

Trask family gains kudos for Autumn Hall work

Triangle Business Journal - by [Amanda Jones Hoyle](#)

WILMINGTON – When the Trask family first proposed the idea of redeveloping the Duck Haven golf course property into the neo-traditional Autumn Hall mixed-use community, they got a lot of push back from neighbors.

It fell upon Raiford Trask III, grandson of land baron and university benefactor Raiford G. Trask Sr., to find common ground and sell the plan to a skeptical community.

Autumn Hall has turned out to be one of the most complex real estate development projects tackled by the Trask family since Trask Sr. began amassing almost 10,000 acres of land in coastal North Carolina and South Carolina as a young farmer.

The Trask family still owns about 8,600 acres of land in New Hanover and Brunswick counties, and it has helped develop the 65-acre North Kerr Industrial Park, the Renaissance office and retail park near Mayfaire and several large residential communities.

For Autumn Hall, Raiford Trask III pulled together a team of engineers and architects from across the region that would focus on environmental stewardship.

He implemented a “save tree mandate” that challenged his construction contractors to avoid clear-cutting the property and save as many trees as possible. “Bulldozers don’t like pine trees,” he says, and oftentimes he had to get creative. He spent \$30,000 to move a utility pipe on the property in order to save four big pine trees at the entrance of the community. More than 200 mature trees were spaded and replanted on the property.

Autumn Hall will have 11 community parks accessible to the public via connectivity to the city of Wilmington’s pedestrian and bike path. The path runs from downtown Wilmington to Wrightsville Beach with one mile winding through the northern edge of Autumn Hall. The property is less than two miles from the beach.

Wilmington City Planner Christine Hughes was so impressed with Autumn Hall’s plan that she nominated Trask for the Citizen Planner Award from the North Carolina chapter of the [American Planning Association](#), which he won in 2008.

“Raiford is sort of a rare gem in the development community,” Hughes says. “He often goes above and beyond the minimum requirements of code. Not all of us have the luxury to do that.”

The Trasks have been able to spend extra time and money on the project because the property carries very little debt. Trask Sr. bought the 236-acre Autumn Hall site in the 1950s for \$27 an acre and built a low-budget golf course, the design of which he sketched on the back of a Chinese menu, as the story goes. Trask Sr., whose name graces the basketball coliseum at the [University of North Carolina at Wilmington](#), died in 1993.

Trask III says the family has invested about \$10 million in Autumn Hall so far with a mix of family funds and a construction bank loan. The debt is nominal compared to most other real estate projects of similar size.

“If we would have had to buy the land for market value and finance it, this would be a very difficult time for us,” Trask III says.

Since September 2008, when home lot sales began for Phase I, 30 lots have been sold. Lot owners must build on the site within two years, and so far eight homes have been built or are almost complete. [Novant Health](#) also has finished construction of a 40,000-square-foot medical office building in the community.

At build-out, Autumn Hall could have 273 single-family homes, 200 condominium units, 33 townhomes and wide paths and sidewalks connecting the neighborhoods, parks and community center. Architectural guidelines require that all homes be designed in the style of Wilmington’s ante-bellum manors, plantation homes and summer cottages, a style Trask III calls “Cape Fear Heritage.”

Trask III says his grandfather always tried to plan his investments for two or three generations ahead and that the family is trying to follow that mandate with its decisions regarding the family’s land holdings.

The Trasks also are involved in the rezoning and development of the 850-acre Blue Clay Farms community in New Hanover County as well as a 140-acre office, retail and multifamily project near the Compass Point development in Leland.



Autumn Hall Homes

Autumn Hall’s new homes reflect the style of historic structures in the Port City.

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