



“ The front nine is a parkland setting surrounded by beautiful live oaks and lakes. As soon as you make the turn, there’s a sharp contrast. The back is ‘links style’ built on top of an old rice field that’s completely surrounded by Lake Clara with views of the Ogeechee River. With no trees, it gives you that Scottish feel in the Lowcountry. Pete Dye created a true masterpiece. ”

— RYAN SKIPTON, DIRECTOR OF GOLF

# Horses, Not Houses

## *Our Visit to The Ford in Coastal Georgia*

By Mark Pazdur, Publisher

RICHMOND HILL, GEORGIA: Since 1903, Ford Motor Company has put the world on wheels. From the first moving assembly line and the \$5 workday to soy foam seats and aluminum truck bodies, the company has a long heritage of progress. Throughout its 117-year history, Ford has stepped up and made contributions in times of need. From bombers in WWII to more recently ventilators, vehicles are not the only items to come out of Ford factories.

In the early 1920s, Henry Ford began looking for a place to establish his winter home. He felt crowded by the rapidly growing population in Florida, so when his friend and famed naturalist John Burroughs recommended coastal Georgia, it raised his eyebrow.

Ford purchased massive amounts of land to the south of Savannah, eventually accumulating 85,000 acres covering 120 square miles. In 1936, he broke ground on the 7,000 square-foot Greek revival-style mansion on the banks of the Ogeechee River.

### *OUR FAMILY’S EXPERIENCE*

Today, The Ford is a private community with a laundry list of amenities including a Pete Dye golf course, large equestrian facilities, and expected fitness facilities with pickleball courts, an indoor squash court, and a heated lap pool. What’s unexpected is its expansive outdoor programming with an onsite, deep water marina and full-time naturalist led by Brittany Dodge—a true “rock star” staff member.

In August, my family had the opportunity to experience the history and luxury of one of America’s most exclusive and well-regarded private clubs. I was most interested in learning more about The Ford’s origins. Most of its peer communities in the Lowcountry have history dating back a couple of decades. Here, history is measured in centuries.

Our flights from California to Georgia were uneventful. The size of The Ford—at more than 1,800 acres provides plenty of room to exhale. During our four days



## The Henry Ford Era

Built in the 1930s by Clara and Henry Ford, The Main House served as a focal point for entertainment. Today, cookies and cocktails prove to be a popular diversion.

(Top right) Henry Ford sitting on the steps of the Main House. (Bottom right) Ford in his laboratory. (Below) Orchestra playing for an audience.



## The Pazdur Experience 90 Years Later

When Henry Ford selected Georgia over Florida for his winter retreat, many friends questioned why he would choose a “backwards” destination. Ford attached a sign above the door the oyster house with Georgia spelled backward to poke fun at the reference.

(Left) Mark and JoAnn enjoying the pool at The Main House, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. (Left page, bottom center) Nikki at the equestrian center.



(Above) Katie and JoAnn touring the oyster house. (Left) Access to the Atlantic Ocean is 20 minutes away. The Ford has a marina and five club owned boats. During our nighttime gator spotting, Katie got close with wildlife.

of exploration we took advantage of night time gator spotting, a boat excursion to uninhabited Wassau Island, golf on the Pete Dye course, and spa treatments. After working up an appetite, each evening we indulged in fine meals with the corn poblano soup being our top pick.

“We pride ourselves as being one of 44 in the United States to be affiliated with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program,” lauded Marc Ray, general manager at The Ford. “Our history can’t be replicated and we understand the commitment required to maintain The Ford for generations to come. Preserving such a large parcel of land to exacting Audubon standards requires

forethought. Our golf course agronomy team has been able to maintain pristine conditioning with limited irrigation. In fact, two years ago, we went 131 days without having to turn sprinklers on. On average we utilize 40 percent less water than the USGA recommends for acreage of our size.

“The quality of the amenities will always stand on their own. What we want our members and guests to experience is the friendly, relaxed sense of community that makes Ford different. The culture is the magic that other clubs will never be able to duplicate.” ■

*For more on The Ford, please call (912) 756-2742.*