGINAL RESIDENTS ARE DOWNSIZING, MOVING TO WHERE THEIR KIDS ARE, OR PASSING ON, WE’RE SEEING AN INFLUX OF NEW OWNERS. A LOT OF THE HOMES ARE BEING UPDATED AND GETTING NEW ROOFS.”

Oak continues to have a large number of families — more than 250 children live in the community.

Other residents include retired corporate managers and business owners, and professionals still working. Physicians like the proximity to medical centers, including Doctor's Hospital and Sarasota Memorial Hospital. You can reach downtown Sarasota by car in less than 25 minutes.

One of the indicators of Laurel Oak's popularity is that many residents move around within the community, relocating to larger or smaller homes.

Of the 19 residences currently on the market, 16 are estate homes, ranging in price from \$549,000 to \$2.2 million. The other three are maintenance-free homes, from \$449,000 top \$525,000.



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