

Air park plan heads down runway

Development near Elkader will include residential lots, a lake and a landing strip
by BECKY SISCO

Elkader -- ELKADER, Iowa - An Elkader couple is planning something new for northeast Iowa, and it looks like the idea will fly.

George and Terry Leonard will develop an air park four miles south of Elkader. The development will include 80 residential lots, a landing strip with hangars and a 17-acre lake. Ten of the lots will offer direct access to the landing strip, so homeowners can fly anywhere from their doorstep.

This will be the first air park in the state, according to Michelle McEnany, director of the Office of Aviation at the Iowa Department of Transportation. "I see this as a positive," she said. "It is all about convenience and access."

The popularity of air parks is growing. They began in winter hot spots, such as Arizona and Florida, and then developed in the Northeast. There is talk of others starting in Iowa, according to Tim McClung, of the aviation office.

The Clayton County Board approved the preliminary plat Monday and expects to approve the final plat next month. The Leonards are calling their subdivision Emerald Valley Acres.

"I am Irish," George Leonard said, explaining the name. He has been farming since 1959, and his wife works at the Clayton County Clerk's Office. This is their first foray into the world of development.

"At age 72, I wondered what I was going to do for the next 25 years," he quipped. Leonard has an interest in flying. He took flying lessons but never received his pilot's license because his flight instructor died in a highway crash, he said.

Leonard said his banker suggested creating the lake in a hollow, and he liked the idea.

"Between Nov. 8 and Dec. 8 of 2003, we moved 325,000 cubic yards of dirt," he said. "We hauled out about one load a minute."

The subdivision will cover 123 acres. Lots will range in size from 0.9 to 2 acres and will sell for \$25,000 to \$40,000 each. There will be hiking trails, picnic areas and two sand beaches around the lake.

Lot owners will hire their own builders but must follow several guidelines. For instance, homes must measure at least 1,500 square feet and one-third of the front must be faced in brick.

"I am trying to make this more upscale," Leonard said. "I want to protect my value and the home owners' value."

He believes Emerald Valley will appeal to the general population of upscale-home buyers as well as to private pilots. He has lined up three buyers to purchase property when the final plat is approved, he said.

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