

HOMES ON RANCH MAY MEAN MORE CARS DEVELOPMENT EAST OF ST. CLOUD WILL BE HAVEN FOR ANIMAL LOVERS

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ST. CLOUD - Plans are continuing to develop the 10,084-acre Triple E Ranch east of St. Cloud and that likely will mean more traffic through town.

The property, on U.S. Highway 192 about five miles east of St. Cloud, was sold last year for \$25.6 million to a group that includes Orlando financial consultant James Lentz. The group bought the property as Birchwood Acres Ltd.

The land was approved in 1990 for development of 4,824 residential units and 1 million square feet of commercial space.

The sellers were Maury L. Carter, president of the Orlando real estate brokerage Maury L. Carter & Associates Inc., and other investors he would identify only as being from the Orlando area and out of state, including from Switzerland.

They bought the ranch in 1983 for \$8.65 million.

Eight years ago, Carter announced plans for development of the tract, and the group got government approval.

The group spent several hundred thousand dollars in engineering and planning fees, Carter said.

Meanwhile, the property remained a working cattle ranch and citrus producer.

"We're basically land investors," Carter said. "When we can find others to develop land, we're glad to take a profit and move on."

He said the group would have developed the property had a buyer not been found.

The land has two 500-acre lakes and about eight miles of frontage on U.S. 192, Carter said.

Homes could be for sale in late 2000.

No one knows exactly how much traffic the development will produce, but the issue of whether to build a bypass was a St. Cloud campaign issue in the recent elections.

Another issue that's been discussed is whether two-lane Narcoossee Road, east of the city, should be widened.

The development will not only bring more people, it will bring animals.

The Harmony Institute, a nonprofit organization that examines interaction between people and animals, is moving from Orange County to the planned development.

The plans also include the relocation of the Back to Nature Wildlife Refuge from Bithlo to Osceola County.

The institute will have 1,400 acres on which to expand.

From built-in containers that hold 25 pounds of pet food to "pet concierge" services for baby-sitting felines and canines, the development is designed for people with critters, officials said.

The community will be a haven for animal lovers and a living example of how pets and nature affect peoples' lives, they said.

It's designed to be a place where residents and others can spend spare time volunteering at the neighborhood refuge, officials said.

They can help nurse wounded animals back to health or attend wildlife photography, equestrian or animal therapy seminars at the institute's Albert Schweitzer campus.

When homeowners in the community are away, the institute will offer pet bathing and walking services and even an on-call assistant who can feed a pet when a resident is working late.

[Illustration]

Caption: PHOTO: Crowded roads. Traffic is already congested in St. Cloud. New development on the city's east side, including homes on the Triple E Ranch property, will only add to the problem. ED SACKETT/THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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