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Doral now a major player -- and not just in golf

By YUDY PINEIRO

When Tiger Woods steps onto the putting green Thursday at the Doral Golf Resort and Spa for his first major competition in nearly a year, the eyes of the world will fall not only on the famed Blue Monster course, but the city that grew around it.

Doral, a place people from all over the globe call home, has emerged as a major player in the business world -- especially the Latin American market -- with most multinational corporations enjoying some sort of local presence. The wide array of eateries and activities adds to the five-year-old city's appeal.

Last summer, CNN Money named Doral one of the Top 100 U.S. cities to live in and launch a new business.

Starting Thursday, the city's worldliness will be on display as golf fans in more than 140 countries tune into the 2009 World Golf CA Championship at Doral, where about 100,000 are expected to visit to see their favorite golf pros, including Woods.

"At one time, Doral was just a golf course," said Frank Nero, president of The Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's economic development agency. "And clearly it's a lot more more than that now."

Long a quaint, golf course community, Doral has evolved into a multicultural hub where thousands of people live, work, learn and play.

Because people who hail from Venezuela and Colombia to the far reaches of Spain find comfort in Doral, many have taken to referring to the city as a mini-United Nations. That international flair is apparent in every city block, graced by Latin American restaurants and nightlife. The top-rated schools and parks add to the city's appeal.

"We've got it all here," said Luis Schilling, 50, co-owner of El Arepazo, which serves Venezuelan comfort food with a side of politics. "Our city is very complete."

BUSINESS BOOST

Doral's biggest boost: Its growing business community, which it owes to its proximity to Miami International Airport and three major highways.

Doral features 22,000 businesses of Miami-Dade's 185,000 establishments. Those businesses employ roughly 150,000 people, a significant percentage of the county's workforce, according to The Beacon Council.

Major companies such as Carnival Cruise Lines and CVS Pharmacy call Doral home as does the U.S. Southern Command. The Defense Department played a huge role in Doral's growth when it relocated the joint command post to the city. More than 1,200 military and civilian personnel work there and hundreds more visit yearly.

THE 'BLUE MONSTER'

"Being a city has helped create the sense of community that has helped us go beyond just a golf course community," said Mayor Juan Carlos Bermudez. "But we're proud to be the home of the Blue Monster."

Even as Doral comes of age, it cannot deny its roots lie in golf and the resort, which opened in 1962 when the area was nothing more than swampland and dairy farms.

When the city incorporated in 2003, it was a no-brainer to keep the name that made it famous: Doral, a combination of hotel founders' names Doris and Alfred Kaskel.

Nearly 80 players representing 20 different countries are expected to play at the WGC-CA Championship, a 72-hole PGA Tour event that runs from today through Sunday. The tour will feature 50 of the world's top golfers.

For Woods, who held the Doral title for three consecutive years until 2008, this will be his first major comeback since his knee reconstruction in June.

"It's an international event in an international region," said Eddie Carbone, executive director of the World Golf CA Championship at Doral. ``It's perfect."