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# Selling the Airpark

GRANT BOYD



Once the airpark is developed, or well on its way, the next step is to sell. Whether it is a standalone lot, a completed home, one in varying state of completion, or any combination thereof—there are many things sellers need to bear in mind during the process.

Joseph Wortman, who is the developer of Sullivan’s Harbor Springs Airpark in Northern Michigan, gives some background information on the airpark selling process. “Selling is perhaps the hardest challenge, at least at the onset of this process [developing and owning an airpark]. Don’t underestimate it. Don’t

underestimate word of mouth either. Be prepared to build a brand as much as an airpark or of a home. It takes time and a leap of faith.”

Mike Ciochetti, who is the developer of Heaven’s Landing in Northeastern Georgia, echoes the time commitment involved, “...a whole lot of hard work. Anyone that thinks that building and selling airpark property is easy has likely never done it. It’s definitely a marathon.”

That being said, those on the selling end who go into the process knowing it’s going to be a lot of work have the opportunity to see their fruits of labor appreciated by many others.

## AIRPARKS ARE ONE OF A KIND COMMUNITIES

There are some unique aspects of airpark properties, compared to that of a standard single-family home in a normal suburban neighborhood. These differences include factors relating to a runway being in close proximity to the homes, types of covenants in the community, the fact that an aircraft (or more) is hangared at the home, and many more. Most in aviation are familiar with these aspects, at least slightly, but there is still a level of education that is needed to be brought to the table by the sellers.

As Wortman hinted, building



## HEAVEN'S LANDING BRANDING

Ciochetti has had success over the years building his airpark's brand while exhibiting at airshows. Anyone who has been to Oshkosh, Sun 'n Fun, or other aviation events likely has seen the Heaven's Landing "Angels," who help guide prospective owners through the little slice of heaven the airpark is.

He too has a strong advertising and non-paid presence. This also includes a variety advertising in aviation-specific publications and features in them as well. An interesting piece highlighting Heaven's Landing was on *The Aviators* several years back and more recently on a popular YouTuber's channel in a full-length video. Coupled with a strong web presence, interested parties are able to engross themselves in the airpark lifestyle without ever leaving their home.

All of these noted activities have

a brand is an essential prerequisite to sales activity and helps educate people about aviation communities as a whole. The two noted airparks lean upon a variety of techniques to ensure each is known to those within the aviation sphere.

## SULLIVAN'S HARBOR SPRINGS BRANDING

Wortman relies heavily upon "curbside appeal" supported by paid and non-paid advertising, with several ad placements and publicity opportunities occurring each quarter. Most of these are in magazines, although the community has been featured on the local news and even highlighted in *The Wall Street Journal*. This media presence is bolstered by their social media accounts, Facebook and Instagram, which funnel

interested parties to a well-developed and informative website.

The airpark's brand is also built through in-person events, that have been hosted at various residents' hangars. From an open house for prospective Cirrus owners, to the local parade of homes tour, there have been a litany of events on site.



helped to drive lot and home sales for the two communities, as well as cement their identities within the aviation community as respected airparks with a stable future.

## SELLERS SELL

Once there is a product created (i.e. home), or available to create (i.e. lot), then the dollars can come. As far as getting these dollars, there is some trial and error needed in order to find the correct mix, in terms of engaging real estate professionals alongside the development team's own assets.

Wortman values a working relationship with the local realtors, yet also recognizes that airpark communities are often misunderstood and in need of non-traditional selling efforts. Exposure to the Multi Listing Service (MLS) network and a strategy that does not exclude the local realtor network is important. Solutions include identifying a listing realtor truly committed to the project, utilizing a flat-fee MLS service and clearly advertising a willingness to pay and protect potential buyer brokers. This strategy has allowed him to better integrate his own team's skills alongside what the real estate professional brings to the table.

Ciochetti himself is a real estate agent and sales at the airpark come from him and other agents. He points out that some sales come

faster than others and that completed homes stay on the market for a shorter amount of time than lots do. "Most people do not want to go through the building process. I get calls weekly by people asking for 'turnkey' homes ready to move into. And when I have inventory to sell it goes in a matter of days. Then again, I'm currently building a new home at Heaven's Landing for my family, and the process has been going seamlessly. I'm actually enjoying it, and I get to build exactly what we want without compromise."

Once the ideal property is selected, then comes the close. In terms of the closing process, it mirrors that of any other neighborhood home or lot across the country. What does vary though is the body of time between listing an airpark property for sale and the new owner taking possession.

While both noted airparks overall seem to have more action than the baseline average aviation community in the United States, the time it takes to sell a property varies depending on the property itself, time of year, location, type of airpark, and other factors. Building a strong sales pipeline by having a developed brand that reaches a healthy number of prospects is key in keeping a positive interest in the development.

## MAKING DREAMS FLY

In summary, Ciochetti and Wortman have years of experience developing their own airparks, as well as learning from others that have done the same. Their advice on *Selling the Airpark*, *Developing the Airpark* (Quarter One, Quarter Two, and Quarter Three 2020 issues), coupled with the author's tips from *Marketing the Airpark* (Quarter Four 2017 issue)-should provide a clearer picture for someone interested in operating their own residential aviation community. While it is a challenging and lengthy commitment, doing so can be more than just financially rewarding when done correctly. ■



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