



Now You Can Live in an Affordable **Tennis Community**

By Laura Newsome

Having a tennis court in the backyard used to be a privilege reserved for a select few, but these days in Atlanta, affordable green-top is so accessible, tennis fans don't even have to leave their neighborhood to strike up a volley.

Atlanta's growing tennis habit has fueled the development of numerous swim and tennis communities in the metro area, further redefining what a residential community should be and what it can offer its residents. Due to the eclectic and booming

nature of Atlanta real estate, tennis enthusiasts have a host of recreational options to choose from, whether they are weekend dabblers or former pros looking for a couple of hours of daily court time. From league play to casual practice, there is a tennis community in the metro area to suit every whim, wish and personality.

The most common kind is the trendy swim/tennis community, native to all parts of the metro area. People buy into these pol-

ished, relatively affordable communities for many different reasons, including higher resale values and manicured community centers. “Not everyone who moves in has to play tennis,” says Amy Hughes of Brayson Homes, “they might think it’s a good activity for their children or it’s an aesthetic thing—there’s some prestige in saying you’re part of a swim/tennis community.”

Brayson Homes currently has five family-oriented communities that offer swim/tennis options. “These are for people who are pressed for time,” Hughes says, “and they don’t want to belong to some big swanky country club to enjoy a game of tennis.” Clearwater Pointe in Henry County offers ranch and two-story style homes situated in a community with a Junior Olympic-size swimming pool and six lighted tennis courts. In these types of swim/tennis neighborhoods, hitting the courts can be as casual as teaching your 10-year-old how to master a backhand stroke.

For potential homeowners who are looking for a full platter of resort-style recreation amenities, affordable master-planned communities may be the answer. Touted as a live/work/play community, Sivica’s River Park is a new type of community that mixes modern amenities with the friendly charm of a classic neighborhood. A mix of residential, commercial and recreational space, River Park is designed much like a small town. In addition to having swimming and eight lighted tennis courts, the community also offers its residents a nature trail and a 30-acre community park.

Such a wide variety of amenities may seem like it would come with an equally hefty price tag, but homes in River Park start in the low \$100,000s and top out in the \$160,000s. “The type of communities that we build are more densely populated so responsibility for the amenities is stretched over a greater number of homeowners,” says Irene Hall, vice president of marketing for Sivica Communities “We are following the tenants of new urbanism, which focus on how important it is to really develop towns and neighborhoods.”

River Park’s tennis academy, founded by former pro player Gary Johnson, will offer lessons, mixed doubles events and structured league play. “A tennis community is not just a place that has a couple courts,” says Irene Hall. “I would say that a tennis community is a place that offers some kind of professional services like on-site tennis lessons, a pro shop or the ability to form leagues.”

Master-planned neighborhoods with a full set of amenities are increasing in number, but so are the original tennis communities—private golf communities where tennis courts were first built as side amenity to the main green attraction—the golf course. As tennis has moved up on Atlanta’s list of favorite recreational pastimes, golf communities are becoming more affordable and catering more to tennis interests. Heron Bay Golf and Country Club, located in Henry County, is a lakefront community with ample tennis courts and three and four bedroom Brayson Homes that start in the \$150,000s. When residents are looking to do a little cross training, they can take advantage of the community’s 18-hole golf course, aquatic center and extensive nature trails.

Net play thrives in typical tennis communities and amenity-

packed master-planned communities, but now a new breed of tennis neighborhood is emerging—a tennis haven modeled much like a traditional golf club. “Atlanta has, according to United States Tennis Association data, one of the highest tennis playing populations in the country, especially along the northern corridor of I-85 to 400,” says Loren Songy, marketing director for James Creek, a tennis-themed community of 900 homes located east of Georgia 400 in Cumming. “I don’t know of any other tennis community in the area that is similar in the way that we grant membership like a golf club does,” Songy says. What makes James Creek unique is its sweeping tennis amenities and the professional way in which they are managed.

Homes in James Creek, developed by PEC Development, will range from the \$100K to \$1 million. Residents of the community will have access to the James Creek Tennis Center, a complex that will have 14 tennis courts, four indoor and two clay, stadium seating, a tennis academy with junior and adult programs, two on-site pros, league play, frequent clinics and a pro shop full of tennis gear. “This is really a fully functioning, full service tennis center that could stand on its own,” Songy says. “I think a lot of residents are interested in the tennis package—the facilities and the location are unmatched.” James Creek will also have an aquatic center, a children’s play area, a clubhouse, nature trails and pocket parks throughout the community.

The increasingly affordable quality amenities at many tennis-centered communities is making tennis living appealing to all segments of the population, from first time homebuyers to retirees and established families. Therefore, at any typical community, it is not unusual for residents to find themselves playing on a court next to a senior couple and a group of teenagers. Elaborate amenities certainly do not run themselves, but many homeowners are figuring out that yearly Homeowners Association Fees (HOAs) are more affordable than previously thought.

“Our HOA fees are typically pretty nominal, but we have to have the resources to do repairs and be able to replace a court light if it goes out,” Hughes says. Even though the fees may seem like a lot at the outset, trips to swimming pools and public tennis courts every weekend also begin to add up.

The benefits of living in a tennis community seem innumerable—good exercise, a reason to go outdoors, acquiring an new skill, an activity for children and, higher home values, but perhaps the best thing about a tennis community is the ample opportunity for socializing, meeting neighbors and making new friends.

“Tennis courts provide a central gathering place, a meeting point where people can get out of their homes so they don’t just shut their garage and go inside every night,” Hughes says. The universal popularity of tennis may be a result of the all-inclusive nature of the sport, which can be played at any age, regardless of one’s income or ability level.

“More and more people are really starting to try out tennis,” Hall says. “It’s a family sport and tennis courts provide a way for family and friends to gather together.”

With so many positive reasons to start up a game, having a court just footsteps from your own backyard may be the best way to start feeling at home in a new place. ■