



Group leads two-year push to rejuvenate Sunriver, Ore., resort (The Bulletin, Bend, Ore.)

By Anna Sowa, The Bulletin, Bend, Ore. McClatchy-Tribune Regional News

Aug. 26--SUNRIVER -- In many ways, Sunriver resident Robin Diner just wants the space to walk Maggie, her Lab-shepherd mix.

Some of her first memories of Sunriver, before moving here from Bend in 2000, are taking Maggie around the pine-scented area.

But parts of the 40-year-old resort's facilities and infrastructure are showing their age, according to some Sunriver residents and officials.

Diner, who moved to Bend in 1998 from the Bay Area, points to the Village Mall, the community's commercial center that, in its peak seasons, can teem with life. In the offseasons, however, it can feel like a ghost town with overhead music playing to few ears.

"After Labor Day, it's as dead as a doornail," Diner said last week in front of the Country Store. "Something has to be done to attract people there year-round."

Something will be done, according to a group of Sunriver officials, homeowners and developers who are working to dramatically transform the sprawling resort. A two-year push to rejuvenate Sunriver is moving forward.

--Already, Sunriver Resort has updated its facilities and developed a new resort, Caldera Springs, across from the exclusive Crosswater golf community. Sunriver Resort last year purchased a 617-acre parcel of vacant land from the U.S. Forest Service. The parcel, referred to as Pine Forest, is not zoned for a destination resort, but Sunriver Resort is appealing to the county to have it re-zoned.

--Plans are under way for a dramatically transformed Village Mall, as are major improvements in golf, aquatic and equestrian facilities.

--Additionally, a marketing campaign is being developed to entice Sunriver residents and visitors from new markets outside Oregon and Washington state. Organizers hope the campaign will keep Sunriver competitive with the slew of other existing or planned resorts.

population that swells to roughly 10,000 to 12,000 in the summer and during major holidays, according to the Sunriver Owners Association.

The new and refreshed developments aren't music to all residents' ears. Like Diner, many residents moved to Sunriver to escape an urban environment and live in a nature setting. What's the point, then, they wonder, of building over some of the aesthetics that bring people here?

Diner recalls walking Maggie a few years ago through a field beyond the Village Mall, where deer would graze and Maggie would be overcome with excitement. Two and a half years ago, a condominium project was built there and Diner and her dog must walk farther to find green space.

"I just wonder how many (residences) the area can support," she said. "There's been a tremendous boom since we moved here. Word is out on Sunriver."

Sunriver developers expect a steady flow of new residents and visitors to the area.

"It became fairly obvious to us that over a short period of time, the supply of vacation rental opportunities, vacation second homes and primary residences in resort settings was going to double in Central Oregon," said Bill Chapman, general manager of the Sunriver Owners Association, or SROA. He was referring to the impetus for rejuvenating Sunriver to better compete with other resorts and creating high-end amenities that resort visitors expect.

"We decided to be more pro-active and do a number of things to keep us positioned as the premier resort in our area," he said.

Caldera Springs is Sunriver Resort's most recent resort development and is the first major resort to open in Sunriver since the Crosswater private golf community was built in 1995.

Caldera began selling property in December 2005. The 400-acre community has 320 homesites, or vacant lots, ranging from \$285,000 to \$500,000. It also has up to 45 Caldera Cabins, for which the model home is built, ranging from \$650,000 to \$1.8 million, said John Fettig, principal broker for Sunriver Realty.

Already, 75 percent of Caldera's homesites have been sold and roughly 35 houses are going up on the lots, attracting both full-time residents and vacation-home buyers from the state and throughout the country, Fettig said.

All the roads and paths are complete, and by this fall, Fettig says, all remaining construction will be finished, including final trail paving and landscaping.

At The Jeld-Wen Tradition golf tournament last week, Sunriver Realty's sales center was busy, Fettig said, and he could track at least two property sales through weekend activity.

"We couldn't imagine any better (media) coverage," he said. "We expect this coverage will lead to many new visitors to our area, some of whom will be looking for real estate in Caldera Springs, Crosswater, Sunriver or other locations in Central Oregon."

Fettig says capital projects like Caldera enhance the pride and overall economic health of the community. He points to the construction of Crosswater, the major renovation

of the Sunriver Lodge, Sage Springs Spa, refurbishing of the Meadows and Woodlands golf courses, construction of luxury accommodations at River Lodges, remodeling and expansion of the Great Hall convention center, and construction of the new Sunriver Realty and Bellatazza coffee building.

"These improvements are visible signs that show our community is vibrant," Fettig said, "and that ownership has confidence in the future."

In October 2005, SROA hired a consulting firm to assess Sunriver and how it measures against its competitors. The consultants found good and bad news.

The good news was that Sunriver has a tremendous sense of community and many amenities like an airport, proximity to Mt. Bachelor ski area and commercial areas.

The bad news was that many amenities need help.

That fall, four action-planning teams were formed to deal with specific areas of improvement and created the Sunriver Community Strategic Plan.

The plan included three strategies that were presented to Sunriver owners in July from the SROA board of directors' State of Sunriver report, which also discussed more recent developments:

--Encourage and assist the development of the Village Mall.

The mall was purchased by local investment group SilverStar Destinations LLC one year ago. The developers are planning to radically change it into a European-type residential and shopping area along the lines of Whistler Blackcomb, a luxury resort in Vancouver, British Columbia, with a Swiss Alps feel. The development will cost upward of \$100 million and isn't expected to break ground until next year, SilverStar representatives say.

--Implement the first year of a Sunriver marketing plan.

This marketing effort will broaden Sunriver's exposure past the boundaries of Central Oregon and the state, SROA's Chapman said. A marketing alliance is heading the effort, comprised of stakeholders including SROA, SilverStar Destinations and vacation management companies, including Sunriver Resort.

"We felt the individual companies in Sunriver were doing a good job getting their message out to the Pacific Northwest -- Portland and Seattle," Chapman said. "But we felt we did not have a strong presence in California."

Redmond Airport got direct daily flights to Los Angeles last August, which further confirmed that Southern California was ripe for Sunriver marketing.

In May 2008, the marketing campaign plans on placing ads in Sunset and Westways magazines, which publish in the Pacific Northwest and Southern California with a combined circulation of more than 600,000.

SROA and Sunriver real estate rental companies will pay \$95,000 each toward the campaign, which already has advertising plans for Portland publications, and the Central Oregon Visitors Association will add \$190,000 for a combined \$380,000 budget, Chapman said.

--Improve existing assets and add amenities -- making Sunriver look like the first-class community residents and visitors expect it to be.

The South Century Drive welcome sign already has been replaced, along with new landscaping of the traffic circle on South Century and Abbot drives. Other infrastructure enhancements include construction of the U.S. Highway 97/South Century Drive interchange and reconstruction of the road to Mount Bachelor, which is expected to be done this fall.

Sunriver's pools, 33 miles of bike paths, sports facilities and restrooms all need upgrading or enhancing, Chapman said.

The bike paths can get crowded close to the mall and Chapman said SROA is studying how to address that.

Sunriver has four major pools and nine smaller pools, he said.

At the south pool, the peak tourism months of mid-June to Labor Day weekend bring more than 100,000 people to the pool, Chapman said.

"It's a zoo," he said. "We know we have to look at that."

Four vacation-management companies are developing a 2,000-square-foot indoor pool, adjacent to the Flowriver wave machine that will open by the end of September or early October. The group also is planning to build another outdoor pool in the future.

At Sunriver Resort, plans call for major upgrades to the marina and equestrian center, the first phases of which will happen this fall, Chapman said. Those upgrades include major construction on the marina's existing building for kayak, canoe and raft rentals and a new building for the equestrian center that would replace the existing boarding facility.

The airstrip also is slated for long-term improvements, including a runway rehabilitation, he added.

Among enhancements already done, SROA has remodeled the locker rooms and upgraded mechanical systems at both SROA swimming pools, according to the SROA July report, with a resurfaced deck at the south pool this spring.

Fort Rock Park has seen upgraded restrooms, new playground equipment and a sand volleyball court. Additionally, five of the nine tennis courts at the north court were completely rebuilt while the others were renovated.

Chapman believes the majority of Sunriver residents, like himself, consider the projects overdue.

"There's a sea change in attitude in the last five years," he said. "People have understood the necessity of these things."

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