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Rathdrum Radiance
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If you can't bring the people to the lake, bring the lake to the people.

At least that would seem to be the rationale of Mike McPhee, creator of Radiant Lake, a 125-acre residential development in Rathdrum that features a 20-acre man-made lake as its centerpiece.

"During our grand opening last year, we landed a float plane on it," McPhee says. "That was basically to show how big the lake is." It took only about half the length of the lake for the plane to take off, he adds.

The Radiant Lake development includes 210 single-family home lots and a five-acre parcel on which condominiums are expected to be developed in the future.

Of the single-family home lots, 63 front the lake, and 30 are located on a large island within the lake.

The first house was completed around Christmastime last year. As of earlier this spring, five homes had been completed, and seven others were in various stages of construction. McPhee says the pace of new housing starts is expected to pick up monthly.

McPhee says the current inventory of available lots at Radiant Lake is quite large in comparison to other developments. Radiant Lake is being built in a single large phase rather than multiple smaller stages.

"Normally you go in and do 40 or 50 (lots)," McPhee says. "Then you go to phase two and do 40 to 50. We wouldn't have saved much by doing that."

Homes range in price from \$300,000 to \$750,000.

The 20-acre lake soon will be home to a variety of recreational pursuits generally reserved only for those with lake property. Paddleboats, windsurfers and electric motor boats will skim the surface in warmer months. In wintertime, the lake will become a skating rink.



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While the lake is the development's centerpiece, Radiant Lake features five private lakefront parks. Those green spaces pull irrigation water from wells that are gravity fed by the lake. Each park includes areas for basketball and picnicking, and one features a volleyball park with bleacher seating for about 100.

The Radiant Lake development is bordered by Highway 41 to the west, Nagel Road to the north, the city of Rathdrum to the south, and Radcliffe Street to the east.

The Lake

Building the lake at Radiant Lake presented a variety of challenges, the most notable being construction of an artificial lake that will hold water above the porous Rathdrum Aquifer. To seal the lake bottom, two liners were installed.

Crews dug out the pit for the lake, filled it with coarse gravel, and compacted the gravel into the pit. Next came a six-inch layer of screened topsoil.

"That's more like what a natural lake would have," McPhee says. That, McPhee adds, "created a liner in itself."

A three-sixteenths inch high-density poly liner was installed, followed by a layer of sand to complete the project.

Keeping water levels constant is one thing, but keeping it aesthetically pleasing to homeowners is vital.

McPhee says Radiant Lake, which has had water in it since November 2005, has a series of pumps and aerators that help avoid stagnation and keep things fresh.

To this day the lake still has "beautiful color," according to McPhee. "That's just natural. It's nothing we're putting in the water. It must be from the minerals in the water."

McPhee helped build a lake in the late 1980s in Orting, Wash., southwest of Tacoma. Unlike Radiant Lake, the first project on which McPhee worked was a small privately held development built for water-skiing enthusiasts.

"I decided we needed more developments, (but) not necessarily with golf courses," says McPhee. He's quick to point out, "I golf myself a lot. They are wonderful housing developments, but I'm not so sure how great an investment a golf course itself is."

The project started with McPhee as the sole investor. When more capital was needed, McPhee partnered with a group of engineers. Together they formed JACAV LLC to spearhead the development.

The idea of building an artificial lake in a land that is populated by hundreds of real ones may have been a real leap of faith for McPhee.

But the idea appears to be paying off more quickly than initial estimates predicted. "We estimated this was a five- to seven-year project," McPhee says. "I think the way it's going - even though the market took a little dip this last year - I think it will be more of a four- to five-year deal."

Paul Delaney is a longtime Spokane resident and freelance writer. He covers motor sports activities in the area and publishes a regional hockey newspaper.