

# Motorcoach Lot Sales Popular Along the Gulf

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Heritage Motor Coach Resort and Marina in Orange Beach., along the Gulf Coast

Steve and Page Jones of Pensacola, Fla., bought a lot for their 40-foot recreational vehicle in Bella Terra of Gulf Shores in Alabama, both as an investment and for a fun place to visit, according to the *Press-Register*, Mobile, Ala.

“We’re renting it out year-round,” Jones said.

Rick and Lori Cole of La Crosse, Wis., used to drive their 41-foot motorcoach to Naples, Fla., where they rented a space, but the 50-something retirees also bought in Bella Terra, and said they enjoy it so much they’re building a cottage on the lot to accommodate guests.

“We like the people here,” Cole said, and the fact that the RV park is exclusively for Class A motorcoaches.

Luxury motorcoaches have been called upscale condominiums on wheels, and come at similar prices — ranging from \$600,000 to \$2 million, industry experts said. Increasingly, the resorts and parks that serve them are selling campsites, then renting them out for the site owners, according to the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds (ARVC).

Land, design and building costs make it tough to develop a new resort park for rentals only, according to park owners.

“Our market is stronger than the condo market,” said Mike Miller, who with his son, Matt, manages Heritage Motor Coach Resort and Marina on Bayou St. John in Orange Beach, Ala., which opened last November.

Almost half of Heritage's 79 RV lots are sold, he said. Prices range from \$169,900 to \$419,900.

Most buyers in the local motorcoach resorts hail from the same states that send condo buyers to the Gulf, areas including Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas and Kentucky. Renters include Snow Birds, according to industry experts.

"We're getting a lot of people who used to go to Tampa and Naples," Miller said. "It's a shorter distance, and they like the area."

Miller said it isn't unusual for his owners to purchase sites in other cities, then travel from place to place.

Bella Terra, which is on the Foley Beach Express, sold eight RV lots over Mardi Gras weekend, according to Chuck Smith, a partner in the development. The 40-acre park, which opened in late now has owners for 79 of its 87 lots, and is developing another 24. There will be a total of 176 lots when the park is complete.

Prices range from \$95,000 to \$155,000, depending on whether the lot fronts the 10-acre lake.

"This is not a retirement community, it's a resort," Smith said. "A lot of motorcoach owners have kids or are newly retired. They see this as their country club, and we run it as a resort."

Newer parks typically have amenities similar to those at Bella Terra — a 6,000-square-foot clubhouse with a kitchen, flat-screen TVs, movie theater, gym and sauna. Outdoor perks include an infinity pool, Jacuzzi, putting greens and lush landscaping and gazebos around the lake.

Rentals have been good — 60% during February, with 80% occupancy during the run-up to Mardi Gras, according to Smith. The January rentals were at 55% compared to 17% in January 2009, he said.

The Coles have owned Class A coaches since 1983 and say they enjoy a lifestyle that lets them park, open their house to guests and start socializing.

"It's a traveling cocktail party," he said