



# Point BREAK

As high-end developments pop up, many wonder whether Sandpoint is the luxury market's next big thing

By MEGAN COOLEY

When it comes to hospitality, the staff at Seasons at Sandpoint, a new luxury community on Lake Pend Oreille, goes beyond the basics—to provide what they call an “effortless lifestyle.”

Planning to go skiing at Schweitzer Mountain? A Seasons driver will take you so you don't have to worry about icy roads and parking. Want to spend a summer day on the water? Simply call ahead, then arrive on the dock in your flip flops—the dock master already will have gassed up your boat, and your cooler will be stocked with sandwiches.

Lake Pend Oreille is one of the draws attracting newcomers to Sandpoint.

—PHOTO BY JEFF STRAUSS





—PHOTO COURTESY OF SEASONS AT SANDPOINT

The \$8 million clubhouse at Seasons at Sandpoint includes a living room, above, fitness center, spa, swimming pool, and dining room, where chefs can be brought in to prepare dinners for residents. Bottom left, a reminder of summer on a cold winter day at Sandpoint's City Beach. Bottom right, a skier breaks for soup at Schweitzer Mountain.

Justin Schuck, Seasons' guest services coordinator, says this level of service, in which your needs and desires aren't merely met, but anticipated, is new to the Sandpoint area.

"I get paid to make people smile," says Schuck, 26.

Seasons is one of several new upscale developments that have emerged in the Sandpoint market in the last few years, changing the area's physical landscape, as well as its culture. The high-end condominiums, townhouses, and single-family homes popping up—along with the

people who buy them—are creating a buzz in the Inland Northwest: Is Sandpoint the next Lake Tahoe, Sun Valley, or Aspen?

"It's hard to tell if it will absolutely blow up to that extent, but it definitely has the makings," says Brad Arnold, director of sales for the Idaho Club, an upscale development under way.

While some longtime Sandpoint residents profit from the influx, others long for the past. The new interest in Sandpoint has sent property values soaring, pricing some blue-collar workers, such as the construction workers erecting the new projects, out of their homes because they can't afford the higher taxes.

Michelle Goode, a server at no-frills Connie's Café in downtown Sandpoint, says that as more newcomers move in, the quaint, small-town feeling they're seeking will disappear.

"We're going to lose it," she says.

Three of the most talked about projects in the Sandpoint area right now are

Seasons at Sandpoint, Dover Bay, and the Idaho Club, where an 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course is under construction.

**Seasons at Sandpoint** is located on 2,000 feet of Lake Pend Oreille shoreline between the lake and Sandpoint's historic downtown. The project's Florida-based developer, BVG Inc., has built 40 condominiums of the 161 condominiums and townhouses it plans to construct. The residential units surround an \$8 million clubhouse.

"The folks who purchase want the casual Sandpoint experience, but when they're at their condo, they want their shoes shined, they want their boat ready. They want luxury-lifestyle service," says Harry Tishler, BVG's vice president of sales and marketing.

So far, 59 condos have sold for between \$485,000 and more than \$2 million to both local residents and buyers from Seattle, San Francisco, Florida, and

other areas.

While Seasons offers residents a piece of downtown living, the **Dover Bay** development, three miles away in Dover, Idaho, feels more like being at camp. Camp with granite countertops and Viking appliances, mind you.

Dover Bay covers 285 acres of forestland and lakeshore. It is broken into small villages of rustically designed condominiums, townhouses, and single-family custom homes on lots priced at as much as \$770,000.

In a move that has drawn accolades from some residents, developers Ralph Sletager, a Sandpoint native, and his wife, Sandy, have opened more than one-third of Dover Bay's property to the public, including its beaches, nine miles of bicycle paths, and a park on the property's highest point.

"I spent a lot of time as a kid on the city beach," Ralph says. "It's hard to state the importance of kids being able to go to a public beach."

The Sletagers also built a City Hall on the property for the city of Dover.

"Prior to this, City Hall was a file cabinet in someone's house," says Gil Morris, the Tomlinson-Black agent who's marketing Dover Bay.

**The Idaho Club**, on the Pack River eight miles north of Sandpoint, sells pre-designed "lodge homes," starting at \$700,000, and \$275,000 to \$900,000 lots for custom building. IMI, a Greenville, S.C.-based luxury real estate company, is developing the project.

Like Seasons, the Idaho Club promotes a hassle-free lifestyle. Once the project is further under way, for example, a wilderness director will be hired to lead and plan outdoor outings for residents.

"We're creating a lifestyle for our owners and guests," says Arnold, the sales director. "If they want to go pick huckleberries or go backpacking, we'll either take them or guide them."

The same goes for riding in float



—PHOTO BY CORY MURDOCK©

The Idaho Club's clubhouse, eight miles north of Sandpoint, overlooks the Pack River.





**Longtime Sandpoint residents Don Deubel, left, and Ed Smith worry that new developments are being approved too easily. The friends are pictured at Connie's Café where they've met for breakfast almost every morning since 1978.**

planes, playing tennis, or relaxing at the yet-to-be built spa.

The Idaho Club also is planning to build a marina on Lake Pend Oreille, four miles away, and will shuttle residents from the club to their boats.

So far, 80 pieces of property have sold at the Idaho Club for a total of \$45 million. Buyers primarily have been from outside markets, such as California, Arizona, and Texas, Arnold says.

Once the Idaho Club is completed, it's expected to have 210 custom homes and 150 lodge homes.

### The next Tahoe?

Lately, it's hard for Sandpoint to come up in conversation without someone predicting it will be "the next Lake Tahoe," the resort-encircled lake that straddles the Nevada-California border. The remark is made as often by locals as it is by representatives of the new developments.

The comparisons between Sandpoint and Tahoe are unmistakable. Big lake. Good skiing. Nearby golf. And so on.

One big difference, though, is the price. Tishler, of BVG and Seasons, says that a residence one could buy in Sandpoint for \$600 to \$700 per square foot would cost \$1,800 per square foot at Tahoe.

Sandpoint "is an incredible value, comparatively speaking," Tishler says, adding that a longtime luxury Realtor from Tahoe recently visited Sandpoint and bought a unit at Seasons the first day she was there.

Another Tahoe resident bought nine

parcels at Dover Bay and plans to build and sell homes there, Morris says.

Seasons, Dover Bay, and the Idaho Club aren't the only new developments in and around Sandpoint. Other projects under way include Forest Park, Northview Subdivision, Spring Creek, Spring Haven, Cedars at Sand Creek, and Crossings at Willow Bay. The city of Sandpoint recently received an application for a project at the Sandpoint Airport called Silver Wing at Sandpoint, which, if approved, would involve building airplane hangars with upscale residences above them.

"There would be a little restaurant, a fueling depot. It'd be its own private community," says Joan Bramblee, an associate planner for the city.

The growing interest in Sandpoint is evidence of what planners at a recent conference she attended called the "third coast" phenomenon, Bramblee says.

Whereas businesspeople once had to live in big cities on the east and west coasts to work for powerful companies and have successful careers, advances in technology mean they can live where they want and telecommute to the rat race. Although the term "third coast" has been used to describe many different parts of the U.S., Bramblee says the planners were refer-

ring to the Inland Northwest and western Midwest regions as becoming hot spots for such a trend.

So, has the arrival of so many newcomers at once changed the face and the feel of Sandpoint?

"I think so," says Sandpoint Mayor Ray Miller, who has lived there for 40 years. "They come in here with a higher level of expectation of services. When you have a large number of part-time residents you start to lose the sense of community."

He remembers a time, though, when Sandpoint struggled economically and begged to be recognized. The challenge now, he says, is to replace some of the good-paying logging jobs that left.

"We're working hard to attract some manufacturing and light-industry employment to balance out the (lower-paying) jobs in tourism," Miller says.

Sandpoint native Don Deubel, 67, says the Sandpoint of his childhood was "poverty country."

"We were poor, but we didn't know we were" because everyone else was, too, Deubel said, sitting with his friend, Ed Smith, 71, at the Connie's Café counter where they've met almost every morning since 1978.

The men worry that the new developments are being approved too easily. It's not the newcomers they blame, though, for the changes in Sandpoint.

"I don't like it, but in all honesty, it's the local people who were willing to sell for the high price of land," Deubel says. □



**A bumper sticker on a bicycle sums up how some people feel about the changes in Sandpoint.**

—PHOTO BY JEFF STRAUSS