

11/04/06**Seafood by the river***Local developers pitch Laishley Park concept*

Local entrepreneur Bruce Laishley may end up playing a major role in developing the riverfront park and marina named after his father, the late Punta Gorda Mayor Phil Laishley.

Laishley is a partner in Marina Park LLC, a new development company formed in response to a city request for proposals published in June.

So far, Marina Park is the only developer to submit a plan for park improvements.

The proposal includes a 23,000-square-foot commercial building, an open-air market, an interactive fountain, and additional parking and landscaping.

The Marina Park partners made a presentation to city officials on Oct. 30, which appears to have gone over well, Laishley said.

"We will negotiate with them on an agreement," said Kathleen Dailey, assistant city manager. "There will be a negotiation team set up ... and I would estimate that we will put that committee together next week."

Dailey added that she was impressed by the way the development group's proposal balances the objectives of the city with those of the private sector. The city's main concern is to build a economically viable marina that will double as a gathering place for both tourists and residents.

Marina Park's development proposal also includes a long-term plan to manage several fishing and boating retail stores. The partnership would also manage the marina itself, including hiring a harbormaster and staff. They also plan to recruit other businesses interested in running river tours or water taxis.

The city already has plans to construct a boat ramp and docks, along with parking and landscaping, Dailey said. This first phase also includes Building "A," which will house the harbormaster's office and a ship's store.

The initial round of construction will turn Laishley Park into a functioning marina. For the second phase, the city wants a concept that will turn the marina into a destination for visitors and residents alike.

Laishley notes that Marina Park's concept -- indeed the existence of the new firm -- is really the brainchild of Chris Evans, the young operations manager for Smuggler's Enterprises Inc., owner of two popular seafood restaurants in Fishermen's Village, Harpoon Harry's and The Captain's Table. He praised the energy Evans has brought to the project -- "he's on the go 12 hours a day."

Evans said that after several years of learning the restaurant business under his father, Ron, it didn't take him long to realize that Laishley Park was a great place for a seafood restaurant. He added that it also didn't take long to convince his father to begin recruiting a development group.

They enlisted Laishley, whose other ventures include Laishley Marine, at 3415 Tamiami Trail, and Southwest Land Developers Inc., which is building a 370-acre industrial park near [Charlotte](#)

County Airport.

The other partners are: Robbie Sifrit, partner in [Five Star Realty](#) of Punta Gorda; Doyle McBurnett, owner of McBurnett & Jernigan, a contractor specializing in large commercial remodeling projects; and local real estate agent Chris McMillan.

The centerpiece of their development plan will be a 23,000-square-foot, two-story building.

The bottom floor will be mainly retail space, possibly mixed with some offices.

The top floor of the building will be the home of another Smuggler's restaurant, projected at a spacious 10,000 square feet. Smuggler's Enterprises will lease the space from Marina Park for a "crab house" concept restaurant.

There will also be a porte-cochere -- a sort of loft extending from the main restaurant building and covering the Old Retta Esplanade -- that will house an additional 3,000 square feet of retail and office space.

The other major part of the plan is two open-air sheds designed to provide overhead cover for any kind of open-air market. A farmer's market appears to be the most likely use for these buildings, but they could also provide a location for arts and crafts fairs.

Marina Park's plan also includes a large interactive fountain adjacent to the restaurant building. It will incorporate computer-controlled water jets and the city of Punta Gorda seal.

By BOB FLISS

Charlotte Business Editor