

LEADERS

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TURLOV

Increasing Human Connection

An Interview with Tommy Southworth, President, Southworth

EDITORS' NOTE Tommy Southworth first worked for Southworth Development as a cart boy at Willowbend Country Club, at age 14. His many childhood roles for the company included greens-keeper, bartender, pool manager, and banquet set-up. Later, he worked in project capacities at both Machrihanish Dunes and The Abaco Club. Southworth received his AB from Harvard College before joining Needham & Company as an Investment Banking Analyst, ultimately becoming a Vice President. He then joined Blue Star Innovation Partners, a start-up private equity firm, as a founding Partner, before returning to Southworth as CFO, and ultimately President.



Tommy Southworth

COMPANY BRIEF Southworth (southworthclubs.com) develops, owns and operates luxury club communities. Located in Boston, Southworth currently owns and operates private clubs and residential communities across North America, the Caribbean, and Europe.

Will you highlight the history of Southworth and how you define the company's mission?

Southworth is a privately held lifestyle company founded in 1991 that specializes in the development and management of luxury private clubs and highly amenitized and programmed residential communities. We first developed a community called Willowbend on Cape Cod. The owner back then was Paul Fireman, Chairman and CEO of Reebok, who launched Willowbend as both a passion project and a mission-driven club aimed at modernizing some of golf's stuffy and discriminatory traditions. We are proud to have honored a legacy of inclusivity – at exclusive clubs – ever since.

Three decades and a few dozen projects later, we remain a mission-driven organization. Our mission today is to increase human connection – in club communities that are uniquely warm, inspiring, and engaging. Sociologists note that the “decline of the American community” – the disappearance of civic organizations, churches, fraternal organizations, etc. – has led to less positive engagement, especially when paired with the proliferation of technology. Meanwhile, clubs – and particularly golf clubs

and country clubs – live on. We firmly believe that the work we do benefits not only our members, but also the broader society by encouraging and enriching discourse, togetherness, and basic human connection. Bringing this mission to life is the fun part. From our development strategies to our innovative operations and service, from our marketing to the values that we set and reinforce through our member selection (and member discipline), we are obsessively intentional about fostering positive human connection.

Our offerings have also evolved over the years. We've refocused our efforts on innovation in the form of sustainability, philanthropy, a shift to an experience-first mentality, and much more. We have codified our founding principles and belief system into a member code of conduct – The Southworth Way – that is unique in the industry, serving to foster positive relationships, encourage togetherness, and allow each member and employee to feel welcomed, recognized, and valued.

The goal is to create exceptional and impactful communities for all members across the Southworth portfolio. My absolute favorite KPI is the number of weddings (2) across second generation members (our members' children, who met at our clubs). Another sign of our impact, not to be morbid, is the many times we have been mentioned in our members' obituaries. Our club communities are key threads in the tapestries of our members' lives.

We're thrilled to be embarking on a new chapter of the company with our recent announcement of about \$475 million worth of reinvestments over the next five years into the majority of Southworth's current global portfolio. These updates are already underway or completed at several clubs and include nearly \$75 million in new amenities added across the portfolio over the next five years and another estimated \$400 million in residential development.

How do you describe Southworth's culture and how important has it been to maintain a family feel as the company has grown in size and scale?

This is one of my favorite questions. I've had the incredible and unique opportunity to watch my father run the company alongside Joe Deitch (father of my childhood friend, Matt Deitch) for many years, so stepping into this new role

holds a lot of weight for me – and I mean that in the best way possible. Maintaining a “family first” approach is crucial to us and that's why our new vision for Southworth further emphasizes our foundational principles rooted in inclusion, community, family and, of course, fun.

Another core and differentiating element of the Southworth DNA is that we develop, own and operate our communities for the long haul – we don't build and run. Many of us at the leadership level of Southworth, myself included, actually have homes in our communities and spend our most precious family time there. Because of this real first-hand experience and the desire to put down roots in these communities as active members and residents, we are always striving for ways to improve and enhance our club operations. More importantly, we have the long-term interests of the community in mind. Thinking on 20-30+ year timelines and considering all stakeholders – homeowners, members, employees, and the local community – forces us to maintain a family feel, in the best of ways.

Will you provide an overview of Southworth's existing portfolio?

While Southworth executive offices are headquartered in Boston, we currently own and operate private clubs and residential communities across North America, the Caribbean and Europe. We have Willowbend; Renaissance on Boston's North Shore; Meredith Bay on New Hampshire's Lake Winnepesaukee; Creighton Farms outside Middleburg, Virginia; Machrihanish Dunes in Argyll, Scotland; and The Abaco Club, located on Great Abaco Island in The Bahamas.

One of our newest and most exciting development projects right now is The Cays at The Abaco Club. Designed by world-renowned design firm, AvroKO, this new neighborhood will open phase one in Summer 2024. We announced the addition of 36 beachfront villa residences in November 2021 and we're thrilled to see the first phase completed in the coming year. This development marks the next chapter for the club's coveted private beachfront, and includes the addition of a beachfront club amenity, aptly named The Winding Bay Beach Club. A sophisticated and authentically Bahamian sanctuary of beachfront living, The Cays is set to redefine barefoot luxury – from the architecture to the amenities – with master planning and landscape by Vita, Inc. and interiors by visionary design firm, AvroKO. Vita, Inc. is known for developing unforgettable environments capable of



The Abaco Club, located on Great Abaco Island in The Bahamas

immersing owners and guests in the authentic culture and beauty of their surroundings.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth for Southworth?

Across our existing portfolio, there is exciting growth in store relating to our reciprocity program and corporate concierge services. A side benefit to long-term ownership and management of our clubs is the ability to offer limited access to the entire Southworth portfolio to members at all communities. We have recently launched a concierge layer aimed at enhancing this program – and offering additional member services – and look forward to bridging connections across the Southworth platform – from Scotland to The Bahamas.

As we look to the future, there are many exciting opportunities for growth. We fundamentally exist at the intersection of luxury private residential communities and extraordinary clubs – we are a hybrid development and hospitality company. As we look ahead many years and follow global trends, there are a wealth of opportunities to iterate on our historically golf-centric model. Where will future generations look to build their communities – to make their connections? We have lots of fun ideas in store.

How important has it been to build the Southworth team?

One of my first lessons in leadership was to surround myself with folks smarter than me – and with people I want to spend time with. Our team is extraordinary – from our longest-standing employees (some have been with us since the very beginning!) to everyone hired along the way. Over the past several years we have added to the team significantly, with an eye towards evolving our brand and positioning for growth. Alongside my counterpart, Managing Principal Matt Deitch, we appointed an Executive Leadership team to help execute our vision, and they are rock stars.

We’ve also created several new roles that truly speak to Southworth’s updated ethos and brand. For example, Eleanor Brown has been brought on board as the Director of Sustainability, overseeing sustainability initiatives for the entirety of Southworth. Additionally, James Dunn has the

role of Director of Member Experience, focusing on the “experience-first” mentality of Southworth, always exceeding expectations with unique member programming, activations, and amenities.

What do you see as Southworth’s responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and resides in?

This has been a major area of focus for us over the past several years, and I’m thrilled to see some of the progress we’ve made. Our version of “sustainability” – informed very much by the aforementioned Eleanor Brown – is as much about supporting the local community as it is the environment. We believe they go hand in hand.

In 2022, for example, we launched a philanthropy initiative called Willowbend Gives – a “giving circle” that has contributed nearly \$200,000 to 10 local causes. Most importantly, it has connected us to local organizations and changemakers. Our members are incredibly philanthropic, but often their efforts are focused on their primary communities. We are thrilled to educate our members on the many incredible opportunities to give back to their second and third communities – and the members have embraced this with passion. In addition to the grants we’ve made, we’ve hosted multiple well-attended volunteer days for our members. This platform – alongside a corporate giving initiative – is being replicated across our portfolio.

Every year we launch new efforts aimed at supporting our local communities. This year’s efforts were focused on fostering youth sports (particularly golf), promoting local vendors at various pop-up events, and highlighting the efforts of local chefs.

On the environmental side, we engage through protection of biodiversity in these local communities and make conscious decisions to reduce any possible negative impact. At Willowbend and Creighton Farms, we promote growth of native plants that support local and migratory wildlife that may be losing habitat elsewhere, such as milkweed for monarch butterflies and housing for resident hawks, bald eagles and osprey. At Renaissance, we are working with a Boston-based company on rebuilding honeybee colonies – honeybees are critical to the human

food chain, pollinating 75 percent of our crops. And at The Abaco Club, we actively protect the habitat and nesting areas of our beautiful club icon, The Abaco Parrot, as well as restoring endangered coral reef in partnership with the Perry Institute for Marine Science and their Reef Rescue Network to create our very own Winding Bay Coral Nursery.

This is just a handful of examples of what our dedicated team does on a daily basis to responsibly engage with the communities where we reside.

How do you focus your efforts leading Southworth and how do you describe your management style?

One of my favorite parts of my job is the multi-faceted nature of it – I am constantly jumping from the realm of hospitality (service, vibe) to development (business development, master planning) to sales and marketing (brand partnerships, prospect engagement). It can also be inefficient though – I constantly remind myself to work on the business, not in the business. My best days involve a combination of organizational design, management of our talented executive team, and long-term strategy.

As for management style – I’ve never liked that question. It reminds me that I do have a very specific style (I’m a “Persuader,” according to Predictive Index) – and that can be a weakness. I think the best managers have many styles in their toolbox.

What are your priorities for Southworth as you look to the future?

My mandate is to build a company that’s big, profitable and fun – it’s a great job. From year-to-year I define those mandates a bit differently. As I look ahead to 2024:

- Big: Strategically grow and develop our brand in new and sought-after destinations around the world.
- Profitable: Grow the organization efficiently and effectively, ensuring that we build repeatable and scalable processes.
- Fun: Twofold: 1) Continue driving innovation in ways that enhance our member experience; and 2) Ensure that our corporate culture is as strong as ever. ●