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REAL ESTATE

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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY

Verandah keeps rural Florida character Bonita Bay development earns high marks for “green” building

BY PETE SKIBA
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Unlike most developers that have unleashed earthmovers and chainsaws to clear the land for building, Bonita Bay Group carefully planned how to save trees, waterways and build Verandah, a green community near Fort Myers.

For its efforts at creating and maintaining the natural environment the company recently earned awards from the Council for Sustainable Florida, Project EverGreen and Trees Florida during 2007.

“Bonita relocated 120, 50 to- 60-year-old, live oak trees and 1,200 sabal palms,” said Tina McCain Matte, a spokeswoman for the company. “The slough and cypress stands were also preserved in what used to be a cattle ranch.”

All of the homes on Verandah’s 1,456 acres, including villas, town homes or custom and traditional single-family homes, must be certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition.

The homes are certified for energy efficiency, water conservation, indoor environmental health and the use of environmentally friendly materials. Home buyers can customize the level of environmental features in their homes.

One of the first builders involved with Verandah showcased homes that although were only a couple years old, featured landscaping with mature trees that looked like they had been there for 20 years.

“We designed a home in a way to preserve four, 36-inch- diameter oak trees,” said Dan Dodrill, president of DanielWayne Homes Inc. “It is a 5,000-square-foot, four bedroom and den home. People are attracted to Verandah because it is green. Seventy percent of the landscaping has to be native to Florida.”

Homes in the community sell from the low \$300,000s to more than \$1 million depending on size and location. The community includes 480 acres of common space and parks, 416 acres of wetland preserve and lakes, 84 acres of upland preserves and a conservation easement ranging from 25 feet to- 200-feet wide along the riverfront.

Approachable by the more than nine miles of walking and bicycling paths that wind through the community, a major showcase for the company’s commitment to retaining the environment sits at the heart of the community—River Village.

Instead of building one huge community center for its golf club, restaurants and fitness center, Bonita Bay designers preserved the oak hammock’s footprint.

The majestic oaks still reign along the side of the Orange River, but the company tucked Four Florida-style buildings in among the trees with their hanging Spanish moss. In addition to the Golf House, River House restaurants, and the Tennis and Fitness Center facilities, a Boat House serves as a gathering spot and canoe or kayak launch.

Snaking along the river, a sidewalk-wide boardwalk connects the Boat House’s screened-in Blossom’s Community Grill to the River House’s breezy deck.

Blossom’s doubles as a sports bar



Aerial view of Verandah a Bonita Bay development.

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A river house at the Bonita Bay Group’s Verandah development on the Orange River in East Lee County. The project was recently honored for environmental building practices.

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To minimize the development impact to Verandah’s extensive live oak hammock, Bonita Bay Group chose to create a village of amenity buildings nestled into the hammock rather than a large clubhouse.

with a few televisions hanging on its porch. In the Boat House, the Alligator Pear restaurant also has a separate bar area.

When it comes to the food in the restaurant, it is in the able hands of Executive Chef Stephen Long.

“We have everything from down-home Florida pot roast with mashed potatoes to blue-cheese-encrusted filet mignon. Our Kobe beef mini-burgers are very popular,” said Long, a Johnson and Wales-trained chef. “People get to enjoy the scenery outside or eat indoors.”

It is the sense of community that attracted Don Terry, 55, to Verandah, that and golf. He takes advantage of the community’s two 18-hole golf courses several times a week.

“We looked all over the Carolinas, and the east coast (of Florida) and we found this to be a place with relaxed people to make friends,” Terry said.



“We didn’t want to be cold and the weather here is great, even in summer. It is just a great environment.”

For information on Bonita Bay Group’s Verandah call (239)694-7199 or (866)694-7199 or on the Web at Verandah.com ■

Verandah timeline:

- >>February 2003: On-site sales center opens for presales
- >>December 2003: Bob Cupp-designed championship Old Orange golf course, pro shop and Boat house opened
- >>February 2004: Model homes opened
- >>January 2005: River House restaurants and lounge opened
- >>January 2006: Tennis and Fitness Center opened
- >>January 2007: Jack and Jack Nicklaus II-designed championship golf course Whispering Oak opened