

Upscale housing to hit former ski slopes

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Tyrone Twp. — The buildings are torn down, the ski lifts have been auctioned off. And despite "No Trespassing" signs, kids still sneak in to sled, party or ride their four-wheelers.

What was once the 96-acre Kandahar Ski Club soon will be a gated community with about 30 houses nestled among hills, forest and a spectacular view of this rural area.

Much of the community's response has been bittersweet:

Nostalgia for a popular ski club where memories were made. Disappointment that development might destroy the country ambience of the area. Optimism that an expensive development will be good for their township.

Mike and Sandy Easler, owners of The Winfield Collection in Fenton, bought the property in September 1995 for \$672,000. The development awaits final site plan approval from the township.

The Easlars bought the site after the 50-year-old ski club experienced a crippling

decline in membership. At its height, 300 families carried a Kandahar membership card. But when it was sold, there were only about 50 members who skied, sledded, biked and hiked at the site.

"Nobody who has been with Kandahar a long time has wanted to see Kandahar not exist," said James R. Heenan, a former president and attorney representing the club. "Too much nostalgia ... It was a very difficult decision for everybody."

Heenan said Kandahar members will divvy up money from the sale among themselves, but declined to specify an exact amount.

Township Supervisor Royce Hyde agreed it was tough to see Kandahar go, but he is optimistic about the development's impact on the community.

"It'll be an asset to the township," he said. "It's too bad to lose a recreational facility out there, but it's one of those things with progress. I guess you're glad to see it turn into something positive."

The developers will design and prepare the site, but will not build the houses. Mike Easler said they haven't yet put price tags on the lots, but they will start where the

township's upscale Top of the Pines subdivision left off — around \$100,000 for parcels of at least two acres.

Top of the Pines houses range from about \$400,000 to \$4 million, said Tyrone Township Clerk Bethany Hammond.

"We're not builders, so we'll be retaining one lot on top of the highest point for ourselves," Easler said. "We want to make it blend and go with the ski slope theme. It's in design right now."

At 1,220 feet, the tallest hill at Kandahar is one of the highest peaks in the region.

He said some people already have expressed interest in the property and he hopes to break ground in the spring.

The Livingston County Road Commission also is being consulted about paving Foley Road, which leads to the property.

Michael Craine, managing director of the road commission, said it could cost up to \$1 million to pave two miles of Foley Road from Hartland Road to Fenton Road.

Hammond said the Easlars are interested in helping pay part of the cost, but since the township has no money to offer for road improvements, Foley Road property

owners would be special-assessed to help pay.

It is not only the cost that worries some homeowners near Kandahar.

"Oh, we're bummed," said Kim Lewis, who lives on Foley Road and grew up skiing at Kandahar. "This is like a little town of its own out here. All the neighbors are close. It will take all the rural atmosphere out of this road."

"A lot of people buy out here because it was country. If you climb to the top of the hill, you can see the lakes. And the deer. Oh, it's beautiful."

Her neighbor, Ella Lauer, said she hates the idea of Foley Road being paved, but she hates the dust, too.

"None of us are above seeing change," said Lauer, whose family has lived across the street from Kandahar for 25 years. "But if you move to the country, isn't it because you want to live in the country?"

Lauer laughed as she recalled sledding down the hills or skidding down a slope she called "Devil's Pit."

"(The development) is a real bad thing because it's beautiful over there," Lauer said.