

# JACKSONVILLE Business Journal

## Developers make an example of infill amid natural beauty

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ST. JOHNS COUNTY-- The lush, marshy path along the Casa Cola Creek has changed little since travelers of the Old Dixie Highway abandoned it in the 1920s, and a local developer and builder intend to keep it that way.

The creek runs along the eastern side of Istoría, a 40-acre mixed-use development off U.S. Highway 1 just north of the St. Augustine/St. Johns County Airport that will include 50 single-family houses, 64,000 square feet of retail and office space plus townhomes. Developer Mike Antonopoulos and builder Bryan Lendry said it's a development like no other in St. Johns County that will fill a demand for a different type of development.

"It's based on the philosophy that one size does not fit all," said Antonopoulos, president of **Antonopoulos & Associates Inc.**

Preservation and enhancement of the natural features are the top priorities of the development, which gets its name from the Latin word for "history." The site is nestled beneath a centuries-old forest, much of which will be preserved and complemented by xeriscape landscaping, which is characterized by native species of plants and trees that require little or no irrigation.

Antonopoulos likes to refer to it as not a development but a master-planned neighborhood with specific design objectives that include not only preservation and natural landscaping, but also a coastal architectural style that combines influences from the British West Indies and the coast.

"There's not one element of those houses that hasn't been thought about, rethought about, started and restarted," said Lendry, the president of **Brylen Homes Ltd.**

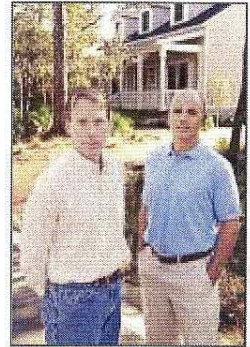
Garages downplayed

Antonopoulos and Lendry have identified which style of home will best suit each lot on the property based on the size, breeze direction, sun and other natural factors. Ranging in cost from \$300,000 to \$900,000, the homes include raised foundations, porches and balconies, extended roof overhangs, double-hung windows, high ceilings, shutters and even weather vanes.

Even more attention to detail was given to what Lendry calls the de-emphasized garage. It's part of the partners' efforts to emphasize the homes themselves by putting the garages in the background and separating them from the homes with breezeways and without some of the homes' decorative detail. The driveways taper from the garage to the street, creating a more natural streetscape as well.

Istoría has caught the attention of Bonnie Barnes, the executive director of St. Johns Vision, a nonprofit organization that plans for the county's future.

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James Crichlow  
Bryan Lendry and Mike Antonopoulos are taking pains to preserve the natural features surrounding their St. Johns County development Istoría.  
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"You're seeing a lot of clear-cutting," Barnes said of much of the development going on in St. Johns County. "You look to the left and you look to the right and you think, gosh, couldn't you have saved one or two trees?"

Istoria is different, Barnes said, because it sends a message to other developers that clear-cutting land and mass-producing homes is not the only method of development.

"It shows what you can do," Barnes said. "You can do a better job of what you're doing."

#### Same standards

Four houses have been built in Istoria and total build-out of the first residential part of the development is expected to take between 24 and 30 months.

Construction on the office/retail space and townhomes is expected to start in about six months and will take four to five years to complete. The developer and builder team intends to set the same standards for preservation and architectural style in that part of the development, some of which will face U.S. 1.

"It's really, really cool," Lendry said of Istoria. "It's one of those places you drive through and say, 'I'm proud I'm doing this.'"

Antonopoulos and Lendry have teamed up on eight projects over the past 10 years, including Port St. John, Azalea Point and Amelia Park. Instead of bulldozing a site and building what Antonopoulos calls "me, too subdivisions," the two Jacksonville-based home-building experts specialize in niche infill markets by identifying sites for their attributes and constraints and then applying planning techniques to home in on the best uses of the property.

"We work very closely together as a developer and a builder," Lendry said, "to get the best use of a property."

Istoria, Antonopoulos said, is a culmination of all their previous experiences and is a development similar in scope and philosophy to Amelia Park, a mixed-use, traditional neighborhood development with a town square, town center and 420 residential units in Fernandina Beach.

The two are already preparing for their next joint project, The Surf on Amelia Island, which they describe as a Caribbean-style beachside village with 37 units starting from \$900,000. It's the next step in their constant evolution, Antonopoulos said.

"We're always striving to improve, we're always evaluating each project."