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Tobiano features golf, riding trails and boating

Community located 20 kilometres west of Kamloops has plenty to draw buyers in

Diana Skoglund

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TOBIANO

Project location: 20 minutes west of Kamloops on the Trans Canada Hwy

Project size: 615 building lots; 499 apartments and townhouses, 9 buildings; sites up to 450 rooms, 3 hotels

Prices: "Bluff" lots, -\$300,000 -- +/--\$550,000; "Summers Landing" townhouses, -\$400,000 -- +\$700,000; "Lake Star" townhouses, +\$400,000 -- -\$700,000

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Developer: Pagebrook Inc.

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Tobiano is the newest, and rarest, jewel in the Thompson Okanagan. A working cattle ranch, an under-used lake and rolling sagebrush hills have been sculpted into a master-planned resort just 20 minutes west of Kamloops on the Trans-Canada Highway.

Mike Grenier, with his father Bill, owner of the Pagebrook Inc. development company, first saw the Six Mile Ranch property in the mid-1990s, while looking around North America for property with recreational-development potential. He purchased the property in 1995 and soon after built his family's own award winning timber-frame home, with 18,000 glorious acres as a backyard.

Grenier admits to having tweaked his plans over the years, but his vision has remained true--to create a premier resort destination.

Mike, Shelley and their daughters Rebecca, 11, and Allison, 9, are about to have neighbours.

Finishing touches are being added to the first of the Tobiano properties, Lake Star Town Homes, scheduled for occupancy.

Mike Vopni of the Sotheby's brokerage firm says that although no major product launches are imminent, the real estate company tasked with marketing Tobiano is constantly releasing new properties.

"As we sell a residential lot or town home, we release new inventory," he said from his office in the gull-wing roofed Discovery Centre at the centre of the development. "We have sold

well over \$3.5 million this year which I believe puts Tobiano on the top of the list for sales success at a master planned resort community for sales in 2008."

Planning this community has included the precision timing of construction. The Thomas McBroom-designed, 18-hole golf course opened to rave reviews last summer and Tourism Kamloops is already touting Tobiano as the best new course in Canada. A round of golf here is often the dealmaker on a property purchase. McBroom has often said that Tobiano is one of the most picturesque properties he's ever worked on. The fairways and the tee boxes complement the landscape and its gulleys, canyons and fissures.

The rest of the development follows suite. With nearly 1,000 acres set aside for the developed part of Tobiano, neighborhoods are widely spaced, with each home and amenity building situated for optimum view, balanced by a "village centre," hotels and the golf course. All set against the stunning backdrop of Kamloops Lake and surrounding hills.

Most purchasers are from Metro Vancouver. Their motivation is mixed: Some are picking up recreational property and some primary residences. Vopni estimates the sales are in favour of the recreation buyer. Either way, it's the recreational opportunities that speak to the purchasers. Besides the golf course, there will be a 100 slip full-service marina and an equestrian centre complete with a network of trails that will connect riders to 17,000 acres of forest, hills and fishing lakes on the other side of the highway. Horse and rider will access the trails through a culvert passing under the highway.

The short, twenty-minute commute down that Trans-Canada to the schools and shopping in nearby Kamloops compares favourably against the Lower Mainland's traffic gridlock. For urbanites coming for the weekend, Vancouver is a neat 3-hour drive (once you're clear of the before-mentioned traffic snarl).

Patrick Harlow, a product development manager with Bell Canada, is going to trade his estimated 10 hours of weekly commute from South Delta to downtown Vancouver. The twice a day drive over two bridges and through a tunnel will be replaced with nine holes in the early morning, before a shift at the home office. He expects to spend two days a week at Bell's Vancouver office, cutting four hours a week off his commute. He's not sure what the change of location will do for his golf handicap.

The 38-year-old says having a full-time residence at Tobiano is a chance to give Ethan, his four-year-old son a chance to grow up in a place where there is time to dirt bike, golf, horseback ride, snowmobile and jet ski, all without leaving the community.

"It's the way my wife [Natalie] and I were raised in Alberta," Harlow says.

"In the Lower Mainland we spend so much time trying to get out of the city, we have no time to really enjoy ourselves.

"It takes forever to get to Whistler for the weekend, but we've been to Sun Peaks and it's a mini-Whistler, and only a one-hour drive from Tobiano."

An avid horsewoman growing up in Alberta, Natalie is looking forward to stepping out her front door, heading to the equestrian centre for weekly rides into the trails through the resort's undeveloped forests and rolling hills. Besides being able to access all that recreation from their home at The Bluffs, the Harlows will move into a neighbourhood complete with Ethan's grandparents.

Natalie's father and mother are getting ready to move from Alberta into their Lake Star townhouse. Harlow said when his snowbird in-laws drove past the development last spring they had no idea it was the same place he and Natalie were considering.

Patrick and Natalie bought their third of an acre in April of 2007. They've just listed their South Delta home with a realtor and are making the final changes to the plans of their dream home that will overlook Kamloops Lake. They expect to be in their new home this fall or the spring of 2009 and Ethan will start school in Kamloops. And after classes, his dad

says, its up to Ethan whether they'll go to the driving range, jet ski or don the wranglers and boots to ride the range.

Diana Skoglund is a Kamloops writer and editor.

KAMLOOPS

"[At] the confluence of N. Thompson [River] and S. Thompson [River]. John Tod, the veteran [Hudson's Bay Company] man who in 1841 took over the fort [t]here ... noted in his memoirs: 'The Shuswap Indians called the place "Kahm-o-loops," meaning the meeting of the waters.'" - G.P.V. and Helen B. Akrigg, *British Columbia Place Names*, 1986 and 1997

Where, according to the Transportation Ministry's distance calculator? From Seymour and Hastings, 355 kilometres, 31/2 hours, via the Coquihalla Highway.

Where, according to the Forest Ministry's Tree Book? In the bunchgrass biogeoclimatic zone, grasses dominate upland sites because it's too hot in summer for trees to take root.

Where, according to the Encyclopedia of British Columbia? "Long known for its trout fishing, Kamloops attracts a growing number of tourists in all seasons, especially since the completion of the Coquihalla Highway reduced driving time from the coast."

Daily average temperature, January: -4.2

Coldest January day: -37, Jan. 29, 1969

Daily average temperature, July: 21

Hottest July day: 40.6, July 31, 1969

Population, 2006 census: 80,400

% change since 2001: +4

Architecturally? Among structures on city hall's heritage list are a cigar factory (1895) and magazines constructed during the Second World War for the Royal Canadian Navy to store ordnance "far enough away from the coast that they could not easily be attacked by carrier-borne aircraft."

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