



*Panoramic view of Perimeter Center*

## New Office Developments: Not All Paradise Lost

By Ellen Fix

White noise. Buffer zone. Native biota. The hottest new-rock bands out of Seattle? Try the latest lingo from Atlanta's new breed of environmentally aware developers.

On the surface, Atlanta's exurban sprawl still reeks of asphalt. But look closer, and you're also likely to find a revitalized sensitivity to the requirements of — and our humanistic craving for — preserving nature's bounty.

"Atlanta is blessed with a gorgeous natural environment," says Ben Carter, CEO of Ben Carter Properties which, in a joint project with Corporate Property Investors, is working closely with community and governmental entities to ensure the 500-acre Mall of Georgia reduces negative ecological impact.

"We don't expect tenants to pay for these amenities," Carter says. "But if you look at the history of development in Atlanta — for example, the Cumberland, Wildwood, and Perimeter Center office parks — they were all very responsibly master planned. We're just trying to create a distinctively styled community with a large sense of quality."

Five of the Mall of Georgia's most notable elements are a 90-acre permanent nature park; 1,000 parking spaces on porous grass surfaces to reduce run-off;

alternative-fuel parking spaces complete with recharging stations (yes, the electric car is coming!); sidewalks with street trees that connect all parcels; and an approach toward erosion control and stormwater management that exceeds county code. Carter also has agreed with Gwinnett County to develop future public transportation links.

States Carter, "A wetlands restoration area is part of the nature park, which will be managed by a non-profit corporation and remain a permanent green space. There will be a series of walking trails that highlight indigenous plant species. We'll also be adding Georgia plants that will enhance the six venues features in the park."

Venues include a floodplain and hillside areas that are typical of local topography. Educational plaques will describe various plants, insects, and creatures of these sub-zones.

"We have an opportunity here to start bending the rules," Carter says. "We're setting an example and showing a commitment that will make this community a more livable place."

"We're setting a standard of quality and adopting a cohesive style of development that encompasses land planning, development, and architecture that will make for

a more desirable community." Sidewalks and trees will cost about \$1.5 million, the park another \$8 million.

### DESIGNING A LANDSCAPE

Developers trying to preserve natural beauty within their projects often look to landscape designers to help them do just that. Take the 83-acre Perimeter Summit, co-marketed by KOLL Management Service and Speros/Wood Real Estate. Best known to some as the location of Hewlett Packard's 580,000-square-foot regional headquarters and Villa Christina's Restaurant, Perimeter Summit boasts some 38 acres of woodland beauty that will be preserved in perpetuity.

According to landscape designer Steven Sanchez of Hughes, Good, O'Leary & Ryan, a respect for the adjacent environs and what was once there was crucial in the early planning stages. What was there was the Lake Hearn subdivision — comfortable suburban homes filled with backyard barbecues and pool-side soirees. Driving along Perimeter Summit Parkway, you can almost hear the kids playing or see them riding their bikes and walking their dogs.

Almost. What you do see are towering magnolias, pines, and other evergreens, blended with the maturing specimen



plantings left by the homeowners, all carefully protected.

"The intent of the development was to be totally compatible with the neighborhood, while remaining aesthetically appealing," explains Jim Bennett, marketing and sales agent for the property. "We wanted the development to blend in with the environment, rather than stick out like a sore thumb."

PROJECTS THAT ARE MORE MARKETABLE

County zoning regulations call for large green-space areas in developments like this one. But beyond complying with these requirements, KOLL spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to make Perimeter Summit more marketable to the likes of high-end tenants such as Hewlett-Packard and Cox Communications.

One of the focal points of the design and the site is a circular water detention facility (one of three) that was transformed into an Everglades-like park.

"The decision was as much aesthetic as environmental," explains Sanchez. "The theme for the park areas came from the razed homes. We kept the non-native plants, as if they were indigenous here. And we selected additional plants like iris and lotus and placed them so they'd appear natural to the area.

"To collect stormwater, many developers just put a big bowl, usually an empty meadow, where water can drain from impervious surfaces. We created a wetland which works to pull out oils and chemicals from cars and heavy metals. It not only mitigates the impact of runoff, but is in a continual state of purification."

Walking paths through the development — which is dotted with stack stone walls — are made of crushed granite dust, which is porous and further soaks up runoff. Along the medians, there are rows of *liriopte spicata*. "It's a very tough plant," according to Sanchez. "Unlike grass, which requires a lot of energy to maintain, it never needs to be mowed. So there are no fossil fuels consumed. And it requires less water, too."

A stream and a small waterfall on the site soothe the soul with "white noise." You'd never know you were just yards away from I-285 and Perimeter Mall.

White noise is one of the many seductive amenities of commercial developments in the delicate Chattahoochee River corridor. And it presents its own set of ecological challenges. Post Properties, in a slight departure from its signature, flower-studded apartment homes, is developing Riverside by Post. The 85-acre planned, multi-use community will combine upscale multifamily residences with Class A office and retail space, and is set along a 500-foot tree preservation buffer along the river, between I-75 and Highway 41.

A RESPECT FOR THE RIVER

Post has worked closely with the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper, The Georgia Conservancy, the Atlanta Regional Commission, the state Environmental Protection Division, and local governments to ensure it's on track environmentally.

Explains Post's Janie Maddox, "There are three streams on the steeply sloped property. Water in Atlanta is such a precious commodity, we wanted to go above and beyond the minimum standards set by Atlanta and the community at large to protect water quality."

Motivated in part by concerns of the Upper Chattahoochee Riverkeeper that adequate stormwater control measures be implemented during construction, Post has spent some \$300,000 to minimize runoff and potential erosion. And the plan surpasses the city of Atlanta's minimum standards.

To do this, Post cleared and graded the site in stages. Rather than a single catch-basin, a series of water run-off checkpoints were created. A temporary stream crossing is now a box culvert, allowing a road to pass over it. Some \$300,000 worth of erosion control equipment was installed. In addition, an arborist was hired to monitor construction progress and tree-clearing. The first component of

the project, a 225,000-square-foot office building, opens in March.

Everything at Riverside will surround a town square. The concept is based on "new urbanism," where one can enjoy the pleasures of living, working and playing — all within a five-minute walk. Riverside's master planner is Andres Dunny, who was the town planner for Florida's Seaside community on the panhandle.

JURISDICTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Another project that faced similar multi-jurisdictional hurdles is Deerfield, a 554-square-foot planned mixed-use facility in north Fulton County developed by Hines Interests.

Deerfield, near Windward Parkway and Georgia 400, also is near the Big Creek Stream basin, a 100-mile drainage area serving Cumming, Roswell, Alpharetta and Cherokee, Fulton and Forsyth counties. The Atlanta Regional Commission delayed approval on Hines' development until all the municipalities could consult.

"This was a \$200,000 study that had to be completed, so we lobbied all of the localities to cooperate on the project," recalls Robert Voyles, Hines senior v.p.

Deerfield also will feature a common retention basin for about 60 percent of the entire development. "We're also preserving all the wetlands around the project, and have extensive tree-save areas," Voyles says. "We're also following the natural topography and current vegetation lines."

Developers are finding out today what Ben Carter and other environmentally conscious commercial real estate leaders have known all along: one of Atlanta's biggest attractions is its topography and natural greenspace. And while the Mall of Georgia, Deerfield, Perimeter Summit and Riverside by Post are only a small handful of such environmentally friendly projects, expect to see more in the future as profitable marketability and environmental concerns continue to go hand in hand. 