

road renovation by Pam McTeer | Associate Editor

Developers add commercial projects along Lena Road

Warehouses, business condos and a hotel are expected open by September.

MANATEE COUNTY — What has always been a neglected, curvy, side road is now turning into a major corridor.

Independent contractor Peter Lane began construction on a two-building condo-office development on Lena Road last November. The projects sits on 1.5 acres with one building holding three units and the other with four. The spaces offered begin at 1,000 square feet and \$300,000. The buildings, which should be complete by September, will include granite countertops and hardwood cabinets.

"It's something people are going to desire," Lane said of his project. "The spaces are ideal for everyone, from Realtors to doctors to contractors."

Lane isn't alone on Lena Road. Developer Mike Sporer and Realtor Don Swartz, of Interstate Commercial Brokers LLC, are developing two projects on the corridor for September of October completion.

The first, Creekwood Commons, is a six-acre development that includes 22 units. called Creekwood Commons, which has 22 units available, and the other is the 6.5-acre Creekwood Exchange, which will include more than 32 units, all at 1,500 square feet.

In addition to the new space for offices and business, Lena Road also will be home to new warehouses, a hotel, gas station and possible pediatric center, Lane said.

Furthermore, as a new destination for business, Lane said



The first building in Peter Lane's condo-office project should be complete by September. The East County independent contractor also built Lane Plaza and Lane Plaza Too in Lakewood Ranch. Ayse R. Twit

he hopes drivers will use Lena Road as a north-south alternative to Interstate 75.

"Lena Road is an important puzzle piece for the road to be connected," Lane said.

The design spaces Lane is building are tagged warehouse flex spaces, which operate on a 30/70 template, where 30% of the space is used for office and 70% is used for warehouse storage. Often, businesses will start with a flex space and upgrade

to a larger facility when necessary.

Despite the nearby Lena Road landfill, the developers chose Lena Road because of its proximity to the highway.

"Many people think of Lena Road as a sidestep to the dump, but we decided to build more than five miles away, which will hopefully eliminate that negative public perception," Lane said.

"It's a great solution to con-

nect the two state roads," Sporer said. "We are definitely ahead of the game, because this area will eventually expand out further."

Sporer's buyers will have access to parking and can choose from three customized floor plans. It will also feature industrial-zoned areas for light manufacturing, distribution and other industrial services.

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IN BRIEF

COMMUNITY NEWS AND NOTES

+ Ranch names operations manager

Ryan Heise was named the new operations manager of Lakewood Ranch earlier this month. He will be responsible for all field operations, including landscaping, irrigation and maintenance, in the five community development districts.

The position was vacated by Loius Lawman in early spring before Bob Fernandez became the community manager. Heise has been affiliated with Lakewood Ranch since April, working about 20 hours each week.

Fernandez said he knows the community, which made him the ideal choice. He will be paid \$67,000 annually.

+ Animal hospital opens new facility

Bradén River Animal Hospital celebrated the opening of its new veterinary office Aug. 7 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony hosted by the Manatee Chamber of Commerce.

Dr. Terry Clekis bought the Bradén River Animal Hospital five years ago and has had dreams of expanding ever since.

"The community has been changing and growing, and I've wanted to meet the needs of local residents by continuing to provide excellent veterinary care in a new state-of-the-art facility," he said.

The new 5,200-square-foot office is located on the same property as the old facility at 5012 SR-64 E. It includes five exam rooms, a treatment room, digital X-ray room, surgery suite, pharmacy and dental suite.

Bradén River Animal Hospital is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and from 8 a.m. to noon, Saturday.

For more information, visit www.bradenriveranimalhospital.com or call Dr. Terry Clekis, 745-1513.

INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE by Bill Rosenberger | Staff Writer

Mixon Fruit Farms to be featured on iLife TV

A crew from 'Eye on Gardening' spent six hours at the East County farm last week.

MANATEECOUNTY — When Dean and Janet Mixon took sole command of the family's citrus farm last year, they vowed to transition it from strictly an orange grove to a destination.

Their dream came to fruition that last week when a crew from the "Eye on Gardening" television show spent more than six hours shooting footage, conducting interviews and touring Mixon Fruit Farms. Host Tim Alan said the Bradenton hot spot definitely deserves the international exposure.

"I like Mixon's a lot," he said after going on the tram ride around the property. "It's everything I hoped it'd be and more."

Alan stumbled upon Mixon's recently while shooting at Tradewinds Resort in St. Petersburg. He said he picked up a traveler's guide and saw a full-page ad for Mixon's touting its butterfly garden, tram ride and all its tasty treats.

"Eye on Gardening," which airs on the Christian network iLife TV, profiles travel destinations that

boast beautiful gardens and floral design. Alan said Mixon's butterfly garden and gazebo overlooking the pond and waterfall bodes perfectly well the show's mission.

"We want to touch people's lives in an intimate way," Alan said. "We really just want to get families together to go out and experience everything God has for them."

The 30-minute show also provides landscaping tips and advice on caring for floral gardens. The show has gained such popularity in its five years that crews have shot footage in Europe, Hawaii, Jamaica and the Bahamas.

Shifting the crop

For more than 70 years, Mixon Fruit Farms almost exclusively sold juice and fresh fruit, but in the past five years, the family realized it needed to adjust to keep the farm alive.

They added a lunch menu, rich chocolate fudge and a souvenir shop. They also started marketing their famous orange-vanilla swirl soft-serve ice cream.



Francine and Yves Grosman were vacationing from Paris last week and stopped into Mixon Fruit Farms for the first time. Bill Rosenberger

And, when Dean and Janet Mixon took over last year, they added wines and jam and jelly shelves. They also invested in an animal habitat that Justin Matthews oversees. Matthews also gives the tram rides through the gardens and groves, and he does animal demonstrations.

The Mixons also are building two on-site wedding chapels — one in the grove and one on the outskirts of the grove — that they hope to have ready by October when the show likely will air.

"Because everything is not done, it's been hard to promote it," Janet Mixon said. "But with this airing in October, it turned out to be a gift."

They also are converting a loading dock into a meeting and banquet room.

"We had to diversify or it was going to fail," Janet Mixon added. "(But) this farm has blossomed into more than we imagined."

Hot spot

About 50 people joined the

tram ride with the "Eye on Gardening" crew, including Yves and Francine Grosman, a French couple who was visiting Mixon's for the very first time. After seeing everything that's there and hearing about what's to come, they said they consider Mixon's a destination worth visiting.

"I want to come back in the fall when there is juice," Francine Grosman said.

Dean and Janet Mixon know there will be many first-time visitors this year, especially after the show airs. He said they still get Manatee and Sarasota residents who come by for the first time thinking it was just another 'Tropicana. Now, they hope this puts them on the map in a larger context.

"I hope so — I can't imagine it not," Janet Mixon said. "We had better be ready for the fall and winter."

For more information on 'Eye on Gardening,' visit www.eyon-gardening.com. For more information on Mixon Fruit Farms, visit www.mixon.com, catch them at 2712 26th Avenue East or call 748-5829.

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