

One of a kind condos: Both eco-friendly and smart-growth

BY ERIN ANDERSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

In this region, landscapes can change overnight, with homes sprouting right out of the ground. The last thing that might appear noteworthy is another development, but the following projects in the Traverse City area have proven that it's not just what you build, it's how, where and why.

The Village Project

The Minervini are no strangers to buzz. In fact, they have been focus of interest since the first whispers of their plans to revive significant portions of the former Traverse City State Hospital.

The project's size and the philosophy at its core, along with the intriguing history of the sprawling 19th century compound, make sorting fact from fiction sometimes difficult. Here are the basics:

The Grand Traverse Commons refers to the 480-acre State Hospital campus, including the historic buildings, transferred in 1993 from the State of Michigan to the Grand Traverse Commons Redevelopment Corporation, an entity formed by the Charter Township of Garfield and the City of Traverse City for the express purpose of preserving the property and attracting developers to the site.

The entirety of the Minervini redevelopment project, which includes the enormous, spire-topped Building 50 as well as the South Cottages, has been named The Village at Grand Traverse Commons. The Village offers 36 acres of land and over one million square feet of existing developable structures to create a mixed-use, walkable community. It is also the region's only tax-free Renaissance Zone, for both residents and business-owners.

Building 50, the largest of The Village's historic structures, boasting a total of 388,000 square feet, has been divided into seven sub-segments: three to the south, three to the north, and the 1963 office addition in the center. Understandably, it's being redeveloped in stages. Stages in progress now include a portion of the southern wing, known as Southview, and Cottage 20, a free-standing building directly across the parking lot from Southview entrances.

Southview, along with the rest of the wing and its northern counterpart, includes three levels, plus attic lofts and a lower, "Garden View" level, now home to the restaurant and bar, Trattoria Stella. The first floors and garden levels of both wings are slated for restaurant, retail and specialty stores, while the second floors will house businesses, medical offices and other commercial spaces. Residential portions of Building 50 will occupy the entire third floors of both wings, as well as their attic lofts.

"We're creating housing and commercial units of all sizes and price points with flexibility and creativity," said Ray Minervini, president of Minervini Group. "We want to attract an inter-generational, socio-economically diverse population that will make the whole of this community even greater than the sum of its parts."

Studio apartments start around \$80,000, with condominiums ranging from relatively modest units at roughly \$150,000 to luxury units priced around \$412,000.

Southview has one residential unit left for sale, and Cottage 20 still holds one available attic-level condominium, as well as some garden-level office space. There is also a list for future phases.

Plans for the next phase include continued residen-

tial renovation on Building 50, as well as similar restoration in the individual historic State Hospital buildings — known as the South Cottages — which lie beyond it. Also in the works for Building 50 is a quarter mile long "indoor street" — already informally dubbed the Mercato — which will feature services, restaurants, shops and galleries.

Although technically a private development, the public may enjoy access to The Village and the grounds surrounding the Commons.

The Village is one of the largest adaptive reuse projects in the country.

As Marsha Minervini said, "Look at how this project is filling up. This is one million square feet of developable space. If people weren't coming here to work and live, they'd all be going somewhere else, probably someplace yet to be built."

For more information on The Village at Grand Traverse Commons contact Marsha Minervini at 947-1006 or visit www.thevillageatc.com.

available, ranging in price from \$271,000 to \$288,000.

The Gallery Lofts on Lake Avenue hope to attract the urban individual interested in a comfortable, low maintenance home that will support and enhance a creative and active lifestyle. Situated within a three story building, the two bedroom lofts sit upstairs from the

were elated with the presence of the younger people and their children. They love having the diversity in their neighborhood," Burden said.

By summer 2006, Burden's company, Red Management, will have completed an additional four new projects ranging from minimalist, economical studios to pre-

Management projects, please call Classic Real Estate's Barb Cooper at: 218-5467 or visit www.redmanagement.net.

Black Bear Farms Project

For some people, there's no substitute for the quiet comforts of country living. But choosing a condominium development that offers

open space for the entire community to enjoy and easily access, as the back of every unit will face onto the parkland.

This is unusual use of developable land, considering Long Lake township regulations allow for three times as many homes on as many acres.

But cramming homes onto properties wasn't Manitou's goal. Instead, they were looking to provide residents northern Michigan's scenic beauty. The 29 acres of green space includes a hardwood and pine forest, meadows and even its own spring-fed pond which, with help from the DNR, will soon be stocked for catch and release fishing. The park is suited to hiking, cross country skiing, biking, snow shoeing and walking. A walking trail follows its perimeter and trail heads which lead to its center are conveniently located at various points near the residences.

Phase I of Black Bear Farms will be ready for occupancy by June and all 14 condominiums were sold within the first 90 days. Phase II is currently under construction and still has some of its 23 units available. It will be ready between fall 2005 and spring 2006, with prices ranging from \$139,000 to \$210,000. Like all phases of the project, Phase II offers three designs for modern, convenient living: single-story two bedroom units, especially appreciated by those who no longer want to deal with stairs, and 2 and 3 bedroom 2-story townhouse units.

All units are purchased at the foundation level, rather than upon completion. This enables each home to be custom built from the ground up. Buyers can choose the particular floor plan, fixtures and appliances that suit their lifestyle.

Another advantage to a "green" condo community is what the unusual amount of open space does for the requisite association fees.

"Our greatest asset — besides the homes — is the incredible ecological surroundings, rather than swimming pools, gyms, and tennis courts," Carey said. "We offer natural, versus man-made amenities. That helps to keep maintenance fees way down."

The same holds true of the community's independent well and septic system.

"We're totally self-contained in that area, rather than sucking off the city's pipes. We even have our own treatment plant," Carey said, "It's one less utility bill for residents."

Although the homes at Black Bear Farms border the interior park, the buildings themselves are also moved back from the roadside and obscured by trees and greenery so as not to attract attention.

"Placing the homes deeper into the lot eliminates the look of sprawl and makes sure that what people see is the beautiful land," Carey said.

The winner of the Parade of Homes "Built Green" award two years running, Manitou Construction strives for the earth-friendly goals of the award: Resource Efficiency, Energy Efficiency and Indoor and Outdoor Environmental Quality.

"We use highly renewable resources and recycled materials whenever possible," Carey said. "We are extremely careful about responsible chemical use and disposal to ensure the environmental healthiness of the building process and of the homes themselves."

For more information on Black Bear Farms or other Manitou Construction/Properties projects, contact Jim Carey at 929-4510 or www.blackbearfarms.com

Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer.



Middle photo: Lara Neel

From the top: A view west of the Mid-Town Project in Traverse City; the interior of a Cottage 20 condo, part of the Building 50 renovation project; the Black Bear Farms Project, west of Traverse City, is planned to allow for natural amenities, such as trails, versus man-made ones, such as swimming pools. All three condo projects offer an eco- or smart-growth condo alternative.



The Midtown Project

Traverse City's Tim Burden's vision found its expression on a canvas that was once considered urban wasteland. Due in large part to the renewed popularity of Traverse City's downtown, people weren't just using Cass as a way to get "somewhere" anymore; it was fast becoming a destination in itself. With the success of 310/Firefly restaurant and lounge just across the street, the perennial Loading Dock on one side, and the Old Towne Playhouse nearby, the site seemed destined to be the hot spot.

Burden's Midtown — aptly named since it is at the heart of Traverse City's burgeoning "in-town" scene — was critical to realizing his concept: the ultimate neighborhood, one that would allow residents to live near where they work as well as where they play. Midtown's proximity to downtown Traverse City is a huge selling point, but so is its nearness to the natural attraction of the Boardman River.

Phase I of the Midtown project included 38 townhouses priced from \$155,000 to \$450,000 — all sold.

Phase II, scheduled for completion this spring, offers 30 town homes ranging from regular condominiums, priced from \$185,000 to \$310,000, to exclusive luxury units and lofts running from \$350,000 to \$750,000.

Next on the Midtown completion docket are Riverwatch and the Gallery Lofts, some of which will be ready this summer.

Riverwatch, at the edge of the Boardman's banks, offers contemporary town homes with value in mind, yet nonetheless contain numerous luxury features such as hardwood floors, cathedral ceilings and modern appliances. Only four of the nine homes remain



office, retail and gallery space located on the buildings' ground floor. The Gallery Lofts begin at \$195,000. Occupancy on the first lofts is slated for June 2005.

"We're creating urban districts that de-emphasize the car and enhance a sense of community," Burden said. "But we're also taking care to provide a variety of product choices and price points. We hope to make a good portion of the homes 'work force appropriate,' which allows for the diversity that makes traditional urban neighborhoods come alive."

Thus far, several phases of the Midtown project have set aside a certain number of units for Homestretch, a program that promotes building affordable housing and helping first-time home buyers. Burden admitted that, at first, the idea of a younger population with limited incomes and young families concerned some investors who feared that some residents wouldn't appreciate the mix. But he was thrilled to see that exactly the opposite was true.

"The other homeowners

mium condominium units.

And after Midtown is complete? Burden has several other projects currently in the works, in a variety of designs and locations, but the one thing connecting them all is the creation of walkable urban experiences, close to existing infrastructure that merges with their surroundings.

One such venture is the creation of a new neighborhood off Garfield Avenue, which would connect to the Village Center and nearby Ashland Park, named Traditions of Ashland Park. It would incorporate traditional town planning principles like narrow, pedestrian friendly streets, a network of alleys behind the homes and public park land. Two similar projects are currently being planned for Petoskey: Petoskey East and Lake View. Another project, yet to be named, is planned for Manistee.

Burden said, "This kind of project is our thing and we're going to keep doing it wherever we go. We take them our message and people respond to it."

For more information on Midtown, or other Red

more room to roam doesn't have to mean one that has a high environmental impact.

At the corner of Cedar Run and Grey Roads, less than three miles from downtown Traverse City, Black Bear Farms is promoting themselves as such an alternative. But just how does a brand new development provide homes for 113 families and still achieve ecologically-minded status? Answer: listen to its future residents.

"The design of Black Bear Farms was totally customer driven," said Jim Carey, sales and marketing director for Manitou Construction/Properties, the company behind the project.

Black Bear Farms sits on a sizable 39 acres, but only 10 acres will hold homes (or roads or driveways, for that matter). The 10 acres will be split into four sections of 2 to 3 acres each. One of the four sections, each of which comprises a separate phase of homes — designed to blend unobtrusively with their natural surroundings — will border the remaining 29 acres on one of its sides; these acres will be left as