

BUSINESS

Villages developer Mark Morse, daughter sell Marion County ranch for \$15.5 million

By [Joe Callahan](#) Ocala Star-Banner

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Nearly a decade ago, The Villages developer Mark Morse and his daughter paid more \$7 million for 2,400 acres on the east side of the Ocklawaha River and turned it into Cow Hammock Ranch, now a sprawling high-fence hunting preserve five miles east of Ocala.

Early this month, Morse and his daughter, Kelsea Morse Manly, more than doubled their investment. They sold the ranch they owned since 2012 to Connecticut's Carl Kuehner III, the chief executive officer at Building & Land Technology Corp.

Kuehner paid \$15.5 million for the since-expanded, 2,725-acre property, 3418 SE 137th Avenue Road, south of County Road 314. Kuehner once served as chairman of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation.

2012: Mark Morse, daughter purchase large Ocklawaha acreage

2013: Mark Morse seeks to launch Cow Hammock Ranch

2019: Villages one of the fastest growing communities in nation

Morse is president and chief operating officer of The Villages, one of the largest retirement communities in the United States. The development was launched by his father, Gary Morse, who died in 2014.

The retirement community spans from southern Marion County to south of the Florida Turnpike.

The ranch sale included a 6,000-square-foot lodge for dining and entertaining, including a bar and a billiards room. It also has a 2,062-square-foot bunkhouse and a 508-square-foot freezer facility. It also included a state-of-the-art game cleaning station and cooler.

There are also two large shops for equipment on the property, the release noted.

Jeff Bewsher, an advisor and wildlife biologist with the Lakeland-based SVN Saunders Ralston Dabtzler real estate company, represented Kuehner during the sale.

Daryl Carter and John Evans of Maury L. Carter & Associates, Inc., represented Morse and Manly.

“I don’t know what his intentions are to be honest with you,” Bewsher said Thursday in a telephone interview about future plans for the acreage, nearly 2,300 acres of which is surrounded by a high fence.

Ranch advertised as being built for 'wildlife enthusiasts... and avid hunters'

Bewsher issued a press release for SVN early this month, detailing the sale of the ranch, originally listed for \$20 million.

It was billed in real estate bulletins as a beautiful ranch just south of Fort McCoy that was built for “wildlife enthusiasts, recreationists, and avid hunters.”

“I try to focus on those properties and what they can offer to my client. Cow Hammock Ranch is certainly one of the best remaining best high fence ranches in Florida,” Bewsher said in the release.

Cow Hammock Ranch provides a top-notch, well-managed habitat for an abundance of wildlife, the press release states. The ranch has elk, white-tailed deer and Osceola turkeys, the brochure notes.

“Professionally managed for over a decade, the ranch is high fenced and a fully licensed hunting preserve,” he noted in the release. “Inside the boundaries of the high fence are over 20 species of exotic and native wildlife that roam freely on the property.”

Morse and Manly, which were doing business as Cow Hammock, LLC, bought the land in 2012 from Rayonier Forest Resources. Both are registered as managers of that company, according to state Division of Corporations records back then.

The pair registered the company in April 2012 and announced in 2013 they were building the hunting preserve.

Back in 2012, Morse owned the M Square Ranch in the Pine Ridge area of Yellowstone and Big Horn counties. Back then he also co-owned Wolf Mountain Ranch in Big Horn and Rosebud counties, Montana.

Joe Callahan can be reached at (352) 817-1750 or email him at joe.callahan@starbanner.com. Follow him on Twitter @JoeOcalaNews.