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Kohler seeks conservation profits

By Steve Liner
EDITOR

Successful entrepreneurs will tell you that one key is doing something you love, something about which you feel a great deal of passion.

Jon Kohler certainly holds that key.

The Florida native lends his name and talents to Jon Kohler & Associates Real Estate Consultants where he acts as principal broker. Mr. Kohler has earned a national reputation as an evaluator and broker of plantation properties, but he is gaining notoriety these days as the visible partner in the creation of the 900+- acre Centerville Conservation Community in Leon County - a position that has gained him a spot on the front page of the Tallahassee Democrat and, with this issue, Business Matters magazine. A recent interview onsite at the Centerville development demonstrated why: after a short lifetime of work, Mr. Kohler is riding the crest of a coming marketing wave in near-urban properties.

The mammoth St. Joe Company gave national attention to the marketing wave earlier this summer by announcing its strategy called "new ruralism" (Business Matters, Volume 3, Issue 12).

By then, though, the Centerville Conservation Community was off the drawing boards and in the hands of an invitation-only list of high net-worth customers. That initial offering consumed 86 of the 200 one-to-three-acre home sites available at Centerville, Mr. Kohler said. Last week, only days into its more public offering, the new community has logged 116 sales.

New Ruralism

"New ruralism" is the term St. Joe picked for its large home site developments now being designed, but it speaks to a lifestyle that Mr. Kohler has served all along. The idea is to provide executives with a place to live alive with room to roam, vistas of green space and the ability to pursue passions such as hunt-

ing, horse breeding and other less-than-suburban pursuits.

In the case of the Centerville development, each home site was carefully selected with a number of aesthetic and practical considerations in mind. First, the vast majority - about 650 acres - of the development's property is

philosophy involved. Mr. Kohler and his partner approached the project from the standpoint of preserving the unique nature of the property. With such an impressive land holding, most developers would bring in planners and engineers to place as many residential sites as possible

Tall Timbers (Research Station)," he said.

It is that experience that has informed a career spent exploring a conservation marketplace. In Florida's Capital Region and Southwest Georgia he has found the perfect setting.

"There are more than 300,000 acres in plantation land between Tallahassee and Thomasville," he said. Examining, assessing and brokering these acres- and similar large land holdings around the country - that makes up Mr. Kohler's work and passion. Early on, he spent time in Montana brokering ranches there. Later, with Jim Dahl as a mentor, he returned to the area to work in acquisition and restoration of environmentally sensitive properties.

"It's my business to know what's happening with all the plantations," he said. "I'm not so much a broker as a consultant."

A bonus is that his work with such large acres parcels is that he is able not only to preserve but also to enhance the marketability and sales value of the land.

"Once people understand the value of the ecosystem," he said, "they hold it to a higher value."

Translation to the rest of us: "The larger the parcel, the more valuable," he said.

Back when he was a student at FSU visiting Tall Timbers, Mr. Kohler began to understand completely the treasure of the red hills, he said. "I realized how long it takes to restore pieces of land."

In the case of wiregrass, the restoration can take a lifetime, he said, because non-native species can so easily compete.

"What people don't realize is that this is the most fertile land in the southeast," he said.

For Kohler and his partners, it is fertile in more ways than one.

More information about the development is available online at www.centerville-florida.com. Jon Kohler & Associates can be reached by calling 850-907-2076 or via email at Jon@JonKohler.com.



Jon Kohler (center top) with Centerville staff (l-r) Kathleen O'Brien, Erica Wasylshyn and Erica Glidewell.

devoted to permanently conserved land that will be managed to preserve or restore the land to its native wiregrass and longleaf pine forest status, Mr. Kohler said. All sites were chosen with a view either of its neighboring lake or of the "park" spaces on the property, and all are on natural ridges on the property.

To support the sport-conscience lifestyle of residents, the property's two lakes (one 18 acres, one eight acres) are stocked with native sports fish that are managed and fed. There also will be an eight-stall horse barn on the property. Residents will pay \$1,000 to \$1,500 annually to support the development's conservation and management efforts, Mr. Kohler said.

Perhaps the most arresting difference between the Centerville development and others even a stone's throw away is the basic

within a defined aesthetic. That is particularly true of land in this part of Leon County, Mr. Kohler said, where soil percolation will allow a higher density of septic tank use.

Profit from Passion

But when Mr. Kohler looks at the property, he sees something totally different. He sees the potential of returning the property to a native state, and it is a conservation and restoration that is a focal passion.

Mr. Kohler graduated from Florida State University with dual degrees in real estate and entrepreneurship and small business management. Even as he was pursuing that academic track, the son of a noted Tallahassee neurologist had his eye on preserving unique ecosystems. Jon Kohler has a Juris Doctorate from Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

"I read everything they had at