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Equestrian Communities Bring the New Ruralism Lifestyle to Market

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By Jennifer K. Donovan & Michael M. Donovan

RISMEDIA, Sept. 14, 2007- As baby boomers are increasing the number of mature adults at record numbers, they are realizing that something valuable got left behind - a connection to the land and the sense of well-being it provides. Now, thanks to technology and a new affluence, active adults, as well as families, are carving out a new lifestyle niche that presents a unique opportunity for builders and developers: New Ruralism.

The American Dream has always included a nice home, friendly neighbors and satisfying work and play. But, the dream has changed over time. In the 1940s and 1950s, families migrated from farms and rural areas to more urban settings. Today, the trend is reversing itself, but in a new way. New Ruralism, a term that encompasses the best of rural living with the best of suburban living, has emerged as the hottest new lifestyle sought by both young and mature.

Drawn to a simpler time, New Ruralism neighborhoods are being developed where community connection, safety and activity for children, and the natural environment are the centerpieces. With dedicated open space and connections to a natural environment at the heart of the new ruralism concept, community residents find it easier to connect with neighbors while also maintaining their privacy. And, this type of development allows for a safe, yet active lifestyle for themselves, their children and/or grandchildren.

At the same time, while leaving behind the hectic pace of city life, and constant stimuli, people still crave satellite TV, mobile phone coverage and high-speed Internet, and gourmet shopping. These are the epitome of New Ruralist living.

Crossing Markets with New Ruralism

Families to active mature adults are a ready market for developments steeped in the New Ruralism design principles. The aging boomer market is redefining retirement and is the most active demographic group to date. Affluent, in good health, and seeking activity, today's retiree "retired" from the shuffleboard court long ago. To compliment their active lifestyle, they also want community interaction and are drawn to more sustainable community designs. New Ruralism fits the bill.

Families are drawn to the New Ruralism concept as they seek safer, more active environments for their children, without giving up the amenities of city or suburban life. Many would like to embrace the days of telling a child "just be home before dark." Parents today want their children to experience life as they knew it when they grew up and want their children off the couch, away from the video screen, unplugged and outside.

In fact, childhood has changed to the point that a new term has emerged: "nature deficit disorder," coined by author Richard Louv who wrote "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder." Nature deficit disorder speaks to the idea that sensationalist media coverage and paranoid parents have literally "scared children straight out of the woods and fields, while promoting a litigious culture of fear that favors "safe" regimented sports over imaginative play."

Building secret forts and tree-houses, catching frogs and fish, swinging on a tire swing, going for a trail ride, spending a day at the barn, playing hide-and-seek in the woods, are all activities New Ruralism offers and encourages.

The Equestrian Amenity: New Ruralism In Action

As a wide range of people actively seek the New Ruralist lifestyle, a range of their expectations can be accommodated, or even exceeded, with one element - the equestrian amenity. From those that have a fond childhood dream of riding with Robin Hood, or the Lone Ranger to those who compete in amateur horse shows on the weekends, horses evoke an emotional - sometimes passionate - response from almost everyone. While typically only a small percentage of residents actively ride in a community (similar to the typical 15 to 25% of golf community members who actually playing golf), all residents receive just as much enjoyment. A well designed and executed amenity will keep horses and riders happy and using the facility - which in turn, provides on-going opportunities for the other residents to have their desires met.

These communities also are almost, by definition of, lower density. But, don't be misled by the old school "density equals dollars" equation. Buyers will pay a premium for a lot (and often a relatively small lot) that has access to significant natural open space and provides the opportunity to interact with horses and nature.

Communities that include an equestrian amenity conserve the land and utilize the natural environment to its fullest all the while bringing much needed services - and lifestyle opportunities - to the New Ruralism seeker, whether they have a horse as a member of their family or if they simply appreciate gazing at horses peacefully grazing in a field. As more people are drawn to its principles, New Ruralism communities with an equestrian amenity will continue to be in high demand.

Jennifer K. Donovan and Michael M. Donovan are co-Founders and Principals of Equestrian Services, which provides turn-key equestrian amenities for communities, resorts and a few select municipal clients nationwide and designs and assists in creating efficient, aesthetically-pleasing, well-planned equestrian facilities. Jennifer and her husband Michael fled the daily intensity, stress, traffic congestion, and aggressive driving of city life two years ago for a more peaceful way of living on 24 acres in a new ruralism neighborhood in Central Virginia. Equestrian Services is headquartered in Charlottesville, Virginia.

For more information, visit [1] www.equestrianservicesllc.com.

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