

# Butler Eagle

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## St. Barnabas has teed up a winner in Penn Township

It takes just a little imagination to see where the St. Barnabas Health System is going with its acquisition of two golf courses in Penn Township.

This is especially so with the assurance that neither course will close. Officials with the retirement living company say they'll continue to operate the [Conley Resort](#) and the adjoining [Suncrest Golf Course](#) and both courses will continue to be open to the public. Wayne Conley, soon-to-be former owner of Conley Resort, says St. Barnabas plans to "increase their presence in the hospitality industry."

What Conley doesn't say, the public can speculate. Retirees love golf. At time-share and retirement communities primarily across the South, countless retirees live in elegant homes around the perimeter of manicured courses. Many of them pay for the privilege of stepping onto the course any time.

Toss in a 56-room hotel and indoor water park for visiting kids and grandchildren, and you have a resort community catering to golfing retirees right here in Butler County. The only thing lacking is the elegant housing. That's the likely but still unstated next development. There's plenty of undeveloped land surrounding both courses that would be suitable for building houses and condos.

St. Barnabas appears to have targeted Penn Township for a new venture. Founded more than 115 years ago, its mission always has been to help retirees live comfortably at a price they can afford. It is one of the region's largest health care systems.

St. Barnabas has suburban campuses in Gibsonia, Allegheny County, Valencia, Butler County and Beaver Meadows in Beaver County. None of those locations includes a golf course.

Given the multitude of retiring baby-boomers who are passionate about golf, it makes tremendous sense to develop a retirement community that caters to them. A report of the golf course deal in Sunday's Butler Eagle included concerns about converting the courses to nonprofit status, meaning they no longer would be subject to property tax.

But any loss would be offset by increased construction and business payroll that would come with the development of a large retirement community.

By every indication, development is St. Barnabas' intention for the side-by-side golf course it just acquired. And it should be a welcome development.