

Splendid China Attraction Site Trades for \$40M

Friday, May 20, 2005

By Alex Finkelstein

ORLANDO-Rolling Oaks Investment Properties LLLP, a locally based consortium headed by Darryl M. Carter and Jeffrey R. Douglas, has acquired the prime 366-acre Splendid China attraction site for \$40.2 million. The shuttered 330-room Days Inn Maingate was included in the sale.

Rolling Oaks paid the China Travel Service of Hong Kong, a direct agency of the Chinese government, \$109,836 per acre, or \$2.52 per sf, for the property on US 192 West in the core of the Orlando tourist corridor. Area brokers familiar with available developable land near Splendid China tell GlobeSt.com the tract will probably be resold within a year for at least five times the purchase amount.

Carter, a trustee with Carter-Palm Parkway Land Trust, last week sold Orlando timeshare magnate David A. Siegel a 50-acre tract near Siegel's Westgate Lakes Resort in south Orlando for \$22.5 million or \$450,000 per acre (\$10.33 per sf). Carter's group made a 100% return on equity on the deal after buying the land 13 months earlier for \$12 million or \$240,000 per acre (\$5.50 per sf), as GlobeSt.com previously reported.

Area industrial brokers familiar with the Splendid China site tell GlobeSt.com Carter is expected to hold his newly acquired dirt for a year or so, as he did with the Siegel tract, before flipping it to a developer of mixed-use or resort properties. Carter and Douglas couldn't be reached by GlobeSt.com's publication deadline.

"Darryl's group isn't directly in the development business," a local broker, not associated with the deal but who could figure in the transaction at a later date, tells GlobeSt.com. "Darryl and his dad [land broker Maury L. Carter] enjoy finding prime dirt and moving it around and they are among the best at making a profit from it."

Splendid China opened in 1993 and closed in 2003 after one of the most dismal attendance performances recorded by any area attraction in the last 15 years, tourism consultants tell GlobeSt.com. The attraction, although often labeled a theme park, was more of an open-air museum, extolling the arts, crafts and culture of ancient China. A \$20 admission for adults and \$10 admission for children in the beginning didn't endear the attraction to either tourists or locals, hospitality industry sources tell GlobeSt.com.

Attraction supporters projected daily attendance of at least 5,000 visitors when Splendid China opened but the 76-acre park, which encompassed the specific Chinese artifacts, never drew more than 500 a day in its best year, area hospitality and theme park consultants concede. The park itself never disclosed attendance or operating profit-loss figures.

Besides the China Travel Service of Hong Kong, the selling entity included the 26 Acre Land Co., CTS International Inc. USA, CTS Investment Inc. USA, Florida Splendid China Inc. and Gateway Tours Inc. The Chinese agency was common owner of the property.

Paul Hoffman of Coldwell Banker Commercial NRT negotiated for the buyer. Margery Johnson of Cushman & Wakefield of Florida Inc. represented the seller.