

green complete the facilities.

Everything must be extremely livable in what Peterson calls "a self-contained housing project." It's not just any housing project, but a recreational water project—the only type he'll do these days. "It's the H₂O effect," he explains. "If it has water it'll fly!" That's why every condominium at Mariner's Cove has an individual boat slip. With Skipper Bud's marina nearby, Peterson found this seven-acre plot of land the last ideal lakefront property to develop.

Originally from Rockford, Illinois, Peterson remembers spending summers on Wisconsin's lakes. "Every year my parents would bring us to the lakes; I guess that's where my love of the water began." Peterson stayed in Wisconsin to continue his career, meeting and befriending Jack Von Rutenberg while both were teaching at Madison Business College. The Von Rutenbergs owned the land surrounding their popular restaurants and had been involved in the Whaler's Cove and Lighthouse Bay condominium developments in the mid-eighties. Over the years the Von Rutenbergs had tossed around some ideas for developing this remaining land. They thought of doing a resort hotel, or possibly a condominium project. But nothing materialized.

They also found they'd spread themselves thin working on the condo projects; they preferred to stay restaurateurs. In 1987 they approached Peterson with the idea of developing the last acreage they owned on Lake Mendota. Peterson had been busy conceptualizing and planning Lighthouse Cove in the Dells, a project similar to Mariner's Cove when the proposition came. He accepted, bought the land, and named his project Mariner's Cove for immediate location identity. True to form, Peterson would handle just about everything. The Von Rutenbergs would help him promote and sell the condominiums through their restaurants and word of mouth.

Behind every good developer, especially with multi-million-dollar projects, there's got to be a good partner. Peterson's got one—Tom Diehl. Diehl, who is also a partner in the Greyhound Dog Track and Tommy Bartlett Shows, Inc., met Peterson through his first

venture, Aqua Sports, in the Dells. Peterson initially approached Tom and his wife Margaret with an investment opportunity in his Blue Water Condominiums, a 28-unit project not far from the Tommy Bartlett show. Diehl didn't have the time to start a new enterprise, so he passed. But Peterson didn't give up.

"Michael doesn't know what the word 'no' means. He simply won't take 'no' for an answer," says Diehl. Peterson approached Diehl several years later with a new idea: Buy the old Dells Mound Resort, tear it down, and break ground on a condo project the likes of which the Dells has never seen. Peterson made a believer out of Diehl on his first condo project. Diehl was excited yet cautious about this new opportunity. "Prior to the Blue Water development there weren't any condos in the Dells. I guess after 25 years up here we'd lulled into a routine of becoming comfortable with that." What Tom Diehl got was "a competent, thorough developer and a beautiful project ideally suited to the area."

The plan was to build a 101-unit project in three phases over three years with the clubhouse facilities going up at the end of the first phase. Virtually no advertising. All word of mouth. Result: The Lighthouse Cove project is sold out on all of the existing 4 buildings and 92 percent presold into its next phase. The ball keeps rolling. Mariner's Cove is going much the same way; at this writing with two buildings up, one building is sold out and the second is 81 percent presold. However the markets are extremely different. Whereas the Dells attracts a seasonal, second-home crowd, Peterson is expecting year-round home buyers for Mariner's Cove.

Diehl's reservations about going into the Madison marketplace were allayed by Peterson's convincing plans. The location has access to major arteries (both land and water), two reputable restaurants, high aesthetic value and top quality construction. Diehl affirms, "There's no question in my mind that Michael Peterson will make the Mariner's project an award-winning development." Why?

"Michael isn't like a normal developer. He doesn't sit back in his office and wait for things to happen. He's out there laying sod, landscaping, really involved with his

hands." Diehl believes this adds to the owners' comfort level with the condos. Peterson's also an old-fashioned man of his word. "His word is the most important driving force behind everything he does. He's so involved with people's satisfaction that it's generated a lot of business. People are impressed with the quality of the facility and the quality of the individual."

This man's got a lot of steam behind him, no doubt about it. By definition he's a workaholic. Part of it is the challenge to build an unmatched project, as taught by Graaskamp. The other part, as he puts it, is fear. "If I told you I wasn't scared to lose all of this, that I was completely confident this project would fly, I guarantee you the bank would own it in 60 days."

The partnership seems to be a good match. Peterson, a gung-ho aggressive developer ready to take on anything with water, is tempered by Tom Diehl with his conservative approach to the risk involved in land development. Failure doesn't exist in either's vocabulary and to date, it hasn't needed to. What about the future?

Peterson has done several historic renovations in Chicago, and would like to pursue that market. If that's the case, his partnership with the Diehls is travelling with him. "If Michael Peterson decided to go to Chicago, Margaret and Tom Diehl would be right there with him."

Both Graves and Peterson shoulder enormous responsibility for a couple of multi-million-dollar developments that vow to be a boon to tourism and to the quality of living in Madison. Each developer holds sacred the precepts of his teacher. Like Graves, Peterson thinks his mentor, Dr. Graaskamp "would've thought Mariner's Cove a tremendous addition to the city." For the amount of money being pumped into these two enterprises a lot of people are banking on it. ■

Heather Sass is a freelance writer.