

Porta del Sol mayors, hoteliers clamor for Discovery Bay Resort & Marina

After nine years in gestation, Fortaleza, Tourism Co. still on the fence about project that advocates say could make or break Porta del Sol

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It was the news heard around the Caribbean, and nowhere was it heard louder, or caused more dismay, than in Puerto Rico. "Donald Trump announces his latest interna-

wrong reasons—while the Puerto Rico Tourism Co. (PRTC) has grudgingly endorsed them, even if La Fortaleza doesn't quite know what to do with them. In an ironic twist of fate, while the PRTC has made the so-called Porta del Sol in the western region of the island per-



Developers of the Discovery Bay Resort & Marina hope to build 160 hotel rooms, 170 to 270 condo-hotel and timeshare units, a 500-boat marina and between 550 and 650 residences.

tional real estate development at Cap Cana, Dominican Republic," read the headline, comprised of "real estate luxury products to be developed representing an estimated value of over \$2 billion." After more than 15 years in development each, and stuck in permitting limbo for more than a decade, developers of the San Miguel Four Seasons and Marriott Dos Mares projects in Luquillo and Fajardo threw their hands up in exasperation. The Katz family, which has been trying to develop Costa Serena in Piñones for more than three decades, could only let out a mournful sigh. Long-time hoteliers and local tourism industry leaders like Hugh Andrews and Rick Newman tore at their hair, thinning and graying by the minute.

However, Costa Serena, Four Seasons and Dos Mares are the lucky ones. At least the public knows about them—if perhaps for the

haps its No. 1 development and marketing priority, the one large resort everyone in the region seems to agree would transform Porta del Sol from a nascent pipe dream into successful reality has failed to earn the PRTC's endorsement.

The project in question is the more-than-\$200 million Discovery Bay Resort & Marina (CB Apr. 20, 2006), nine years in the making, which would bring to the western region of the island a development it altogether lacks: not only a world-class resort on a par with the Westin Río Mar, El Conquistador and soon-to-be Gran Melía on the island's east coast, but also a 500-slip marina, the likes of which exists nowhere between Ponce and Arcibo. As Tommy Cordero, President of Cordeco Northwest and the developer behind Discovery Bay,

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25 AÑOS OFRECIÉNDOLE SEGURIDAD A PUERTO RICO.

Ocean Sixteen luxury condominium takes shape at Río Mar

Desarrollos Urbanos to begin deliveries in summer of \$65 million project adjacent to Westin Río Mar, makes use of resort facilities, rental program

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Desarrollos Urbanos, the development company responsible for projects like Ventanas de Gurabo and Maralago Villas at Palmas del Mar, is close to completing the first phase of Ocean Sixteen, a luxury condominium project comprised of 87 two-, three- and four-bedroom apartments. Prices run from the 700,000s up to \$2.8 million for condominium units ranging from 1,646 square feet. to 4,145 square feet. R-G Mortgage is providing permanent financing, Fiedler Frias Architects is in charge of architectural design and Jorge Rosselló & Associates is supervising interior design for the project.

The first of four "private clusters" of apartments should be ready for delivery in the



The first of four condominium clusters at Ocean Sixteen will be ready for delivery this summer.

summer, while the entire project is due to be completed in 2008. Desarrollos Urbanos President Adolfo González indicated some \$65

million is being invested in the project, which has created approximately 300 jobs during its construction phase.

"It is important to create a significant second-home market for foreigners, especially when located around hotels and tourist hubs," González commented. "These projects don't just stimulate the economy during the construction phase, they also attract people who spend money in hotels and create permanent jobs to provide them with all the services they require."

Ocean Sixteen owners will have access to the Westin Río Mar Beach Golf Resort & Spa, including its two championship golf courses, 13 tennis courts, 11 restaurants, Mandara Spa and concierge services.

Amenities include an owners' lounge with a large screen TV, wine cellar, billiards and bar; a gym; wading and infinity-edge pools; a spa; and water sports storage facilities. Each apartment will have two parking spaces available. Owners will also have the option of making their apartments available to the Westin Río Mar rental program, with their condos functioning as condo hotel units. ■

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points out: on that entire stretch of coast, there are at most 300 available boat slips, one-tenth of those available on the east coast.

What's even more ironic about the PRTC's inaction regarding Discovery Bay is that, unlike some of the aforementioned projects, the proposed resort has earned the unqualified support of all mayors in the region and the vast majority of residents in their respective municipalities. Even area hoteliers—who may otherwise be excused for being territorial—sing the praises of the resort, contending it would draw widespread attention to a region they term otherwise forgotten.

Although Discovery Bay will be located mostly in the Barrio Espinar area of Aguada and adjacent to Aguadilla Bay, virtually all municipalities in the Porta del Sol region stand to benefit from the project. "We have known about this project since the beginning and all the mayors in the area of Porta del Sol have been 100% behind it," Isabela Mayor Carlos Delgado Altieri (PDP) told CARIBBEAN BUSINESS. "Support for the project crosses party lines and geographical boundaries.

"There is no resort like it in Porta del Sol," he continued, "one that can attract the sort of high-end nautical tourism being siphoned off by a project like Cap Cana. To see Donald Trump put his weight behind a project like Cap Cana, while a resort like Discovery Bay languishes largely forgotten, is heartbreaking," Delgado commented, adding, "In order for Porta del Sol to be successful, we need a project like Discovery Bay."

Delgado revealed that the Costa Isabela project, which in the early 1990s was to have become

Puerto Rico's largest resort but never got off the ground, has started construction on a limited scale, beginning with two 18-hole golf courses and resort villas. He said a 500-slip marina like that proposed for Discovery Bay (with an additional 280 dry-stack spaces) would constitute an ideal complement to Costa Isabela.

"The Dominican Republic, with mega-resort projects like Cap Cana, is attracting consumers investing in second and third homes because they have a product we don't offer," maintained Aguada Mayor Berty Echevarría (NPP). "Dozens of Puerto Ricans are taking their money elsewhere because we have no options here for them, and investors like Donald Trump won't even look at Puerto Rico. In the meantime, some 70 miles away, so close we can see their lights at night, they're investing billions of dollars on a project like Cap Cana. Why can they realize such dreams there, but we can't do it here?"

"As it is," he continued, "I have to go to La Parguera with my boat right now. That shouldn't be the case."

For his part, Aguadilla Mayor Carlos Méndez Martínez (NPP) explained that beyond its potential economic impact, which includes generating some 1,500 direct and indirect jobs when operational for one of the most impoverished regions on the island, Discovery Bay will have a major social impact. He indicated that in the course of 10 years, Aguadilla paid the Army Corps of Engineers some \$100,000 to undertake a study to determine how best to deal with the frequent flooding that afflicts the municipality.

"They determined two levees would have to be built, but neither the federal nor the state government consider it a priority," Méndez explained. "In order for Discovery Bay's inland marina to

be built, the Madre Vieja river will be channeled and the two levees will contain the Culebrina river, saving some 4,000 families in Aguada and Aguadilla from the threat of constant flooding. This will be done as part of the cost of the project, at no additional cost to the federal or state governments."

Alain Tiphaine, owner and general manager of Villa Montaña Beach Resort in Isabela, looks forward to the day when Discovery Bay becomes a reality. "It would be phenomenal if it could happen," Tiphaine, a one-time head of the Puerto Rico Tourism & Hotel Association, commented. "The more hotel rooms, the more amenities, the better it is for everyone in the region."

While the mayors of Aguada and Aguadilla have endorsed Discovery Bay and their respective municipal governments have become the endorsing entities of the project before the Planning Board, Cordero indicated the agency is dragging its feet. "We delivered an environmental impact statement to them months ago, and they haven't even acknowledged its receipt," he asserted.

Cordero said that he, along with the mayors of Aguada and Aguadilla will be meeting with functionaries from La Fortaleza and the PRTC to discuss the project.

Echevarría pleaded, "Let this dream happen," while Méndez implored, "The Tourism Co. needs to work with us to make this project a reality. We had been suffering from a mental recession and now we have made that recession a reality. I call on the government agencies to get their act together and start giving us the permits we need to move forward. In the meantime, the Dominican Republic is moving further and further ahead and if we don't do something soon, we're going to be lost." ■