

## RV Business

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# RVBusiness<sup>®</sup>

## More Gulf Coast Resorts in the Works

There will soon be a steady procession of high-end recreational vehicles rolling along Gulf Coast interstates, searching for a place by the beach to park, according to the Mobile, Ala., *Press-Register*.

Or so developers in south Baldwin County, Ala., are betting.

On 40 acres near Gulf Shores, Ala., Sagebrush Realty Development is mulching trees and preparing to excavate an H-shaped fishing lake to be the centerpiece of its 176-lot, full-service motorcoach resort, Bella Terra. Around 4,000 square feet in a four-star setting will cost between \$88,000 and \$200,000.

Farther south, developers have asked the Baldwin County Planning & Zoning Commission to dice an irregular-shaped 240 acres into 772 land-yacht lots and five lakes. The body will likely decide the fate of the project, called RV Resorts of America, next month.

Orange Beach has also caught the motorcoach fever. Earlier this month, the planning commission vetted final plans for Buena Vista on the Beach, a 111-lot RV resort on the north side of the beach highway. That project would be a gated community with lots - essentially 4,700-square-foot parking spaces with utilities and landscaping - offered for around \$350,000 and governed by strict covenants that allow only well-maintained, top-of-the-line motorcoaches.

In May, the Orange Beach Planning Commission approved plans for the 79-lot Heritage Motor Coach Resort on 8.5 acres.

Orange Beach developers Jim Brown and Ken Wall, both of whom were convicted in 2006 of federal charges of bribing then-Mayor Steve Russo, were the trend's local pioneers. They built a 47-lot motorcoach resort in 2004, selling the lots for prices between \$65,000 and \$109,000.

The developers of these resort projects tend to use the terms "motorcoach" and "recreational vehicle" interchangeably. Generally, they are referring to Class A motorhomes.

The allure is a rising number of Baby Boomers seeking a life on the road paired with rising RV purchases. The Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA), a trade group, says RV ownership will extend to 8.5 million households by 2010.

"We really perceive that we're insulated from the real estate industry's recession," said Trip Keber, Bella Terra's executive vice president for business development.

So far Sagebrush has sold about 45 lots and many of the buyers - well-heeled Baby Boomers shedding their homes and hitting the road - paid cash, which has helped Bella Terra dodge the

mortgage industry meltdown, Keber said. He envisions a circuit of Bella Terras in which unencumbered and moneyed retirees can "chase the seasons" from Portland, Ore., to Santa Fe, N.M., Scottsdale, Ariz., Gulf Shores and south Florida to Portland, Maine.

The popularity of RV resorts has been noticed in local city halls, and planners said with home and condo sales badly slumping, it's not surprising to see developers trying something new. Some RV resorts – which are built faster and torn down more easily than homes, shopping centers or condos – may even be an intermediate use until land values rise again.

The RV parks in Gulf Shores are numerous but generally the traditional type in which travelers rent space, be it a for a summer weekend or a full season. They also tend to accept a wider range of vehicles, from pull-behind folding campers to fifth-wheels to motorhomes.

At Gulf State Park, for example, there are more than 500 recently renovated campsites with power, water and sewer hookups. In the coming weeks those spots will fill with flocks of seasonal residents from the North.

But Gulf State Park doesn't have high-speed Internet access at each pad and concierge service. That's where the luxury comes in.

At Buena Vista each brick-paved and native landscaped lot will come with a gazebo and have shared use of a pool and walking trails. Bella Terra will feature a private movie theater, bocce courts, putting greens and Jacuzzis. Designs for the RV Resorts of America site, a city of motorcoach slots, show swimming pools, restaurants and tennis courts.