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Valley HOMES & Style

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Crofts' Photos Courtesy of Dennis Crosby

the Crofts an Equestrian Niche

By Bonnie Williamson

Very rarely will a developer actually live in his or her development. The Crofts, a few miles outside of Shepherdstown, WV, is the exception to the rule. It's home to all three of the partners who founded it.

"[The Crofts] is a totally different approach. It's definitely home to us. That's how much we believe in it," said Peter S. Corum, one of the partners.

The Crofts is an equestrian-planned, gated community. In today's market it is referred to as a niche community, Corum said. Niche communities are the national trend.

According to the New York Times, niche communities are based on the theory that people want to find neighbors who have the same interests. Developments that cater to vegetarians, religious groups and even retired pilots are sprouting up all over the country. About 6,000 people of all ages live in communities whose residents have common interests.



The Corum home was designed by Grove & Dall'Olio Architects

The Crofts is for the horse community.

"We wanted people to have the benefits of the country, as well as the security of a subdivision," said Corum, a Shepherdstown native. Corum's wife, Andrea, is also from the Jefferson County area, so their roots run deep, he said. The Corum home is on 33 acres in The Crofts.

The Crofts, named after the English term croft for small farm, consists of 169 acres divided into 16 estate lots, a 9.5-acre park, three miles of hiking and riding trails and a centrally located barn for residents that will be used as an equestrian center. Four lots have been sold and a fifth is under contract.

Corum and his partners know real estate well. Corum is a mortgage consultant, Ed Slonaker owns a wealth management company and Tim Hafer is a real estate agent. However, their plan wasn't to create a development with a large number of homes built close together.

"We wanted to have a "green" approach. We want to preserve the land and have it thinly populated. We wanted to do it right," Corum said.

Corum said no vinyl will be used on the homes, only brick, stone or natural wood. No power lines will be seen either, as the electricity lines will be underground.

"That's more expensive but it keeps the natural feel to the area," Corum said.

The development even has a stacked stone retaining wall like many found on historic properties.

Keeping a horse theme for the development is attractive for the area, too. Nearby Loudoun County, VA, is known for its horse farms. Corum said he wasn't worried about the competition that might pose.

"People can get an incredible deal here. Property is less expensive," he said.

In addition, Corum said residents have Shepherdstown close by, with its university and other cultural attractions.

"The arts are widely engaged here and the town is very quaint with a lot to offer," said Corum.

The land for The Crofts was purchased from the Staub family, and used to be a dairy farm.

"The Staubs knew my family. I let them know we would make them proud by how we developed the property. They still watch its progress," Corum said.

Corum said The Crofts will not be subject to the boom and busts of the real estate market.

"We don't want people to 'flip' houses or buy then sell them right away. A sense of community is very important to us. This is for the long term," he said.

Corum said many area residents were initially afraid of the changes The Crofts would make to the area.

"But I think we surprised them with this natural approach," he said.

Plans for another niche community designed by artists is in the future, Corum said.





Above are artist-drawn renderings of Tim and Mary Hafer's home in The Crofts, to be completed the summer of 2008. Mary Hafer along with Rosella Kern, a local architect, designed the gracious traditional-style home with Georgian elements. Tom Kern, a builder, is giving this 4800-square foot home an all-brick finish on a full basement foundation.

