

Cottages in cabin country

Built on an old campground, these vacation homes open up new market for Cultus Lake

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The Times

Friday, August 10, 2007

Ontario has its "Cottage Country" in the Muskoka region and now some developers want to create the same kind of laid-back, summer community close to the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley.

They've taken out full-page ads in daily papers and have billboard space on the highway outside Chilliwack, all to advertise the Cottages at Cultus Lake.

One of the developers, Jon Van Geel, president of Adriana Pacific Development, believes the 200-plus lots south of Cultus Lake will be a first for the region. He points to similar developments in the Whistler area but says the Cultus project will have a broader market.

"You can go to Whistler but it's very expensive," he told the Times. "It's the first of its kind....We've attempted to come up with something for the mainstream clientele....It's basically veranda living."

The cottages will be anywhere from just under 1,000 square feet up to 1,900 square feet and the cost is expected to start at just under \$330,000.

Van Geel says they are trying to create real "cottage" homes with no garages; open, loft-style homes with large covered porches and decks; narrow lane roads designed to take the rustic environment and tree retention into account.

"We spent painstaking days and nights retaining as many trees as we can," he said. "I think that's important, to get that outdoor forest environment around you....It's not going to be like you're driving through a typical subdivision. It will be very quaint."

There will also be a clubhouse with amenities such as an outdoor pool and hot tub, tennis courts and a children's play area, in addition to the other recreation opportunities nearby.

The project is being built on a former 300-lot campground south of Lindell Beach, rather than on new land. The project received a development permit from the Fraser Valley Regional District this summer so the developers could begin work on the water, sewer and other infrastructure at the site. Once everything is in place, it has to receive subdivision approval from the provincial government.

The project is being built in three to five phases, with the current work on infrastructure representing the first. George Hare, president of Recreational and Residential Project Marketing Inc., is handling the marketing side of the project. He expects the Cottages at Cultus Lake to take shape over the next 12 to 15 months and does not expect demand to be a problem, especially in the burgeoning Lower Mainland real estate market.

"Land in that area's very valuable, especially freehold," he said.

Much of the other land near Cultus Lake has been passed down through family legacies or is held through leases with the province, so this development represents an opening up of the market at Cultus Lake.

As far as the "cottage" concept is concerned, Hare says the word is one used more in eastern Canada, whereas "cabin" is more common here.

"We took a look at how the word 'cottage' is used and we took a look at who the word 'cabin' is used," he said.

The difference, he explains, is that a cottage conjures up images of something that is more developed, though still casual enough for summer use.

"A cottage is more of a craftsman style....The qualities are more of a home away from home."

He echoed Van Geel's point about the attraction a summer home at Cultus will hold for people, especially those in the 40 to 60 age range who live in the city and want a nearby escape. Hare expects sales to start in the later summer or early fall.