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Woodfield Country Club: Great place to live

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BOCA RATON — Drive around Woodfield Country Club and you'll see one sign that this isn't a typical country club.

It's an actual street sign: "Caution Children at Play."



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Combine that with all the strollers parked outside the gym and the kids' game room and the baby-sitting center, and it's obvious who lives here: families, along with some empty-nesters and about 20 percent retirees. This isn't a standard senior citizens' country club.

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Of course, there is an excellent golf course, along with 20 busy and well-kept tennis courts, a 38,000-square foot fitness center with a pool, playground, gym, aerobics rooms, spa, salon, game room for kids 9 and up, plus Kids Korner, which offers baby-sitting. And don't forget the 100,000-square-foot clubhouse, with its restaurants and card rooms and locker rooms.

But the average age resident here is 49, and there are nearly 1,400 residents under age 25, says Rosie Slocum, the club's membership director.

"I've never worked for a club this young," Slocum says. "And I've had 22 years in membership marketing."

Woodfield is unique because it started out young and hasn't changed much since its beginning in the late 1980s. The Barbar Group started the community with young families in mind, Slocum says.

And if anything has changed, it's that the community has gotten younger over the years - perhaps because it fills a niche among so many retiree-focused country clubs in Boca.

"It's the only one that celebrates children; it doesn't just tolerate them," says Julian Rubinstein, who moved into Woodfield in 1994 with his wife and two young daughters. "The kids run the place here, which is good."

That seems to be a universal feeling among residents, regardless of their ages.

"I'm an empty-nester and I have no intention of moving out," says Claire Sheres, a Realtor with Coldwell Banker who moved into Woodfield in 1992 and now does the majority of her business there. "It's nice to be around active young people. There's a lot of excitement around them. I'm living in paradise. That's the way I look at it."

The homes and the landscaping alone make it feel a lot like paradise in Woodfield, an 820-acre community. With 20 subdivisions and 1,297 properties, the prices and sizes of the homes vary greatly, from mid-\$200,000s for townhouses and villas in the Cambridge Park neighborhood to a recent \$7.5 million sale for a furnished home in the gated Princeton Estates.

In between, there are homes starting at \$469,000 in the Stratford Green neighborhood, homes starting in the high \$200,000s in Kensington and custom homes starting in the \$600,000s in the Hamptons, a decidedly kid-centric neighborhood that throws a great Halloween party every year.

And each neighborhood does develop its own personality - some more child-focused than others, some with more singles, others have more retirees, residents say.

Residents often move within Woodfield for that very reason.

"There's something for somebody," says Sheres. "I've lived in three subdivisions."

Other selling points include the location, convenient to both the Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale airports and just minutes to the Town Center mall and the beach, and the outstanding schools nearby, including private, religious and the public schools: A-rated Calusa Elementary, Omni Middle and Spanish River High.

Homeowners fees vary depending on the subdivision and how much maintenance residents handle themselves. They range from \$1,000 to \$2,300 per quarter and generally cover the 24-hour manned security gate, landscaping and maintenance of common areas and other services. All new residents must join the club at one of three levels: golf, sports or social. Annual dues are about \$15,000 for golf, \$9,000 for sports and \$7,700 for social.

Standard equity is \$38,000 and golf equity is \$65,000, both with a \$20,000 initiation fee.

It's pricey, but the amenities are stunning. The tennis program is highly regarded. The golf course is challenging, and the fitness center, with its 13 trainers and state-of-the-art equipment and classes, is top-notch.

"I've been to Canyon Ranch and that isn't any better than our gym," says Sheres, referring to the luxury spa with locations in Tucson, Ariz., and Lenox, Mass.

Professional athletes seem to like the facilities, too. Residents include golfer Bernhard Langer, tennis player Sebastien Grosjean and former tennis player Wendy Turnbull.

The club also received recognition this year as a Platinum Club of America, which is voted on by club managers and presidents across the country.

Sheres also recommends the value within Woodfield.

"Even though I think we're a superior club to most, I think that we're very well-priced," she says. "None hold a candle to our facilities and if you're active, you want to have a lot of facilities."

And don't forget the activities. The variety is staggering - from a two-day, clubwide season kickoff party that draws 900 people to Halloween hayrides and pumpkin patches to a winter carnival with snow and an ice-skating rink.

Those are just the big events. There are also monthly happy hours and concerts, book review groups and film review groups, and themed family dinners, like Sesame Street Suppers and Hannah Montana Karaoke night, says Allie Weiner, event services manager.

"It's great because it's so upbeat," Weiner says. "It's just a totally different vibe than any other club."

Shereen Randazza of Lang Realty, another resident and Realtor who works primarily within Woodfield, agrees that living in Woodfield can't be beat.

"It offers a privileged lifestyle that fits most people's budgets," Randazza writes in an e-mail.

It hasn't always had all the amenities, however.

Sheres recalls touring the development nearly 20 years ago and seeing potential, but not much else.

"We started to look around, and for some reason, even though Woodfield was unfinished and in receivership and only half done, I said, 'This is going to be the hottest place in South Florida,' " she recalls. "My husband looked at me like I was wacko."

Woodfield went through some challenging years when the Barbar Group struggled financially and eventually filed for bankruptcy two years after a lavish opening in 1989. That stalled work on the club and slowed home construction.

But builder Canada Square bought Woodfield at auction in 1993 and finished the development well, residents say.

Sheres couldn't convince her husband to buy right away. Instead, the Canadian couple rented for a year. At the time, there was no gym or pool. Just 12 tennis courts were finished and the clubhouse was housed in a trailer.

Sheres wasn't daunted.

"I loved it," she says. "It just was a pretty place. I have really watched this place evolve into the finest country club in South Florida."

THEIR HOME: 4 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, plus an office with a pool and about 5,200 square feet of living space in Coventry.

LOIS and SAM SAIDEL

WHEN THEY MOVED IN: March 2005

CURRENT VALUE (from [Zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com)): \$1.51 million

WHY THEY LOVE IT: When the Saidels decided to buy a home in Florida, they knew right away that they wanted to be in Boca Raton, because they already had many friends and family in the area.

Still, they made sure to look around at other similar communities before making a final decision.

Ultimately, two factors won them over to Woodfield: that they still could build their own home and the community's youthful feel. (And the super-easy, right-outside-the-gate access to Publix didn't hurt, Lois adds.)

They also like that Woodfield has a playground and a nursery and families with kids. Not for themselves, but for the feeling it provides.

"It's so nice to see young people and young children," says Lois, a retired teacher. "No matter what time you come in, there are always people jogging and walking and playing basketball. It's a very nice thing to see. You don't feel as if you're in a senior community."

With an average age of 49, they aren't in a senior community, but there still are plenty of amenities and activities to fill their schedule. They play golf and cards, enjoy the restaurants and work out at the gym. "Everything but tennis," says Sam, who co-owned a men's apparel manufacturer in New Jersey before selling it in 1993.

They're actually on their second home in Woodfield. They moved because they wanted a bit more space. Lois recommends that anyone moving down just start off buying the bigger home.

Sam most likes the "diversity" of Woodfield. "The multiple age groups, the socio-economic differences," he says. "You've got everything from the bums (pointing to himself), I mean the retired people to the working people to the professional people."

Lois loves the people too.

"We've made such deep friendships," she says. "And it doesn't take a lot of years to make good friendships here."

TERRY and JULIAN RUBINSTEIN

THEIR HOME: 5 bedrooms, 612 bathrooms, plus a billiards room, library, gym and game room for the kids, with a pool and spa and about 10,000 square feet of living space in Princeton Estates.

WHEN THEY MOVED IN: 1997

CURRENT VALUE (from [Zillow.com](http://www.zillow.com)): \$3.7 million

WHY THEY LOVE IT: Julian and Terry were lucky enough to be able to move down to Florida when their kids were young. They wanted a country club but not a senior citizen country club.

They looked all over the state before settling on Boca Raton for its convenience to airports - to visit family in the Northeast and travel elsewhere - and other features.

Next, they searched Boca for a place they could build a home and live comfortably with their then 4- and 2-year-old daughters.

"We looked at all the different country clubs and felt that Woodfield really was a no-brainer," says Julian, who owns American Asset Management.

They first moved down on Christmas Day 1994 and rented a home in Woodfield to get to know the community. They bought a lot in the gated Princeton Estates neighborhood of Woodfield and proceeded to have their custom-home built.

Fifteen years later, they still love the community and its youth, even though their daughters are heading off to college. Alexandra started this year and Brooke is a senior at Pine Crest in Fort Lauderdale.

"We love our home," Julian says. "It's a great place for our kids to come back. We can't really see living anywhere else."

The Rubinsteins considered the schools when choosing their home and liked the public school options as well as the private school possibilities in the area.

Today, the best thing about the community is the people, Julian says.

"They are just really a lot of fun," he says. "Everyone seems to have a good balance between work and play."

- Stories by Elizabeth Clarke

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