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## ThursdayStyles

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### Fitness

# Location, Location, Location: A Key to Good Health, Too

By DEBORAH BLUMENTHAL

**R**OLL out of bed and swallow your customized vitamins, then decide: the gym, the Olympic-size pool or the track?

Workout left you sore? The personal trainer can stop by later with the massage therapist, and the nutritionist can help fine-tune your diet.

What's that suspicious mole on your arm? Walk to the clinic and have the dermatologist take a look. Don't worry about cooking dinner; the healthy food service will drop off broiled salmon.

That, anyway, is the vision of Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, the cardiovascular fitness expert whose 1968 best seller, "Aerobics," put the word into the wellness lexicon.

Over the course of almost 40 years, Dr. Cooper, 76, one of President Bush's personal physicians, has become something of a chief spokesman for preventive medicine, inspiring legislation for mandatory physical education for Texas schoolchildren, crusading to ban trans fats from prepared foods, and running his flagship clinic in Dallas, the Cooper Aerobics Center, which has published 600 papers.

So you could say he made his bed. Now he wants you to sleep in it.

To that end, Dr. Cooper is developing a \$2 billion residential wellness community here called Cooper Life at Craig Ranch that is going up on the first 51 of an eventual 151 acres on the Texas plains, north of Dallas.

Taking the concept of spa real estate into the medical realm, Dr. Cooper's community promises home buyers a life that sounds equal parts Norman Rockwell and Olympic village: a small town where doctors will make house calls and where every resident has a bevy of experts close at hand for keeping in tiptop shape.

It appears to be the first of its kind. "There's nothing out there like Cooper Life," said Susie Ellis, president of Spa



**THE GOOD LIFE** A digital rendering of the Cooper Life community.

Finder Inc., a media marketing company that tracks the spa industry.

Included in the monthly residential fee (\$1,041 for an individual to \$2,181 for a family of six) will be an annual physical and a six-month follow-up, which Dr. Cooper calls key to his utopian vision of a place where everyone can live in peak health. The fee also includes home doctor visits, a fitness center membership, concierge services and exterior home maintenance, lectures and social activities.

While a diverse mix of ages and fitness levels are welcome, Dr. Cooper admits that many prospective residents may well be baby boomers with cushy bank accounts. "They've got the money," Dr. Cooper said, "now they want to live long enough to enjoy it."

The first 800 private homes, town houses, brownstones and midrise condominiums are priced from \$400,000 to \$2 million; another 1,250 homes are planned for an adjacent parcel, alongside a completed athletic training center named for the Olympic sprinter Michael Johnson. The community will also include a hospital and research institute,

parks, gardens, three schools, shops, offices, restaurants and a hotel.

None of the homes, which officially go on sale next month, are completed, though there are more than 200 interested buyers. Dr. Cooper expects the first residents to arrive in January.

Joe Mendelson, 69, an investment professional from Santa Barbara, Calif., and a patient of Dr. Cooper's for nearly 40 years, heads the list of interested buyers.

"He told me about this concept several years ago and I said, 'Man, that's for me,'" Mr. Mendelson said. "I eat right, I exercise, I coach and I've been an athlete all my life, so it kind of fits my lifestyle."

At Cooper Life, Mr. Mendelson plans to coach seniors and race walkers. "I'll keep busy," he said. "I won't just sit all day and eat salads."

Dr. Cooper, who routinely buttresses his statements about fitness by rattling off statistics, said a yearly physical is "the best life insurance you can buy." (Some may argue that not having to wait days or waste lunch hours for doctor's appointments at Cooper Life is what will really add years to lives.)

Residents will still need health insurance because medicines, specialists and surgical procedures are extra, as are nutrition consultants, personal trainers and food service. The fitness center, which includes the pool, a 10,000-square-foot workout area, an indoor running track, a rock-climbing wall and a spa, is already open to the public. So is the clinic.

Cooper Life residents and outsiders will also have access to specialists in disciplines including cardiology, dermatology and sports medicine. Dr. Gail Lebovic, a breast surgeon, will direct the women's health clinic, which will offer special care for women at high risk of breast cancer.

For Dr. Cooper, the project is more than an elite community for the health-minded. It will also be a testing ground.

"It's my Framingham study," said Dr. Cooper, referring to the federal study of cardiovascular disease that has followed the population of Framingham, Mass., for decades. "Over the next 25 years, can we prove that people who live at Cooper Life will live longer and healthier, that children will make better grades at school, and that costs of health care will be less?"

Some medical experts were unsure just what such an undertaking could prove.

Dr. Nicholas A. Christakis, a medical sociology professor at Harvard who recently published a study of how people's weight can be influenced by their friends, said that if a wellness community succeeded it might be hard to say why. Was it because the self-selecting population who lived there were already of a like mind? Or, he wondered, would it show that "the association caused some like-mindedness?"

Others were concerned about the broader message that such a luxury wellness community might convey. Dr. David Satcher, a former surgeon general and the director of the Center of Excellence on Health Disparities at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, said that while he supported anything that furthers wellness, he also cautioned, "I don't want people to think you need that kind of money to invest to adopt a healthy lifestyle."

Dr. James O. Hill, the director of the Center for Human Nutrition, funded by the National Institutes of Health, said he loved the idea. "The community we live in probably influences our behavior more than anything else," he said. "It may be one of the only ways that will make a difference in the health of Americans."

The utopian venture — built and financed by Wellstone Communities, a



MARK GRAHAM FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

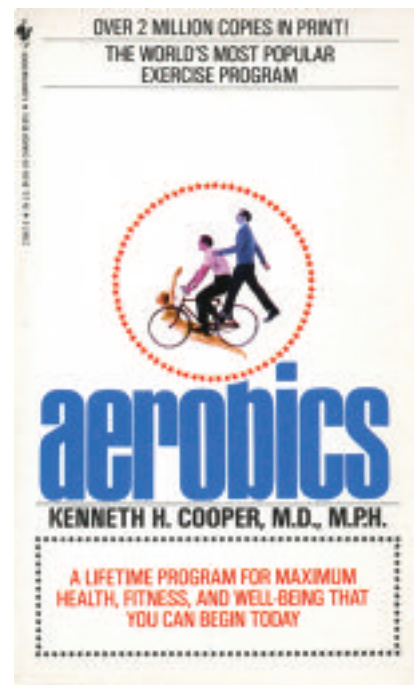
*Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, the fitness expert whose 1968 best seller, "Aerobics," put the word into the wellness lexicon, and his son, Dr. Tyler C. Cooper.*

Georgia real estate developer that put up \$2 billion — is part of a wider movement to integrate spas and wellness centers with residential communities to attract affluent, convenience-loving home buyers. Miraval Life in Balance, based in Tucson, is opening a 41-story condo tower on the East Side of Manhattan this fall, and Canyon Ranch has put up a condominium and hotel complex in Miami Beach.

Dr. Cooper recently wrote his 19th book, called "Start Strong, Finish Strong" (Avery, 2007) with his son, Dr. Tyler C. Cooper, 37, the president of Cooper Life, and they plan to continue

***A planned community  
where doctors will even  
make house calls.***

their collaboration. The McKinney project is a prototype for what could eventually be 5 to 10 other communities worldwide, said Tyler Cooper — places to attract people like Nancy Cummings, 58, a manager for American Airlines from suburban Dallas. Like many of her generation, she is focused on "staying young forever." Besides the chance to meet like-minded neighbors, what Ms. Cummings likes most about Cooper Life —



where she hopes to buy a town house — is the idea that she can leave her car parked.

"It's an exciting concept, to walk out your door and have restaurants, parks, physical amenities and medical facilities," she said. "It's sort of like Europe: everybody walks everywhere."