

A Fountain of Opportunity

The Millstone Company's Fountain Lakes offers St. Charles County more than meets the eye

By Sarah Robine

What was once just agricultural land north of the City of St. Charles is now one of the hottest pieces of land under development in St. Charles County. This piece of land near Interstate 370 is divided into two tracts, each being developed by a different company, each company with its own distinct plan for their portion. The Millstone Company broke land on its development, Fountain Lakes Commerce Center, in 1999. Designed to be a commercial/industrial development, Fountain Lakes is taking a different path than originally planned, thanks in part to the second company's development of its portion of land.

The second company, Whittaker Homes, is developing a New Urbanism community called New Town. This residential development will be located just north of Fountain Lakes, and the addition of homes in such a close proximity to the commercial/industrial development has enabled The Millstone Company to add a larger retail development to its original plans.

"Prior to New Town, when we looked at doing some major retail at Fountain Lakes, we couldn't get the buy in from quality retailers because of the lack of housing to the northwest. With New Town and the other planned communities, there will be about 6,500 additional homes, making retail services necessary for those communities. So, that is really what resulted in the shift of strategy. Before New Town, we only had some retail planned with frontage to Elm Street, now we have the entire south side planned for retail," said Bob Millstone, president of The Millstone Company.

The original plan for Fountain Lakes, designed by Millstone and his former company, Millstone Bangert Inc., called for a mix-use project containing light industrial facilities, office space, warehouses, distribution facilities, and some retail. Included in this plan was a 150-acre public park, which is the second largest park in St. Charles County. The park contains more than 80-acres of lakes and a seven-mile walking/jogging trail, all of which, upon completion, was donated to the City of St. Charles.

"The way the park was planned for phase one is that you had large distribution in the back [to the north] and as you got closer to the highway, you had higher usage, where you had your retail, a hotel and some office uses. Fortunately, the park built out as we had originally planned it," Millstone said.

"Phase one is obviously north of 370. If you look at the intersection of Elm Street/New Town Boulevard and 370, think of Fountain Lakes as quadrants. The northwest quadrant is essential-

ly built out at this time, there is a little bit left for development, and that is phase one. Phase two is the northeast quadrant and there has also been some development in the southwest quadrant, with retail along Elm Street. In terms of the build-out on phase two for the northwest quadrant and the southwest quadrant, it is just going to depend on the market."

Phase one of Fountain Lakes, at nearly 90 percent complete, contains just less than 1.9 million square feet of developed space. This phase contains numerous businesses, some new to St. Charles County and others that have been based in the county for years.

The companies in the first phase include Balke Brown Associates, Executive Real Estate, Opus Northwest, LLC, Sleep Inn and Suites, Victory Packaging, Plastics Plus Awards, Wiegmann & Associates, TSI Network Cabling, Gateway Medical Research, Millstone Bangert Inc. and a selection of other companies.

The second phase of Fountain Lakes is planned to contain an additional two million square feet of space, bringing the entire project's grand total of space to around four million square feet. The completion and tenant mix of phase two will depend on market demand.

Despite this, Millstone said that he anticipates that the center will be what is called a power center - a development anchored by big box retailers with smaller retails in between.

"The tenant mix is very important, but since we are in the planning stages at this point, it is premature to say exactly what that mix will be, but we are paying very close attention to make sure that it will be a quality center and that there are retailers that the community wants," Millstone said.

Not always comfortable talking about what others have said about Fountain Lakes, Millstone feels that the community has been supportive of the development. The City of St. Charles nominated the project for an award in Planning Excellence, presented by the Missouri Chapter of the American Planning Association. The project won the award, something Millstone feels demonstrates how people view the development, in regards to the innovative approach to design.

The Millstone Company's Fountain Lakes and Whittaker Home's New Town have given new life to an old piece of agricultural land. Even though there is not a scheduled completion date for either project, whether or not construction is complete the impact these projects are having on St. Charles County is undeniable. Only time will reveal the true possibilities of this recently renewed area of St. Charles.

