

Deer Canyon Preserve Development Uses Strict Rules to Maintain the Natural Landscape

By Johanna King
For the Journal

When Alan and Kathleen Clute bought 20 acres in Deer Canyon Preserve outside Mountainair, they secured for perpetuity a piece of the old West.

The Bay Area couple agreed to build only on a designated acre of their property. The rest of their land will remain protected open space used only for hiking, biking, horseback riding and exploring nature.

And for every purchase of property, developer Heritage Preserve of El Paso dedicates 20 acres to a conservation easement, forever protecting the unspoiled landscape.

About 90 percent of the 18,000 acres of Deer Canyon Preserve will remain undeveloped, which makes this Central New Mexico community unique, says Justin Ruby, vice president of sales and marketing for Heritage Preserve.

"We saw an opportunity to do something different, to give back a little and to create a unique offering to our property owners," says Ruby. "Not everybody gets it at first, but once they experience the property, ultimately that's what drives them to come to Deer Canyon."

The developer has sold nearly half of the 450 lots, which list for between \$155,000 and \$175,000. About a dozen homes have been built so far; another dozen are under construction. Landowners work with recommended custom builders to develop only one to three acres of their land. The rest must remain open space.

The Clutes are considered Deer Canyon pioneers, having lived in the community for a couple of years.

Alan Clute, a semiretired computer programmer, and Kathleen Clute, a professional pianist who wanted to dedicate more time to composing music, visited the community about five years ago at the urging of a friend. The pair bought their property that day.

"We just liked the way it felt," recalls Alan Clute. "That particular day, it had snowed about six inches, it was bright and sunny and not too cold. It was fresh air

and open space. We liked the fact it was peaceful and quiet and there weren't too many amenities. And the idea of sharing 20 square miles with a few hundred houses is kind of a neat thing."

Development rules

The Clutes, like their Deer Canyon neighbors, built their 2,350-square-foot home to blend with the aesthetic of the environment. Building requirements for the development include earth-tone colors, height limits, square-footage minimums of 1,000 to 1,600, no mobile homes or temporary structures, and restrictions on fencing, animals and landscaping.

There are also restrictions on lights, noise and odors, as well as "unsightliness" that could obstruct the area's pristine views. Property owners are expected to be stewards of the land, practicing good conservation habits and respecting the natural habitat.

Deer Canyon Preserve is located about an hour and a half southeast of Albuquerque on the edge of the tiny community of Mountainair, population 1,100. When the development is complete, Ruby expects it will double the population of the area.

Utilities are underground, and homes share water wells. Though it may seem that the community is in the middle of nowhere, each home has access to telephone service, high-speed Internet and TV.

In addition to its wide-open spaces, easy access to both Albuquerque and Santa Fe is a selling point for the development, says Ruby.

Most who have bought property in Deer Canyon are from large urban areas where the developer has concentrated its advertising campaign: Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Chicago. "These are people who have lived their whole lives white knuckling the steering wheel. They hear the concept of Deer Canyon and they love the idea of freedom, of the Wild West. But they also love the fact that it is close to a big city."

Second life

Ruby says of the more than 40 people who visit the property each month, the majority are boomers looking for a place to retire. "They're looking for their second life," Ruby says. "They're not coming here to die. They're looking for something to do. They're active in the community. They want to stay busy."

As a result, the area already is developing into its own microcosm made up of semiretired scientists, artists, educators and other professionals with a passion for the outdoors and a consciousness for both the environment and community.

Jack and Nancy Lockridge of Alexandria, Va., are typical of property owners in Deer Canyon. In their early 60s, the couple was looking for a place to relocate after Jack retired as executive director of the Federal Bar Association.

"We were intrigued by the openness of the land, the elevation of the land, the deeded recreational interest in the whole preserve, and finally the natural beauty and climate," Jack Lockridge said in an e-mail interview from his home in Alexandria. "Did I say anything about the unbelievable views?"

The couple purchased their 20 acres in August 2005. Their home is under construction, and they plan to make the permanent move in about three years. "We are so looking forward to learning what we can do to preserve and enrich the land, learn the history of the people who were on the land before us, and becoming a part of this wonderful state and community," says Nancy Lockridge.

In the meantime, the couple has connected with other Deer Canyon landowners in the Washington and Baltimore area. A group of about 20 future neighbors met for dinner earlier this year in Virginia. "Just being together and talking about Deer Canyon and New Mexico created an aura of excitement," Jack Lockridge says.

In keeping with the idea of giving something back, the developer has created the nonprofit Heritage Land Conservancy, a nonprofit organization that conducts environmental research, education and remediation programs in conjunction with environmentally sensitive landowners, says Ruby. "It helps us contribute to the legacy of this land. If we're going to develop the land, we're going to do it in a way that gives back."

For more information about Deer Canyon Preserve, call toll free at (877) 573-3843, or visit the development's Web site at <http://www.dcpreserve.com/>