

Utah Pros Making their Mark off the Golf Course

By Kurt Kragthorpe

Bruce Summerhays is only partly kidding when he says he was looking for something to do in his old age.

Brett Wayment is about 25 years younger than Summerhays, but he's also trying to diversify himself at this stage of his career.

So it is that two of Utah's most prominent golfers have become key figures in The Markers Club, a golf-oriented residence club that is aligning itself with some of the top destinations in the United States and beyond.

"It's really fun," Summerhays said.

"It was a great opportunity," Wayment said.

First, a quick description of The Markers' concept: The whole idea is basically like buying a luxury home, only this membership costs about the same as the down payment — roughly \$300,000 — for a house at one of these premier locations.

Through the time-share arrangement, members have access to the homes the company is purchasing at destinations such as Scottsdale, Ariz., and Southern Pines, N.C., along with free or discounted golf at big-time courses in those areas.

Sounds nice, huh? So how do Summerhays and Wayment fit into this picture?

Summerhays, the 62-year-old Champions Tour veteran who lives in Farmington, became involved pretty much from the start. He's investing in the company and working as the co-chairman of the Players Council, and his role is primarily to conduct clinics, play with the members in selected events and deliver PGA Tour players and other big names to tournaments such as The Markers Club Championship at famous venues.

"He got the concept immediately," said The Markers co-founder Mitch Brinton. Ron Wade, the other co-founder, and Brinton were looking for a tour player to become involved, and Summerhays "actually helped us start the whole company," Brinton said.

Summerhays, who has earned more than \$8 million in his Champions Tour career, is a conservative investor, but he's convinced this idea is "going to pan out." He intends to play the Champions Tour full-time through next season and then re-evaluate his career, which will likely mean playing a somewhat reduced schedule, as opposed to giving up his tour pursuits entirely.

Thanks to his position among the "all-time" money leaders, counting combined earnings from the PGA Tour and the Champions Tour, Summerhays basically can play as long as he likes.

Wayment also intends to keep playing various mini-tours and may chase his PGA Tour dreams. But the former Nationwide Tour member also was seeking some stability in the golf business, and The Markers provided it. Along with Derek Miner, Wayment is the co-director of membership.

That job description means exactly what the title suggests: attracting members. Up until now, Wayment's focus has been on finding people who would help find potential members. He has done it by hiring "ambassadors," some 50 golf professionals and players who are commissioned to provide referrals. About a dozen Utahns are on that list, including Todd Tanner and Ryan Ellis, Wayment's friends and competitive rivals, and several club professionals.

In addition, Utah golf figures such as Billy Casper, Bruce Brockbank and Chris Briscoe are members of the club's advisory council.

The ambassadors' role is up front in the company's development. Eventually, they will step aside and The Markers will rely on its members to invite other prospective members.

Brinton says the company still wants Wayment to play tournament golf, although on a reduced basis. Wayment remains one of the state's best players this side of the Nationwide Tour or the PGA Tour, as illustrated by his recent victory in the Gold's Gym Provo Open. He also figures that playing in tournaments helps get the word out about the company, noting that when he played in Provo with "The Markers" logos on his shirt and golf bag, "All of a sudden, it created quite a buzz."

Salesmanship fits into Wayment's personality. The year he played the Nationwide Tour, he was a fixture on the practice tee, but he was not always hitting balls. That's not a commentary on his work ethic, just an observation about his friendliness and networking ability among the other players.

That "charisma," as Brinton cited, is what the co-founders were looking for, and has paid off in the development of the ambassadors' list. Wayment's next step will be to take potential members to the sites for what he calls a "test drive," giving them a taste of the full experience.

Rather than advertise in high-end publications, The Markers is using the ambassadors to identify clients, and also has received a good response in terms of coverage in major magazines.

The Markers Club is well on its way toward filling a niche in the golf, travel and residential industry. It's being marketed as a "hybrid club" — just as irons and woods have merged into specialty clubs, The Markers is mixing country club membership, vacationing and real estate.

Why didn't anybody think of this concept before? “You don't know how many people have asked that; it's not even funny,” Brinton said.

The Markers' philosophy started when Brinton was vacationing at a friend's home in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, and happened to call Wade. That's all it took to make both of them realize the potential for this idea among avid golfers. They decided to create a country club experience — on the road.

Memberships are equity-based and can be sold back to the company, but the investment is not directly in real estate, it's in the company that purchases the homes. The money to buy the luxury homes is initially coming from outside investors. As of late June, The Markers owned seven homes and had completed its sale of charter memberships.

The eventual goals — and limits — call for 325 members, who will have access to 36 homes for between 21 and 56 days a year. The current inventory includes homes in Scottsdale, Ariz.; Cabo San Lucas, Mexico; Kiawah Island, S.C.; Southern Pines, N.C.; Lake Las Vegas, Nev.; Daufuskie Island, S.C.; and St. George, home of the company headquarters (there's also a Salt Lake City office). Targeted spots include St. Andrews and the Monterey Peninsula.

The membership includes people from New York to Hawaii, and the word is getting out. “We're really excited,” Brinton said.

That includes Summerhays and Wayment. They still think of themselves primarily as golfers, but they also have something else to concern themselves with — a growing company that offers them another way to keep score.

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