

on architecture

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Out to pasture Bundoran redefines house and farm

ON Virginia Governor Tim Kaine's recent visit to dedicate the Albemarle CiderWorks, his helicopter touched down at a development site just down the road off Route 29 South. While Bundoran Farm, a so-called "preservation development," provided a convenient nearby helipad, it also gave Kaine a chance to see the first community in the state to receive a "Certified Gold Signature Sanctuary" designation from Audubon International.

Kaine was talking about the CiderWorks when he said that "protecting working farms like this and open space are among the ways we can preserve our agriculture heritage." But he might have had Bundoran in the back of his mind.

Since 2005, when the 2,300-acre Bundoran Farm was purchased (for a whopping \$33 million) by Qroe Farm Preservation Development, the developers have

sought to make it a model of rural land stewardship.

For example, rather than cutting it up into 21-acre lots as County ordinances allow, over 90 percent of the land will remain untouched. This includes 1,000 acres of pasture for livestock, 200 acres of apple orchards, 1,000 acres of managed forest, fifteen miles of walking and riding trails, and two ponds. Eventually, the plan is to have the money paid by farmers who lease the land going to the homeowners' association, which will in turn safeguard the land for farming.

Including forestry, agriculture is the number one industry in Virginia, hauling in \$79 billion a year, with crops like soybeans and livestock like broiling chickens and beef cattle topping the list. Kaine asked the CiderWorks crowd to guess how many farms there were in Virginia. Someone shouted 800. Someone else said 1,000. Try 47,000, said Kaine, with the average size being about 170 acres.

As Audubon International mentioned in its citation, Bundoran Farm is to be "commended for their efforts in fostering sustainable development and land management with emphasis on protecting and sustaining land, water, wildlife, and natural resources where people live."

After a tragic plane crash that claimed the lives of the two men who initially began the eco-conscious work at Bundoran, the property is now being codeveloped by Celebration Associates, whose founder, Charles Adams, spearheaded the famous Walt Disney Company master planned community of Celebration.

"It was a lot of work to get that designation," says Bundoran's development director Joe Barnes. "It took us about four years."

In addition to having the Audubon's scientists study the quality of the land, an

extensive resource management plan had to be submitted. The installation of underground electrical and fiber optic systems, as well as the development's network of roads, also had to be monitored. Finally, the first two houses in the development had to be built to pass environmental muster.

Barnes says the vision is three-fold: to preserve agricultural land, enable on-going environmental stewardship, and allow folks to live on a farm without the headache of having to manage one.

However, Barnes, a licensed architect who also holds an MBA from UVA's Darden business school, admits that Bundoran has been impacted by the sorry state of the real estate market.

"We've noticed some lack of motivation to move forward with purchases," he says. But he also points out that they have something unique to offer. "So there has been pretty steady interest," he says.

Clearly, rural land stewardship isn't for the middle-class home-buyer. So far, only 11 of 108 lots have been sold, and only two houses have been built. Lot sizes range from around two acres for under \$300,000 to as much as \$1 million for 30-plus acres, though Barnes says there is no limit on the number of lots that can be purchased.

Lot buyers must also use builders and designers from a vetted list. Bundoran's "guild" of builders are asked for a list of their past customers going back five years, and similar background checks on architects are also conducted.

Moving forward, Barnes says construction on two more homes will begin in August and September, but making the Bundoran ideal a reality appears to be taking more time.

"The challenge," says Barnes, "is figuring out how you balance the design vision with the business plan." ■

Bundoran Farm in North Garden hopes to be the States premiere preservation development.

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