

LEESBURG Today

Creighton Farms' Developers: 'Here To Stay'

Posted: Monday, November 14, 2011 2:05 pm | Updated: 5:34 pm, Mon Nov 14, 2011.



Posted on November 14, 2011



by **Danielle Nadler**

When developers David Southworth and Joseph Deitch bought Creighton Farms, the luxury golf course community near Aldie, in early 2009, they knew they had their work cut out for them. The gated rural subdivision-which was developed in conjunction with the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co. and opened for home sales in 2006 -fell into financial woes in the height of the economic downturn. Much of the work on the property's planned estates and facilities to enhance the 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course had stopped; the road, water and sewer infrastructure was incomplete and the maintenance building had just burnt to the ground.

"For the first year of our ownership, it was really just a fire drill-no pun intended-in terms of getting our facilities rebuilt and completed," Southworth, President and CEO of Southworth Development, said during a recent visit to Creighton Farms.

Today, the 964-acre development is back on track, as Southworth puts it, with 20 homes occupied or under construction, another 57 lots ready for construction next year, and more than 100 family memberships at The Club at Creighton Farms, which played host to the Senior PGA Professional National Championship last month. And Creighton Farms is poised to open a new 30,000-square-foot American Vernacular-style clubhouse-complete with 10 suites for members and guests-early next month.

"To see it like this is very rewarding and fulfilling," Southworth said. "It's every developer's dream to see their vision appreciated by others."

"And to see families move here and create a community-and to know we were a part of that- feels good," Deitch added.

Southworth, 53, and Deitch, 61, have been family friends for 17 years, since their sons were elementary school classmates in Boston. The two have worked at Southworth Development together for the past five years after first excelling in different industries on their own.

After work in hotel administration, Southworth joined Willowbend Development at its inception in 1992 as president and CEO. In 2005, he founded Southworth Development.

Deitch's work as founder and chairman of Commonwealth Financial Network earned him the title from Investment Advisor magazine as one of the nation's "30 Most Influential People in the Wealth Management Industry Over Past 30 years." He joined the Southworth team in 2006.

Southworth and Deitch first were a part of Creighton Farms (<http://creightonfarms.com>) as the asset managers on behalf of Fidelity Investments, which took over the property in 2008. Deitch said as soon as he saw Creighton Farms' views, plush golf course and the plans for large estates tucked among the property's trees and rolling hills, he wanted to be a part of it.

"What they built was something literally magnificent up here. I'm good with magnificent," he said. "I just can't get enough of this place. I think to some degree, David and I consider ourselves stewards."

One year after Fidelity Investment took over Creighton Farms, Southworth Development stepped in to purchase the property. Southworth and Deitch agreed to drop the name Ritz-Carlton, because they said it just didn't seem to fit the property's character. The company was the third owner of the property, which meant a better deal and less risk for Southworth and Deitch.

"They say it's best to be the first son, the second wife and the third community owner, and that's true," Southworth said. "The initial visions are expensive to build, and typically by the third owner you're not paying 100 cents on the dollar."

"When you come in at our point, so many rocks have been turned over, so the level of risk is enormously diminished," Deitch added.

Although Creighton Farms has seen modest growth throughout the past year, Southworth and Deitch say it's really just getting started.

In late August, Southworth Development signed an agreement with Stanley Martin Homes to build on 57 lots in the fourth neighborhood of the development. The neighborhood, called Huntleigh at Creighton Farms, will offer homes on 1 to 7-acre lots, and residents will have full access to the Club, as well as reciprocal access to Southworth Development's international list of clubs and resorts.

Several of the community's amenities are also in the design and permit stages, including the Sports and Wellness Center with tennis courts, a pool and a fitness facility.

That leaves 89 lots still to be developed. At build-out, Creighton Farms will have 184 single-family estates. The homes start at about \$1 million for a 3,193-square-foot house on 1 acre, and lot prices range from \$495,000 to \$1,360,000.

Developing in phases and avoiding investing in too much too soon is one major reason Southworth Development has done so well, according to Deitch and Southworth. They don't begin building phase two of a project until the first phase begins to sell.

Since Southworth Development started the company 20 years ago, it's survived three recessions, according to Southworth, and that's because he and the company's other leaders are measured and careful. "When things are really good, we never rode that high. We didn't go out and buy airplanes and helicopters and that type of thing," he said. "Then, when times were bad, we weren't stuck holding a lot of debt."

Southworth Development is known for buying and reviving developments that are under tough financial strains. The company owns The Village at Machrihanish Dunes in Scotland, Meredith Bay on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire, Renaissance Golf Club near Boston, and PGA Village in The Bahamas.

Deitch said a lot of developers have incredible vision, which is expensive to get off the ground.

"Throw in a bad economy and it's sort of a recipe for trouble, which is actually what happened here," he said of Creighton Farms. "We've been fortunate to be offered some magnificent opportunities."

And the two business partners plan to stick around to make the most of the opportunity they found in Creighton Farms. Deitch lives in Palm Beach and Boston, and Southworth lives in Boston and Cape Cod, but the two say they will continue their frequent visits to Loudoun to preserve Creighton Farms as the dynamic community they've envisioned.

"At this stage in our business careers, we want to keep a few things forever, and this is clearly one of them," Southworth said. "We'll never sell it. We're so proud to own it."