

July 30, 1997

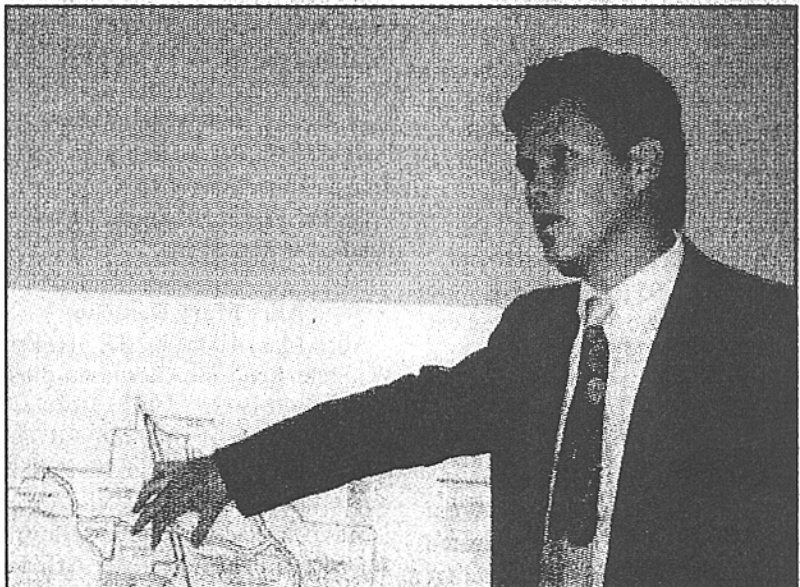
Lt. Gov. MacKay visits Clermont



PAT FLOOD/South Lake Press

ABOVE: Hospital administrator Shannon Elswick points out the location of various planned facilities on South Lake Hospital property east of Clermont. Looking on are property owner Daryl Carter, Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay and Lake-Sumter Community College Vice President Ken Stack.

RIGHT: Daryl Carter, whose family owns the Skytop tract, explains the family's plans for land surrounding the site of the new South Lake Hospital and the branch campus of Lake-Sumter Community College and the University of Central Florida. Preliminary plans call for a golf course community, commercial buildings, single-family housing and apartments.



Partnerships "unprecedented," MacKay says.

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By Pat Flood
South Lake Press

Florida Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay spent last Thursday morning speaking to residents of northern Lake County.

By the time he reached South Lake Thursday afternoon, he was all ears.

MacKay visited Clermont July 24 to get a sneak peek at the new South Lake Wellness Center and to hear about the cooperation that made that facility – and plans for half a dozen more – possible. Meeting with MacKay were mostly city, hospital and college officials.

"You can't keep the area the same, but you can keep quality high," MacKay said, commenting on growth in the area.

Relying on public and private sectors to control quality, "works a little better than government regulation," said MacKay.

South Lake Hospital's Chief Executive Officer, Shannon Elswick, guided MacKay's entourage through the Wellness Center, pointing out the medical offices, exercise rooms, conference rooms and areas for physical therapy and rehabilitation.

After the tour, Elswick explained the network of partnerships that has helped create the wellness center as well as plans for a new hospital, college campus, assisted living facility and athletic training center on property east of Clermont.

About 2-1/2 years ago, the Carter family donated 40 acres out of their 1,257-acre Skytop tract to Lake-Sumter Community College for a South Lake campus.

Earlier this year, University of Central Florida officials announced plans to join LSCC on the branch campus.

"With the university involved, 40 acres would not contain the growth," said Ken Stack, vice president of LSCC.

The Carters agreed to swap the land for 40 acres nearer the hospital, donate an additional 27 acres and sell another 60 acres to the college.

Since Lake-Sumter can currently afford only \$600,000 of the \$1.2 million price tag, the hospital bought half the acreage and will re-sell it to the college over the next several years.

"Our board is a community-oriented board," Elswick explained.

"All of this is unprecedented," MacKay said.

"We've been pinching ourselves," said attorney George Hovis, who is drawing up the contract.

Elswick also pointed out the hospital's partnership with USA Triathlon, the national triathlon-governing board, which is moving its headquarters and training center to Clermont.

"In the year 2000 in Sydney, when you're watching the athletes compete, those athletes will have been trained right here in Clermont," Elswick said.

Orlando Regional Healthcare Systems, of which South Lake Hospital is a part, has agreed to build an Olympic-size swimming pool, field houses, athletic dorms, large recreation areas and field spaces.

After construction is complete, the cooperation will continue.

"The college could support a swim team right out of our facility," Elswick said.

In addition, Lake-Sumter and the University of Central Florida will offer health care courses, which will benefit from the proximity to the hospital.

"There's no reason we also couldn't roll out the graduate programs," Elswick said.

The athletic facilities will be available to the community first, but will receive rental income from other Olympic sports and from other countries' athletic teams which wish to train in Clermont.

Also on the hospital property will be an assisted living facility and medical office spaces.

"It all started with a dream," Elswick said.

Daryl Carter, whose family owns the tract – aptly named Skytop because of its elevation – said plans for the remaining acreage would complement the hospital/college plans.

Much of the land will be developed into housing, including 470 acres which will become a golfing/retirement community, he said.

Another site will be available for an elementary school, he said.

By the time the land is ready for development, water and sewer will be available, said City Manager Wayne Saunders.

Carter said developing land is an uphill battle in many communities, but not in Clermont.

"The people here are pitching in. It's been a real partnership," he said.

Elswick compared the overall plans to walking the Yellow Brick Road in "The Wizard of Oz."

"The closer you get to Oz, the more people who are tagging along," he said.

MacKay commented that in many areas, separate entities experience turf wars rather than cooperation.

"A lot of it's been on a handshake, too," Carter said.

"This is about economic development," MacKay said. "It's fascinating. What a great vision. This took some leadership at every level to get this done."

After visiting the land in question, MacKay vowed to tout Clermont as a positive example for others around the state.

"I plan to send some people down to look at this," he said.