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Steve LaFave, Earl Lafave  
& Dennis Park

Blue Heron Construction  
Building on Combined Resources





*Blue Heron Pointe development in Northville. Each home is located on the water. Cover story photos by Dave Smith.*

## Blue Heron Construction Building on Combined Resources

*By Emily Brunswick*

**U**p until a few years ago the prospect of developing the land on Beck Road and Seven Mile in Northville was considered improbable and cost-prohibitive by most developers. Many developers who had analyzed the site for possible use concluded that there were too many risks and cost-variables involved to even attempt the project. The land, a 30 year old gravel and sand pit with steep eroding sides, derelict buildings and trash piles, would be very difficult to fill and keep dry. The springfed water in

the pit was 60 feet deep.

Although there were risks in this venture, Dennis Park of Dennis A. Park Building and Earl and Steve LaFave of Metro Transport Inc. took the challenge of developing the site and building the luxurious Blue Heron Pointe condominium complex. Park and the LaFave brothers attribute most of the success of the project to hard work and foresight, but they don't discount their luck at being in the right place at the right time and being able to capitalize on it.

“Developing the Beck Road site and building Blue Heron Pointe provided a unique opportunity for Metro Transport Inc. and Dennis A. Park Building to work together. The main problem with the site was the lack of clean fill and the costs of transporting it to the site. Metro Transport (an aggregate hauling company) was currently transporting land from the I-696 construction away from the road. We had large amounts of clean fill on hand and it presented us with a window of opportunity,” explained Earl



LaFave. Eventually, 10,000 tandem truck loads of fill were brought to the site.

Prior to combining their efforts and finances into Blue Heron Construction Company, Park was an independent builder, and the LaFaves served southeast Michigan through their major land transportation company. They also own Beck Development, a leasing company of construction equipment, trucks, trailers and earthmoving equipment. Both Earl LaFave and Park agree that the combined resources of a builder and dirt hauler were the assets which helped them overcome the difficulties of reclaiming and developing the site.

Dennis Park began his career in building in Los Angeles where he worked for Roberts Construction

Company. Prior to becoming President and one-third owner of Blue Heron Construction Company, Park was President and co-owner of Energy Saver Homes and 100 percent owner of Dennis A. Park Building. Park was in charge of the physical building of the structures at the project.

Earl LaFave, who serves as secretary and one-third owner of Blue Heron Construction, began his career in the aggregate business in 1970. Steven LaFave is also one-third owner and acts as treasurer. In 1978 they both formed Beck Development. Soon after they formed Metro Transport Inc. for hauling.

Despite the vast amount of individual time and effort the three men put forth toward the development, all three insist that

the project has been a team accomplishment.

"Since the beginning, the project has been a team effort of professionals," explained Earl.

"Had not everyone worked together, this project may not have succeeded," contributed Park.

According to the principals the team concept includes everyone who helped make the project work: the Department of Natural Resources, city officials in Northville Township, landscape architect Robert Leighton, and architects Coponen Architects Inc.

"Many times the interaction between the developer and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is argumentative and negative. Instead of waiting for a problem involving the wetlands, we went to the DNR and essentially asked, 'What would you like to see done here?' We wanted cooperation and innovation, not a battle," said Earl. Together they developed a water management formula that will benefit the residents, both human and animal.

There are three essential components of the wetland plans: total preservation and enhancement of the high quality wetland, creative stormwater treatment program, and maintaining high water quality. The system involves a series of catch basins and storage tanks and filter fabrics for water percolation. The end result is that no surface or storm drainage will be discharged directly into the lake and existing high water quality will be maintained. Robert Leighton was instrumental in the design and implementation of this program.

The three principals are also quick to praise the Township of Northville for their ability to make quick decisions and take advantage of the unique opportunity. The pit had long been an eyesore and the Township welcomed the

*This distinct living room overlooks the water and DNR protected preserve.*







*Large and well crafted kitchens show off the open feeling in the homes.*

suggestions to convert the land into a usable parcel of homes.

Beyond the people and organizations mentioned for the effort, there were countless subcontractors and workers that actually performed the nailing, lifting and painting. The homes would not be standing without them. Dennis Park, a builder for many years, notices a special pride in the work they do. "There is a pride in workmanship here. Every single person involved in the project is proud to be here and works that much harder to make it perfect. I'm sure being around the water has some sort of effect."

Water plays a large part in the development. Each home is within 30 feet of the water and features wide, open windows, patios and decks to enjoy it. Boats are allowed on the lake, except those with petroleum burning

engines. Residents can enjoy sailing, rowing, paddling or small electrically powered boats. Two pairs of swans also claim residency on the lake.

Surrounding the 2,000 to 4,000 square foot homes are walking paths and plenty of well disguised parking. There are paths that lead through the preserve. Currently, feeding stations and nesting places are being designed to line the pathways to the nature areas.

In conjunction with these wetland habitat enhancements, Park and the LaFave brothers have even designed an insect control program for the community. They are building two Purple Martin birdhouses to control the undesirable mosquito and insect populations. According to DNR research, the Purple Martin houses will decrease the insect population and, at the same time, offer an

interesting view of the Purple Martin in a natural habitat.

A project is only as successful as the buying public deems it. At noon on November 1, 1987, the preconstruction sales were opened. With no advertising, at 12:05 the first unit was sold. By the end of the day deposits for six units had been taken.

The Blue Heron Pointe Development came together through hard work, foresight and the ability to take advantage of a unique opportunity. Dennis Park, Earl LaFave and Steven LaFave have brought to the Township of Northville an exciting development of condominiums through a team effort.

*Builder/Architect Magazine* is proud to designate Blue Heron Construction as our Builder of the Month.