

Plans aim to put Lake Ozark, Mo., in step with the times

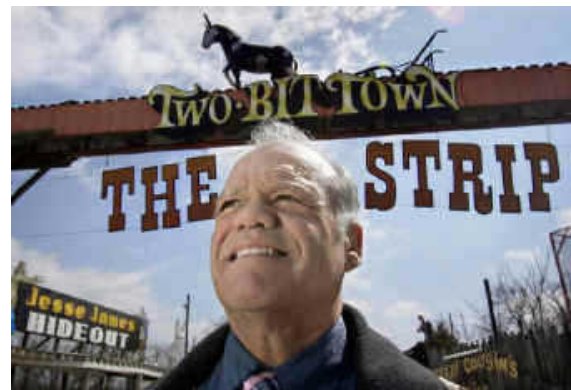
By KEVIN MURPHY

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<http://www.kansascity.com/105/story/542742.html>



Shawnee residents (from left) Ben Van Lerberg, 11; Nate Compton, 12; Alexa Van Lerberg, 13; and Mikala Compton, 13, last week sported hotdog, hamburger and pizza hats on “the strip” in Lake Ozark, Mo.



“The strip” known as Bagnell Dam Boulevard in Lake Ozark, Mo., hasn’t changed much since Johnnie Franzekos and a friend paid it a visit from Kansas City in 1959. But Franzekos, who is now the mayor, said, “If everything goes well, this will be a booming town in a couple of years.”

LAKE OZARK, Mo. | After graduating from high school in 1959, Johnnie Franzekos and a pal left Kansas City in an old Studebaker, slept in the car here overnight and then did the town.

“We hit all the places on the strip,” Franzekos said. “It had everything — arcades, bumper cars, souvenirs, a fudge shop.”

Today, Franzekos is the mayor of Lake Ozark, but “the strip” known as Bagnell Dam Boulevard hasn’t changed a lot. You can still play Skee-Ball for a dime, get T-shirts and tattoos, and admire giant cowboy and Indian statues waving across the street to each other.

With all due respect to the past, town leaders and big-time developers say Lake Ozark has to skip ahead to the 21st century.

The community in the heart of the popular Lake of the Ozarks region is embarking on some \$2 billion of new development, including stores, apartments, condominiums, restaurants, theaters, and perhaps even a zoo.

“If everything goes well, this will be a booming town in a couple of years,” Franzekos said.

The Lake Ozark projects would not only be a boost for that community, but for the whole Lake of the Ozarks area, said the mayor and other officials.

Communities such as Osage Beach have seen plenty of new stores, outlet malls and condos in recent years, but the lake area still falls short in meeting the changing needs of visitors and residents, according to market studies by developers.

People want more entertainment, more restaurants, more glitz and broader shopping choices, such as major chain department stores, they said.

“The whole lake area is changing,” said Jeff L. Van Donsel, a Lake Ozark alderman and owner of the Rockwood Resort Motel in Lake Ozark. “It’s become more of a year-around place now.”

Baby boomers are retiring to the lake or buying second homes there.

The lake area is on a path to becoming the fourth-most populated region in Missouri, according to census projections. It draws 5 million visitors a year. Roughly one-fourth of the visitors and property owners are from the Kansas City area, studies show.

Lake Ozark has fallen especially behind in serving lake residents and visitors, said Bill Kuhlow, president of Cody Road Development and a partner in a proposed retail and residential development on what would be an extension of Horseshoe Bend Parkway.

The extended parkway and a new U.S. 54 expressway the state will build at the lake have triggered the upcoming building boom, Kuhlow said.

“This alleviates the traffic gridlock that exists here for four or five months of the year,” Kuhlow said. “You couldn’t develop anything because nobody could get to it.”

Development aplenty

Ground has been broken for some projects at Lake Ozark, while others are getting close. Here is what is on the horizon:

The Shoppes at Horseshoe Bend, the Kuhlow project, is to have a retail center of 1.4 million square feet with a department store anchor. It calls for 2,200 apartments to fill a need for people who work in the area but have few places to live. Mid-priced and economy hotels are also envisioned, Kuhlow said.

Prewitt Enterprises, which built a new Target, a Lowe’s and many other stores at Osage Beach, plans a 1 million-square-foot retail center, a 400-unit residential complex, and a hotel on U.S. 54 in southeast Lake Ozark.

Below Bagnell Dam in Lake Ozark there are plans to develop land along the Osage River that is now barren, except for a deserted American Legion Hall and a decrepit bandstand. Silver Star Development plans a 116-acre family entertainment district there, with indoor and outdoor theaters, an outfitters store with canoe rentals, and possibly a zoo.

Company President Ron Armitage ran an exotic animal zoo in southwest Missouri that closed in 2006.

Ground has been broken for The Shoppes at Vista Lontana, south of downtown Lake Ozark. It will have upscale shops and office space, and will be adjacent to 180 luxury lakeshore condos under construction on the 30-acre site.

In Osage Beach, 4 miles away, the John Q. Hammons group plans to build a 15-story hotel similar to Hammons' upscale Chateau on the Lake in Branson.

It remains to be seen if all of the projects develop as fully as expected. The Shoppes at Horseshoe Bend and the Prewitt project, for example, will compete to draw major chain stores not found at the lake.

The Horseshoe Bend developer is Cormac Co., which has done two successful retail centers in the Kansas City area — at 135th Street and State Line Road and at 135th and Metcalf Avenue.



Ground has been broken for The Shoppes at Vista Lontana, south of downtown Lake Ozark. It will have upscale shops and office space, and will be adjacent to 180 luxury lakeshore condominiums under construction on the 30-acre site.

Kuhlow said work on Horseshoe Bend Parkway and excavation for commercial development would begin this spring. Privately financed, the projects would steer new tax revenue generated into construction costs.

The Horseshoe Bend project would be built along an extension of Horseshoe Bend Parkway, winding 2 miles through what is now wooded, hilly land in south Lake Ozark.

Prewitt developers also plan to break ground this year. The firm's shopping center would have easy access from existing U.S. 54 and the proposed bypass, said Andy Prewitt, junior vice president of the firm. He envisions it being "the premier power retail center" at the lake.

The Silver Star project below the dam could have the biggest impact on Lake Ozark's strip because it would be adjacent to it.

Silver Star is doing feasibility studies and continuing to arrange financing. The company hopes to break ground by the end of the year, Armitage said.

"I'm pretty confident, but it's never done until it's done," Armitage said. "We are spending a lot of money to make sure it gets done and gets done correctly."

There are also plans to develop a public lakefront access off the strip that is now lacking in the area except at Lake of the Ozarks State Park. A marina, fishing docks and boardwalk would help draw people downtown, town officials said.

Turnaround on 'strip'

The surrounding development is expected to boost business on Bagnell Dam Boulevard downtown and create demand for a greater variety of shops, restaurants and entertainment, said town officials and business owners.

“It could become a marquee place, not only at the lake but within the Midwest,” said Charles Clark, the Lake Ozark city administrator.

But a downtown merchant said he has heard promises like that before. Bob Diebold, who has run D & B Indian Jewelry for 27 years, said merchants and the town have had a hard time working together to update the strip.

“They need somebody with a bulldozer and a lot of money to come in and do the whole thing over,” Diebold said.

He said he would like the town to be like Parkville, with small specialty shops offering high-quality merchandise.

Diebold said he was still skeptical about Lake Ozark’s revival, though he said there appeared to be money behind it this time.

Kuhlow said previous ideas lacked good planning as well.

“There was planning, but it was done by people who were not in the business,” he said.

Downtown merchants have formed a district to apply for a state program that would divert sales tax and some income taxes into redevelopment. Low-interest loans could be available to renovate aging buildings and storefronts or new construction.

The changes in downtown would not mean the end of the 1950s feeling of the strip, even if new businesses move in, city officials said. Building guidelines will require a quaint look, said Van Donsel, whose motel includes stone cottages built in 1953.

Some of the original businesses on the strip like his will remain, he said.

“People still like that old stuff, it’s part of the eclectic feeling of the strip,” Van Donsel said.

But parts of the strip are past due for updating, despite what nostalgic visitors may think.

“It’s not really the way it was when they were kids,” Van Donsel said. “Because of disinvestment, it’s kind of run down.”

Today, new investment could lead to not only a revival downtown, but unprecedented construction and population growth in the area, said Frank Snelson, a broker for The Shoppes at Vista Lontana and a longtime real estate professional.

“We’ve had several growth plateaus at the lake,” Snelson said.

“I believe we have set the stage now for the next decade’s worth of growth.”

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http://www.newstribune.com/articles/2008/03/22/news_local/284local01lake.txt

Several communities stand to benefit from \$2 billion in developments near the Lake

By Ra'Vae Edwards
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LAKE OZARK, Mo. - The more than \$2 billion in developments planned during the next five years within the City of Lake Ozark will have an economic impact on more than that city.

That's why surrounding communities already are preparing for the projected explosion of commercial and residential population.

As reported over the past several months, developers in the Lake of the Ozarks area have committed to more than \$2 billion in developments including hotels, retail establishments, a family fun park and more.

As city leaders in Lake Ozark prepare to make the area a premier vacation destination, officials in neighboring communities also are hoping to cash in.

Some have already attended economic development seminars, while others are preparing enhancement and incentive plans and searching for ways to attract new residents and new businesses.

Bill Kuhlow, president of the Cody Road Development and a partner in the Horseshoe Bend Project, said the proposed developments in Lake Ozark likely will result in a surge in other surrounding rural communities.

"The surrounding municipalities are asking themselves if there is an



Developments such as this strip mall along Business Highway 54 in Eldon are indicative of the growth the community is currently experiencing. City officials are hopeful the upcoming developments totaling more than \$2 billion in the Lake area will play a significant role in the future growth of Eldon both on a commercial and residential level.

(Ra'Vae Edwards/News Tribune photo)

opportunity for their communities that will allow them to benefit from the growth around them," he said. "The answer to that question is 'yes.'"

Kuhlow said one of the attractions for local municipalities is that many people may not want to live in the Lake area and would prefer to live in a smaller and more rural community that is less hectic and more community focused.

The population of the Lake area, if the trend continues as it is now, has the potential of making the area the fifth largest populated area in the state, according to statistics provided by the United States Census.

The growth trend in the Lake area has been significantly higher than other metropolitan areas in Missouri, and the continuance of that trend over the next 20 years will bring large population numbers to the area.

Wayne Morgan, director of economic development for the Eldon Chamber of Commerce, said the possibilities of growth and expansion within the Eldon community have the potential of being extraordinary over the next several years.

"There are several new developments already on the drawing board for the tri-county area, which includes Camden, Miller and Morgan counties," Morgan said. "We feel there will also be opportunities for Eldon because of the popularity and growth the Lake of the Ozarks is experiencing."

Being located about 30 minutes from Jefferson City and even closer to the Lake, Morgan said Eldon is the perfect community for people that do not want to live in either area, but still want to live close enough that getting to either is convenient.

"We are looking at housing developments and new retail opportunities for commercial businesses who would like to be here," Morgan said. "We feel there is going to be a steady growth in the Lake area and we certainly want Eldon to be a part of that."

City officials said they are ready for the expansion and growth opportunities in regards to infrastructure, and they do not expect a surge in residential population to cause problems.

"We have been looking at several things over the past few months and we have several things going on right now," said Debbie Guthrie, assistant city administrator. "For example, our wastewater treatment system is capable of handling a double in our population without affecting the treatment.

"We definitely have enough water capacity to handle an increase in population."

Guthrie said construction of streets would be handled on a case-by-case basis, depending on the location of any developments and how the city's code would match it.

"We are attending different economic development conferences and working with the state's economic department and actively pursuing ideas to assist in bring more retail businesses to the city," Guthrie noted.

Guthrie said a handful of new businesses have already constructed facilities over the last two years, including one strip mall.

"A second strip mall is being built now, and we expect we will see even more things similar to this in the near future," she said. "It is a positive enhancement for the city and we are excited to be a part of it."

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Thanks.

mikemojc wrote on Mar 22, 2008 6:59 PM:

" I agree that preparation is the key. " A rising tide lifts all boats."
People in the area just have to prepare now, otherwise they'll get their feet wet... "

boxergal wrote on Mar 22, 2008 5:19 PM:

" Thanks for this article, interesting. This Horseshoe Bend project is the one I was referring to when I posted on economic growth in the casino article. I am really looking forward to this when its done. Its a total win win situation for everyone. "