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Visit the big man's big house

Ever seen a 26,000-square-foot home? Now you can. Ex-NBA player Matt Geiger is opening his new mansion for a fundraiser.

By RICHARD DANIELSON, Times Staff Writer

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EAST LAKE -- The big man plans to show off Pinellas County's biggest house in a big way.

In the 4-1/2 years that former NBA player Matt Geiger's mansion has been under construction, the public has gotten few glimpses inside the 26,000-square-foot home.

That will change, at least for the ticket-buying public, on June 28. That evening, Geiger has agreed to host a charity fundraiser organized by the Greater Palm Harbor Area Chamber of Commerce.

Up to 500 people will pay \$100 each to attend a New Orleans-themed party at the recently finished mansion on Old Keystone Road. Along with the chamber, the proceeds are expected to benefit several charities still being discussed, said Geiger's attorney, Robert Eckard of Palm Harbor.

Geiger, 33, moved into the house late last year. This will be the first public event he has hosted.

"This is kind of a coup," said attorney Walt Blenner, a past chamber president who chairs the committee organizing the event. He and chamber president Connie Davis toured the home Jan. 17. They left agog.

"I used to watch the program Dallas, and when we were pulling up, this is what came into my mind," Davis said. "I was so busy looking at the entrance and the architecture, I just stood there with my mouth open."

Blenner said the place was "beyond description," though he agreed to try.

"The grounds are massive," he said. "The house is three stories tall. Matt Geiger is 7 feet (tall), so everything in the house is basically supersized."

The Friday afternoon that they arrived, "the huge wrought-iron gates opened and we see this large lake with three Wave Runners parked on the shore, next to his full-sized putting green. As you approach the house, there are a number of very nice SUVs in the driveway, as well as a helicopter sitting on the front lawn. The helicopter, by the way, belonged to a visitor who was there for a day.

"This is something you don't see every day in Palm Harbor."

Much of the party will take place on the first floor of the home.

"In his downstairs area, he has basically a full discotheque, a bistro kitchen, an enclosed cigar bar/game room with a big card table, a sunken living room, a full-sized gym/sauna/spa," Blenner said. "He's got a fireplace and family room in addition to the disco area. This is all on the one floor, and he's got a theater. In addition, there is a huge salt water aquarium complete with a shark that must be about 21/2 feet long."

Geiger's mansion is the largest home in Pinellas County and, next to corporate raider Paul Bilzerian's 28,400-square-foot home in Tampa, one of the largest in Tampa Bay.

So far, the place might be best known as the home of Geiger's pet bison, Big Daddy. Last year, the beast jumped two fences and somehow got over two cattle crossings. Big Daddy spent three days on the run before being captured and returned to the 100-acre estate.

A former Countryside High star athlete, Geiger played professional basketball for 10 seasons. In 1999, he signed a six-year, \$52-million contract with the Philadelphia 76ers, but he retired two years ago because of an arthritic condition in both knees.

Last year, Geiger said he has worked in the development business with his father and one of his brothers since his retirement from basketball.

Eckard said several groups, both profit and nonprofit, have approached Geiger about booking his home for events.

"If the right opportunity and the right cause comes along, he'll consider it," Eckard said. "It's not something he's actively seeking to do. He's a guy who enjoys his privacy."

For the Palm Harbor chamber's party, tickets will cost \$100 per person or \$175 per couple until June 1. Any tickets that remain after that will cost \$120 per person. No tickets will be sold at the door. The party is expected to include valet parking, Mardi Gras beads, a silent auction, live band, food from 15 to 20 restaurants, cash bar and tarot card and palm readers.

During talks with the chamber officials, someone asked whether the place could accommodate 500 people.

"He said at the millennium, Dec. 31, 1999, he had over 500 people at his poolside," Blenner said.

For tickets

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