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Developers ride equestrian community trend

By Lisa R. Schoolcraft

STAFF WRITER

Equestrian communities have been springing up in suburbia — a potentially stable niche for developers looking to make hay while the housing boom lingers.

One of the newest neighborhoods among the horsey set is Estates of eQuest in Canton.

The development, off Arbor Hill and Pat Rich roads, is expected to have 20 miles of horse trails, a barn and up to 72 homes, said Lorry Clinton, owner of the barn on Estates of eQuest, which is being developed by **Sunrise Trails Development LLC**, partly owned by Clinton's husband, Jim.

"We bought property to build a horse facility five years ago," she said. "But then we started acquiring the property around it for an equestrian community. When we started the barn, we realized how much in demand this was."

Horse lovers lead such busy lives "they don't have time for upkeep and maintenance of a farm of their own," Clinton said.

Home prices in Estates at eQuest start in the \$600,000s, she said.

Equestrian communities won't likely replace golf or tennis communities as the subdivisions of choice, but they are a niche community, said Pam Sessions, co-president and co-owner of **Hedge-wood Properties Inc.** in Alpharetta.

"The demand for space would make it hard for [equestrian communities] to be a trend in Atlanta," she said. "You need enough room to pasture the horses. But there is a large population of horse riders and people with horses in Atlanta, and that will continue."

Sessions has completed **Chattahoochee River Club** in Forsyth County, an equestrian community with 640 homes and 10 miles of hiking and riding trails. Home prices there range from the \$300,000s to the \$700,000s.

Georgia has a large horse population, said Carol Bradley, president of the **Georgia Quarter Horse Association** in Social Circle, which has about 300 members.

"But the number of members in this association doesn't begin to touch the number of people who own quarter horses in the state," she said. "The majority of our focus is for show purposes, but so many owners may have horses for recreational purposes."

And Atlanta has a variety of other associations that cater to other horse breeds, including Arabians and thoroughbreds, Bradley said.

Chastain Horse Park Ltd., in the heart of Chastain Park, reopened its doors in 1999 and demand has remained strong, said Amy Lance, president.

"We've stayed full with our boarding services and we have about 300 families on the waiting list for our riding program," she said. "Partly it's because of our location."

But Lance feels equestrian sports, once considered a sport of the elite, have become more popular as they have become more accessible "and people want to be involved in something very exciting."

With so few equestrian communities in Atlanta, compared with other communities, they should do well because "it gives extra benefit to [horse] families right in their back yard," Lance said.



SPECIAL

Forsyth: Chattahoochee River Club is an equestrian community with 640 homes.

"Atlanta has long been known to have a lot of horse owners," Bradley said. "In days past, Alpharetta had a tremendous number of horse farms." The same was true of Canton and Woodstock, she said.

"They're still out there, but you have to go farther and farther out," Bradley said. The 900-acre Serenbe development

near Palmetto includes an equestrian community.

Serenbe developer Steve Nygren didn't turn toward market research when he decided on an equestrian community in the South Atlanta development, where home prices range from \$260,000 to more than \$500,000.

"We looked at the number of people who ride and who have children who ride and saw a definite market for it," he said. "We're just starting to touch it."

Nygren said he thinks what is making equestrian communities so attractive to the horsey set in metro Atlanta is the fast-paced housing market that is gobbling up what was once pastoral land.

As of Oct. 31, Atlanta led the nation with 61,916 housing permits sought so far this year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

"Some of the [traditional] equestrian areas are being forced out and are becoming very urbanized," Nygren said. So there are fewer places to ride or pasture horses, he said.

"I don't think that is a market that has been realistically tapped," he added.

Reach Schoolcraft at lschoolcraft@bizjournals.com.