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FEATURES

Paradise requires hard work

[Jill Brackett](#)

(Updated: Thursday, August 21, 2008, 4:13 PM)

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Seven years ago, two Fresno real estate developers came to a dead stop as they turned right off Road 632 just before Nelder Grove. It was as far as their truck would take them. They hiked up a rugged private property road to behold an old run-down camp; a veritable over-grown forest, with a motley crew of residents and broken-down buildings dotted over 100 acres.

They were given three days to decide if they wanted to purchase it.

A sight that would have sent many potential buyers running, Dave Wasemiller and Nick Kossaras saw as a haven in the woods for their family and friends.

But not without an extra nudge from their wives, Patti Wasemiller and Carmalee Kossaras, the real visionaries the men said.

"It was like God's country," said Patti. "I saw the light streaming through the trees and just felt God all around us."

They had no idea, then, that years later it would become a signature resort.

But first things first. The couples began by gathering all the family and friends that hoped to have a home-away-from-home to help clear and haul away brush and debris, filling more than 20 dumpsters.

"There we were, the two of us with clippers staring at this jungle of forest," Dave laughed.

"It took a lot of vision and creativity and not everyone has that," Nick added.

Today, crews have remodeled, rebuilt, spruced and primped their way into a full-fledged resort with attention to detail that is staggering.

The couples say they are still in awe at the labor so many put into the revitalization.

Six buildings are available to rent, and each uses materials found on the property.

Wood has been milled on-site and used for for everything from a three-tier deck descending alongside a gushing waterfall, which leads to a natural pond, to the finish carpentry found in every nook and cranny. Even the water is piped from a natural spring.

The road to becoming a resort has been a steep learning curve, the foursome said, none of whom had previous experience outside of renting apartments.

"It just took on a life if its own," said Dave.

Part of the new life of the resort was its blossoming into a popular wedding destination. With packages that include scenic vistas for ceremonies, a large banquet room for a reception and accommodations for guests, the resort has been gaining the attention brides-to-be.

The first wedding, booked well in advance of the opening date of the resort, had the owners frazzled. In just three weeks the owners had promised to landscape, construct a gazebo, create a waterfall, and finish buildings far from completion.

"And we did," the group said, each with obvious relief.

"There we were, Carmy and I, out planting flowers at three in the morning," said Patti.

"Yeah, we had parked the cars and had the headlights on so they could see what they were doing," added Dave.

The couples, thinking they were in the clear, were ready to enjoy the first wedding, and the first event at their new resort, when they got another surprise.



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The tables, which had been decorated with real fruit for the wedding reception, had attracted grazing cattle from land bordering the property.

"I saw Carmy out there, saying in her little voice, 'shoo, shoo,'" laughed Petti. "And I said, 'that isn't going to work, we need a gun.'"

The owners have since fenced off the property.

Open for business, officially, since October, the resort has had 44 bookings.

Up at the resort, the owners continue to look at their property with eagle eyes, noticing every detail and feature, planning and scheming for what is next.

"The girls always say, '(renovate) another building because we want to shop,'" said Dave.

The resort is full of the owners' personalities and what they say is an important part of the ambiance of their place.

"We want it to stay unique and keep our own identity," said Dave.

For now, the couples see no end in sight to their plans. "It's become a very expensive toy," said Nick.

Dave elaborated, "It's like Disneyland. It's never done."



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