



October 2, 2008

Self-Contained, 41,300-Acre Community Proposed for Osceola

By [Michael Freeman](#)
REPORTER EDITOR

KISSIMMEE | In an effort to deal with a rising population and a shrinking amount of environmentally protected land, Osceola County is hoping to take a new approach, by creating a community that combines high density housing with plenty of protected green space.

'We're all dedicated to the proposition of improving the quality of life here in Osceola County,' said Mike Horner, president of the Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce. 'That's why I'm so excited to see this city in Osceola County, putting us on the cutting edge.'

The proposal is to create a new city in Southeast Osceola County called Destiny, a planned 41,300-acre, self-contained 'green community,' the first in the nation designed to create a harmonic blend between environmental protections and urban living.

'We see Destiny as an opportunity to stop talking about protecting the environment, and to start taking action,' said Randy Johnson, the former Osceola County state representative and now the chief operating officer for the new community, which would be built about 50 miles from the Four Corners area near Yeehaw Junction.

The plans for Destiny were unveiled last week during a sold-out presentation held at Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center. The plan still needs approval from the Osceola County commissioners, but its supporters say the concept has a lot of selling points, including more rural land preserved for future generations, a stronger job base that includes high tech positions, and expansion of the county's tax rolls.

Johnson said the project would sell itself through 'the incredible potential this project has to change the face of Central Florida,' while the project's founder and managing partner, Anthony V. Pugliese III, said this planned environmental development would likely become a hit with home buyers as well.

'This area would become home to those seeking to escape congestion,' he said.

Throughout this decade, Osceola has not only been one of the fastest growing counties in Florida, but also in the nation, often coming in behind only Flagler County

in terms of growth. During the boom days of the housing market, that put great strain on Osceola, as more and more available land got bought up for new developments, and the cost of housing here became increasingly unaffordable for the county's largely blue-collar employment base.

The initial vision behind Destiny was to save and preserve one of the last substantial parcels of land in the region from suburban sprawl. But rather than simply allow it to become available for new residential and commercial construction, the vision behind Destiny would take the concept in a different direction.

The community of Destiny would be a city where the ecosystem was integrated into the local infrastructure. It would be a series of inter-connected villages, but one where strategically placed Eco Industrial Preserves would work to the benefit of the cluster of businesses operating there. The city could also serve as an incubator for firms that focus on new, green-friendly technology, linking researchers and universities together into one advanced community.

Several county leaders attended the unveiling, which included widescreen video presentations and a lunch made up of organic foods grown in the county, and praised Destiny for its strong vision.

'The way we were growing was absolutely unsustainable,' said Osceola County Property Appraiser Atlee Mercer. He noted that census projections have indicated that Osceola County would reach 225,000 people by 2025 – and that past growth projections for the county have often been far too low.

'The solution was to create an urban growth boundary,' Mercer said. 'The solution is we create a new urban center.'

Destiny would be the ideal community, Mercer said, because it would have a high density urban core, with a range of housing options, and be surrounded by green spaces that provide leisure and recreational opportunities as well.

'It is a smart growth design that accommodates more choices,' he said. 'We want green space, we still want ranchers, we still want opportunities for outside activities.'

It could also provide opportunities for new jobs, a more diverse tax base, and greater tourism options, Johnson said, adding that the plans include creating a technology expo center 'where the latest developments in eco-technology are tested.'

He and Pugliese have already let the business community know about Destiny, and gotten positive feedback, with 'a host of companies interested in making Destiny their home,' Johnson said.

He added that if interest remains strong, it could end up 'bringing hundreds of manufacturing jobs to Destiny. Let me tell you, folks, our future is bright and our

phones are ringing off the hook from businesses. They all want to be a part of America's first eco-sustainable community. Destiny will create thousands of jobs.'

Maria Grulich Toumazos, Osceola's economic development administrator, agreed that green technology jobs could become a rising wave in the future.

'This is going to give us a clean slate to bring in those high-skill, high-wage, eco-friendly jobs,' she said.

Patsy Heffner, Osceola's tax collector, said the expanded jobs base would help the county's tax coffers as well.

'We've tried to keep up, but our tax base doesn't cover our needs,' she said. 'I don't support new development just to collect more taxes.'

Johnson said Destiny would have an eco-system as its infrastructure, which would include waterways, a 1,300-acre fresh water lake, and agriculture buffers around the city. The plans also include growing organic foods and fish there as 'green collar' jobs, and providing plenty of recreational activities that include 61 miles of walking and bike paths, and riding trails. There would be trams build across the waterway, and hundreds of miles of navigable waterways.

'This is a place where we expect to build a beautiful community of tomorrow,' Johnson said. 'We want to build America's first eco-sustainable community right here in Osceola County.'

Jim Murphy, chairman of Osceola County's Tourism Council, said this unique community would be an added selling point for the county's tourism efforts.

'Tourism has been good to us, and we're good at it,' Murphy said.

The plans also call for Destiny to have 84 miles of bus and trolley routes, 15 miles of light rail, and an International Green Technology Center.

'Isn't it exciting?' Johnson said. 'I want you to come dream with us about our incredible future.'

To learn more about this proposal, log on to www.destinyflorida.com.

Michael Freeman can be reached at Michael.Freeman@theledger.com or at 863-421-5577.