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Emily Weaver

Historic theme park plans continue to build

By EMILY WEAVER
Editor

Marti Mongiello, proprietor of the Inn of the Patriots bed and breakfast in Grover and historic theme park visionary, said that great things have been happening since the announcement he gave a couple of weeks ago to open up a living history center resort and theme park in Cleveland County.

He said that he has been contacted by two groups of people who have offered land for the future park. A contribution of land would save the committee about \$1 million in total costs.

But, just like in other real estate matters, "location, location, location" is key.

Mongiello said that he and committee members have been looking at two waterfront properties. No decisions have been made yet on any sites, but he said that finding a place to develop off of either exit 2 or 8 would be ideal.

It has been reported that at least 50,000 motorists pass by exit 2 on I-85 everyday, he said. "All we need to do is unlock that."

But 50,000 shies in comparison to the amount of tourists Mongiello believes he will attract with the new park. He anticipates that

they could attract at least 1 million new visitors each year, which would, in turn, provide cash flow from 1 million fresh pocket books and wallets to area businesses, Grover, Kings Mountain and the county.

South Carolina State Park and the Kings Mountain National Military Park have already seen an influx of visitors - nearly half a million over the past year. The park service's diligence to the preservation of local history has not only attracted more tourists, but has also helped them receive more funding from Congress for new uniforms and equipment.

Just over the state line, the parks are growing. They bustle to life with new flourish. The activities and exhibits at Mongiello's Inn of the Patriots is growing too. The challenge is finding room for that growth.

Current laws prohibit the parks from having live battle reenactments. The Inn is currently restricted to four guest rooms, a small wing or two for exhibits, and no land to host a battle. But the new park would solve those problems, with a 12-room Colonel Frederick Ham-bright Inn, a Colonel Cleveland Museum and Phifer Hall and plenty of wide open land for "war."

Mongiello said that he is

not in this for the money, although the park would be a for-profit organization. He said that his main concern is for the community he calls home, for the potential growth and tourism this could attract, and for the American history this will excite.

He said that they plan to cap their executive director's salary at \$32,000 a year for at least the first 10 years. The director, along with employees, will be subject to drug testing and polygraphs. Board meetings will be filmed and available for public view on line. "We have nothing to hide," he said.

Mongiello will be attending an upcoming home show in Charlotte to promote plans for the new park.

He is also asking the public to write letters to Congress in support of this project as a heritage site. If listed, the park could receive perpetual funding in addition to putting "the county on the map."

For more information about writing a letter in support, contact Marti Mongiello at 704-937-2940.

The photograph which appeared on the front of last week's Herald was provided by Hearthstone Homes, Inc., of Dandridge, Tenn.