

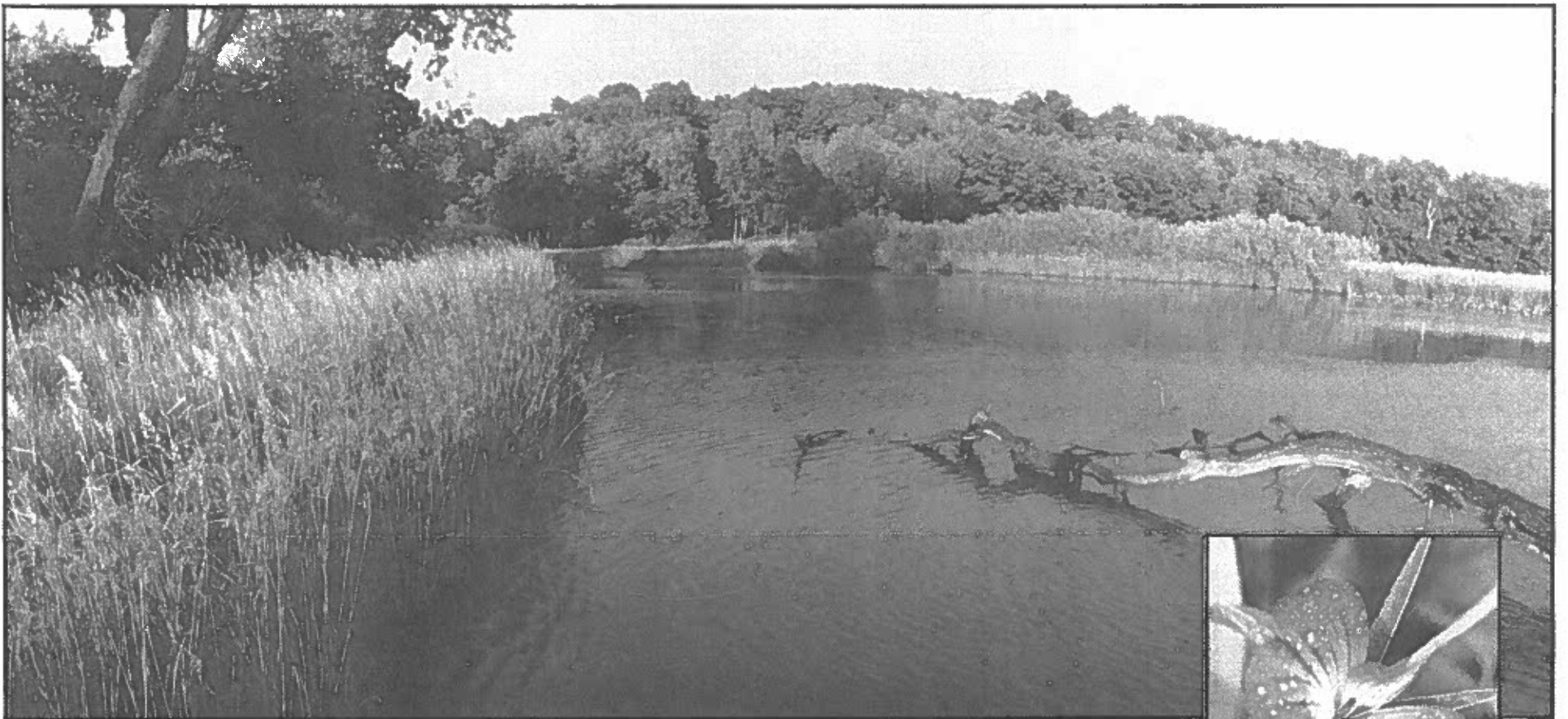
Chicago Sun-Times

Homelife

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

FRIDAY, JULY 3, 1992

PULLOUT SECTION



Wildflowers grow along the Galien River in New Buffalo, Mich., where a 125-acre tract will host condos and custom homes.



Michigan Preserve Limits Housing In Face of New Buffalo Stampede

By Jerry C. Davis
Staff Writer

NEW BUFFALO, Mich.—To see Chicago friends this summer, drive 90 minutes to Harbor Country. Vacation homes in places like New Buffalo, Union Pier and Grand Beach, Mich., give Chicagoans a comforting view of the Hancock Building across Lake Michigan.

Yet nearby is a different world of wetlands, wildlife, flora and fauna—a conservationists' paradise called the Preserve, which might be studied for years for its combination of development and preservation.

To build 22 2-story condos and 20 houses instead of 550 apartments and a fancy marina would seem a great waste to many developers. But it makes sense to the Sima family, which dedicated the 125 acres of marshes and forests to a foundation that will protect its natural resources in perpetuity.

Construction will begin late this year on a 50-acre plateau overlooking the marshes. There will be thousands more birds than human beings on that property each spring and fall

because it's a major migration station for herons, mourning doves, mallards, Canada geese and other waterfowl.

Many homes will face the Galien River in New Buffalo, Mich., but not be visible to each other because of the way they will be situated on the land, according to Chicago architect Margaret McCurry of Tigerman-McCurry.

"Our firm has done a lot of homes, but never with such a concerted effort to save the full environment," McCurry said.

Harbor Country has, in the last 10 years, turned into Chicago's favorite summer getaway—and, in many cases, an all-season retreat. The housing market has had ups and downs with the economy, but this year has been "the best in recent memory," according to broker Michael Kuhn of Century 21 Harbor View in New Buffalo.

"There is very little available on Lake Michigan, so people are going for their second choice, acreage in the woods with privacy. And that property is being eaten up quickly," Kuhn said. "We could really use some new product."

But the economy has kept demand down and

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Condo owners at Harbor Pointe in New Buffalo can park power boats at their front door. Two-bedroom resales go for about \$250,000.

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Getaway Homes

New Buffalo Draws From Chicago Elite

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prices haven't risen beyond reach, Kuhn said. Most houses with 1,600 to 2,000 square feet of living space sell for \$150,000 to \$180,000. "At least 90 percent" of buyers are from Chicago, he said.

"The prices are about the same as a year ago, and maybe a little bit down from a period about two years ago when people had to lower their prices to make sales," he said. "We had some very high-ticket items that people bought with cash before the recession.

The Preserve will satisfy some of the demand, but it won't be cheap.

The 3- and 4-bedroom condo villas range from 2,200 to 3,000 square feet. They're expected to sell for \$325,000 to \$400,000. Lots for single-family homes range from \$175,000 to \$225,000, but significant preconstruction discounts can be negotiated.

McCurry said her company's design for the villas emphasizes large rooms, not unnecessary rooms.

"If they don't need a family room, we eliminate it to give other rooms an appropriate size, or to add an additional bedroom," she said.

The Sima family, which used land that was in the family for three generations, decided to emphasize preservation over profit.

James Sima hopes the Preserve will inspire environment-sensitive developments across the country. He shares ownership of the property with his brother and sister, Ralph Sima and Madeline Sima Reinke, who have a restaurant and a bed and breakfast hotel that are prominent in the area.

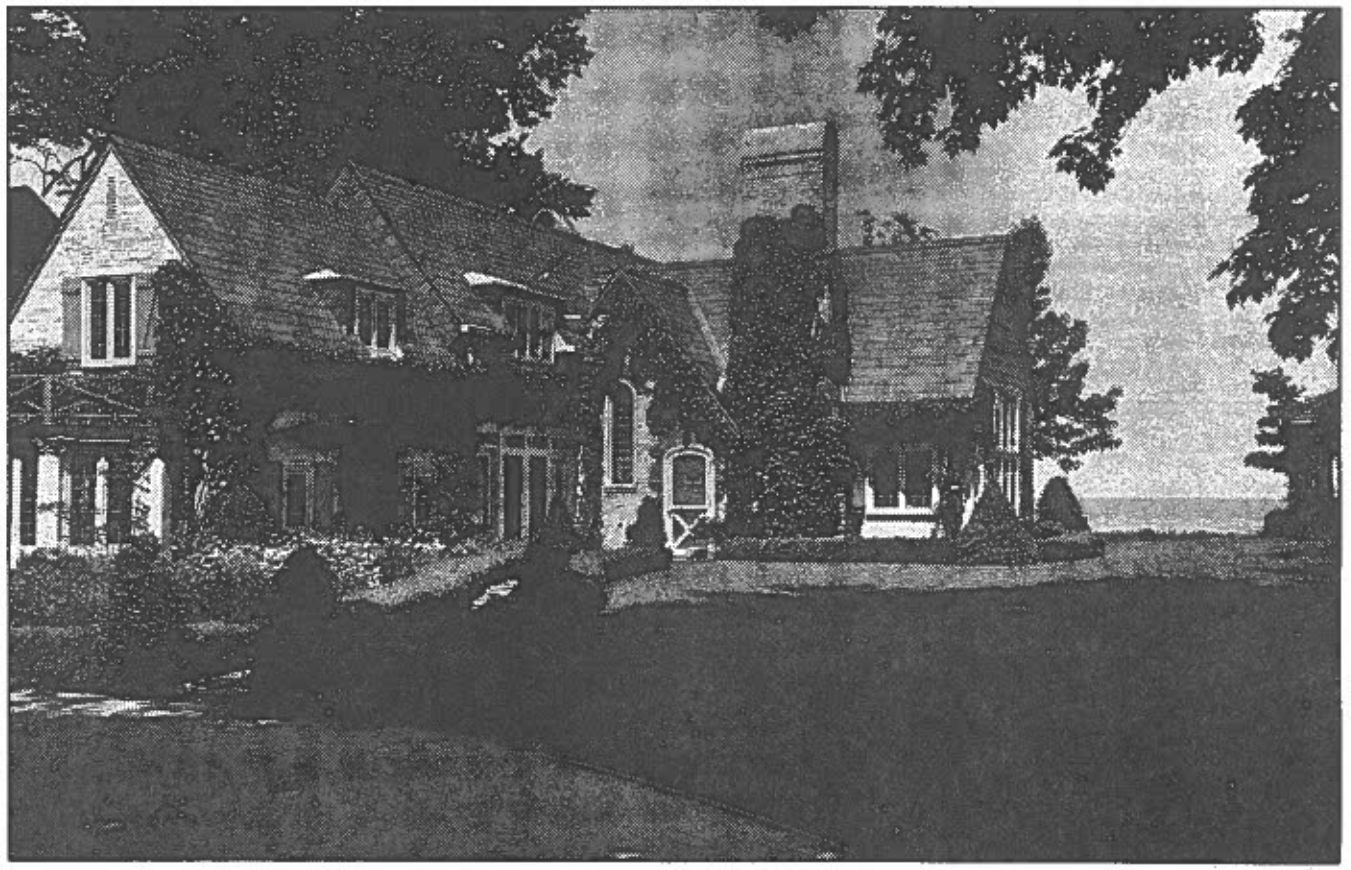
"They gave up a lot of dollars when they decided not to do the marina and high-density development," said Tim Bureau, chairman of the Resource Management Group, a consultant on the project. "But they did the right thing. There are not many natural places like this left. It will be a legacy of pride for the Sima family that they chose to save this area."

The Sima family employed naturalists, environmental planners, landscape designers and archeologists to guide the project. Naturalists call the Preserve one of the most important coastal resources in Michigan.

Anthropologists commissioned by the family have found eight Potawatomi Indian sites dating from the 15th to the 17th centuries, which might help the tribe gain federal protections. The homesites won't be developed until after they have been excavated for artifacts.

"That is a rare example in the Midwest of developers voluntarily choosing to regulate construction to minimize the impact on existing archeological sites," said William Cremin of Western Michigan University, another consultant for the developers.

The first homes and villas at the Preserve probably won't be seen until the spring of 1993. But if the development proceeds as planned, they will be special residences indeed.



On posh Riviera Drive in New Buffalo, Mich., stately \$500,000-plus homes overlook Lake Michigan from the crest of 60-foot-high sand dunes.

Harbor Country Leaves The Others in Its Wake

NEW BUFFALO, Mich.—This trendy Harbor Country port-of-call is leaving Lake Geneva, Wis., in its wake.

Until the late 1970s, New Buffalo's basin was a marshy peat bog surrounded by sand dunes. But after dredging and breakwater construction was completed in the early 1980s the area boomed as a summer home haven.

Today, New Buffalo is becoming the summer vacation getaway preferred by many Chicagoans.

The harbor at New Buffalo has more than 1,000 boat slips, including 600 private "dockominiums" that serve as moorings for luxury yachts owned by condo dwellers. Depending on size, boat slips go for \$27,000 to \$66,000.

Waterfront condominiums developed by architect Harry Weese at South Cove on Harbor Isle Drive are selling in the \$110,000 to \$340,000 range. Nearby at Harbor Pointe development on Whittaker and Lake streets 2-bedroom condos are selling in the \$240,000 to \$260,000 range.

For summer getaway buyers seeking the unusual, Sotheby's International Realty and broker Rhonda Shane of Chicago-based Koenig & Strey Realtors are offering 2.8 acres on the tip of Harbor Isle peninsula for \$2.9 million.

"Either a private estate or a community of waterfront homes would do justice to this stretch of land where Miami Indians once made their home and French fur trappers formerly traded," says Sotheby's sales brochure.

Near the peninsula, on posh Riviera Drive, stately \$500,000-plus homes overlook Lake Michigan from the crest

of 60-foot-high sand dunes. These large homes, accented with decks and plenty of glass, have whimsical names such as Sandcastle, Stones Throw, Sam's Source and Shore House.

Dozens of properties are for sale on the outskirts of New Buffalo, along the Red Arrow Hwy. and in other Harbor Country towns—Grand Beach, Harbert, Lakeside, Michiana, Sawyer, Three Oaks and Union Pier.

"The advantage of Harbor Country property is its diversity," said broker Nadra D. Kissman, of Nadra K Real Estate in New Buffalo. "There are condos and cottages, large summer homes and farmland all within a 10-minute drive."

Off the water, a cottage on a small lot

without private beach rights sells in the \$33,000 to \$60,000 range, she said. Houses within two blocks of the water with private beach rights sell for \$85,000 to \$150,000.

"If you are shopping for a larger beachfront house on Lake Michigan, expect to pay \$425,000 to \$1.25 million," Kissman said.

Off the water in New Buffalo, vacant homesites with beach rights range from \$40,000 to \$150,000 for 1/2 acre to 1 acre. "Inland, bargains still can be found in New Buffalo or Three Oaks," she said.

Many wooded country lots are available, she said. "Three miles outside New Buffalo you can buy a 14-acre tract with woods and a ravine for \$28,000.

"Raw farmland goes for \$1,000 to \$3,000 an acre. We have a listing on a

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Don DeBat



SUN-TIMES



Downtown New Buffalo, Mich., is dotted with many retail establishments, including Whittaker House, a woman's clothing and accessories store.