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Other cities try to replicate East Lake's success

Atlanta Business Chronicle - by [John Manasso](#) Staff writer

On Sept. 25 the world's top 30 pro golfers will gather at Atlanta's East Lake Golf Club for the [FedEx](#) Cup and many will marvel at the \$10 million worth of changes to the historic club.

Inevitably, many of the nearly 25,000 spectators each day will be drawn to the changes in the once-impooverished neighborhood surrounding the course.

Those behind that transformation, especially developer Tom Cousins, who bought the course in 1993 for \$4.5 million, want to export their model.

Among the cities that the [Cousins Family Foundation](#) and the [East Lake Foundation \(ELF\)](#), formed by Cousins in 1994 and which made \$6.8 million in grants in 2006, is helping is New Orleans. Cousins will act as honorary co-chair of the [Bayou District Foundation's](#) \$30 million fundraising campaign along with former U. S. president George H.W. Bush. The campaign will launch soon to help rebuild the former high-crime St. Bernard Public Housing Community along the East Lake model.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Bayou District Foundation was formed to help rebuild the parish.

Carol Naughton, the former executive director of the East Lake Foundation and, before that, general counsel of the [Atlanta Housing Authority](#), is charged with helping other cities replicate the East Lake model on behalf of the East Lake Foundation and CF Foundation.

After Cousins bought the club, among the first acts to revitalize the neighborhood came in 1996 when the city removed the notorious East Lake Meadows public housing project.

Working in conjunction with the Atlanta Housing Authority, Cousins built the mixed-income Villages at East Lake, the first phase of which was completed in 1998.

The East Lake Foundation raised the funds and built the Charlie Yates Golf Course as a training ground for neighborhood children. The first nine holes were completed in 1998 and the Drew Charter School — the Atlanta Public School's first charter school — opened in 2000. The new YMCA opened in 2001 and Publix opened a store.

The concept is that the low-income children who live in the Villages at East Lake attend the charter school and take part in The First Tee of East Lake, which has a goal of teaching character through golf. One thousand children are involved in First Tee and 2006 tax records indicate the program cost \$580,335.

Todd Rhinehart, executive director of the Tour Championship, said First Tee is among three charities that received \$1.3 million from the event in 2007. The funds go to the East Lake Foundation and both national and local First Tee organizations. Since it began in 1998, the tournament has donated more than \$7.7 million to local charities.

Naughton, now paid by the CF Foundation, said her goal is to provide technical assistance, especially in terms of the sequencing: the order in which to build the housing, schools and supporting nonprofits. She shows groups how to negotiate city councils and housing authorities as well as federal agencies like Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development while also working with the private sector.

In Memphis, a friend of Tom Cousins', Andy Cates, whose family has Atlanta ties, has sought to make a similar investment in his community, which has some of the nation's poorest ZIP codes. The model in Memphis is music.

The Cates family bought the original home of Stax Studio and have remade it into a museum.

"We have Bobby Jones as the patron," Naughton said of the legendary golfer whose home course was East Lake. "They have Isaac Hayes."

The Memphis charter school will be a 6th- through 12th-grade music academy. The nonprofit Soulsville USA — which takes its name from the neighborhood — boasts of a "\$100 million neighborhood revitalization project."

Former University of Georgia President Charles Knapp, who is the East Lake Foundation's board chairman, said the process can be daunting, but not impossible.

"What we have is a model that works that's actually been done," he said.

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