

It's Our History

The community that today exists as Heritage Hunt was formed out of two parcels of land that had been sold to a developer in 1989-1990. One parcel was called the Melbourne Tract and contained 450 acres located south of Little Bull Run. The Marsh Tract was located north of Little Bull Run and encompassed 390 acres. This land included 40 acres where Bull Run Middle School on Catharpin Road is located as well as 50 acres for commercial development. The developer received county zoning approval for the Melbourne Tract where regular residential housing of mostly town homes was planned. At this time the Marsh family still lived in their large pillared estate home. Due to the economic downturn in the early 1990's the property reverted to the bank.

Toward the end of 1995 Jerry Berman, regional vice president of Houston-based U. S. Home, contacted the property owner, Riggs Bank. Mr. Berman worked out of the Annapolis adult community of Heritage Harbor, which had been founded by U. S. Home in 1976-1977. In mid-1996 an agreement was reached that permitted U. S. Home to purchase the two parcels of land from Riggs Bank subject to zoning approval for an active adult community as the original zoning had lapsed.

The Prince William County Planning Commission voted unanimously on May 21, 1997, to recommend approval of a proposal by U. S. Home to build an age-restricted community on 806.2 acres immediately north of the Interstate 66/ U. S. Route 29 interchange and east of Catharpin Road. Plans called for a total of 1,950 homes. At least half the units in the proposed Heritage Hunt gated community would be single-family detached homes that would be built around a minimum 6,400-yard golf course for the exclusive use of residents and invitees. The single-family detached homes would be priced from \$200,000 to \$275,000 and

attached villa homes would be priced from the \$150,000's to the \$200,000's.

U. S. Home asked that 713.9 acres of the land be zoned PMR—Planned Mixed Residential. The remaining 92.3 acres include a 52.5-acre portion on Heathcote Boulevard to be developed as an office park with office, employment, and lodging uses. Forty acres on the west side of Catharpin Road would be dedicated to the county school system as a middle school site. About 54 acres of the site are flood-plain/environmental resource areas.

The Board of County Supervisors approved the zoning for Heritage Hunt in June 1997, and on July 31, 1997, U. S. Home settled on the entire parcel that was to become our community. Gainesville District Supervisor Edgar S. Wilbourn, III, wrote in a fall/winter 1997, INFOCUS column: “First, we wish to welcome U. S. Home’s Heritage Hunt to the Gainesville District. Heritage Hunt, at build out, will generate more positive tax revenue than Potomac Mills, which is currently the county’s largest source of revenue. Heritage Hunt is a positive example of residential land use.”

With the Prince William County Board of Supervisors’ zoning approval in June of 1997 of the Melbourne and Marsh tracts, the development of Heritage Hunt entered a new phase. Following the July 31, 1997, settlement, Jerry Berman planned to move from the U. S. Home Virginia Regional Office in South Riding into the Marsh Mansion on Catharpin Road. However, the imposing southern colonial-style home that Jerry entered to set up his office in the portion that is now our billiards room was not the gleaming opulent mansion we see today. The condition of the house was deplorable. It had been unoccupied for some time since it had been sold to a developer before reverting to Riggs Bank. The doors had not even been locked during this period after the initial developer

left. There had been no heat or electricity for several years and it had become in Jerry's words "a big wildlife preserve." Birds, deer, fox, groundhogs, mice (alive and dead), and raccoons greeted Jerry, his secretary Kathy Galliher, and Vice President of Construction Tracy Morris, when they arrived to establish the Heritage Hunt Golf and Country Club office.

The zoning approval for Heritage Hunt stipulated that the Marsh Mansion was to be renovated and refurbished, and with great expense, it was preserved. The first steps were to remove the accumulated debris and dead animals, to clean the downstairs portion of the home, and to repair the leaks. The billiards room was then partitioned into offices for Jerry, Kathy, and Tracy.

The Marsh Mansion was built by John Marsh and his wife Hazel in 1967. Mr. Marsh was an insurance executive with offices located in downtown Washington, DC, and also a former secretary of the army. Mr. Marsh raised and sold racehorses and grew hay. Marsh Farms also operated a rehabilitation facility for thoroughbred horses that served a nationwide clientele. The farm resembled a small self-contained city. The property consisted of the residence, an outdoor pool, a large greenhouse on the present tenth tee, a tenant house, seven apartments for staff, barns, stables, a race track (now hole #5) used by 40-50 horses a day, indoor whirlpool, a pond with a dock, an exercise pit, and pastureland. The farm had its own fire hydrants, underground water system with wells and two 10,000-gallon underground storage tanks. A large backup generator in the basement of the Marsh Mansion could produce enough power for a small mall; however, this was under water when U. S. Home moved in to begin renovation.

Even though the company that purchased the estate from Mr. and Mrs. Marsh was not able to develop the property as planned, it leased the

farm to a Maryland operator who continued to operate the Marsh farm as a thoroughbred rehabilitation facility and grew hay until the golf course construction began in the spring of 1998.

Karen Naylor, Heritage Hunt historian and Community Relations Committee member