

BANK SELLS PART OF TRINITAS TO FRESNO FAMILY WITH LINDEN TIES

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Trinitas

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A portion of the Trinitas property in Calaveras County has been sold to a Fresno family with ties to the Linden area.

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SAN ANDREAS - Community Bank of San Joaquin has sold a 160-acre chunk of the former Trinitas Golf Course to a Fresno couple with ties to the Linden area.

According to property records, Lance and Renee Dami of Fresno purchased the parcel, which includes a large house, for \$1.2 million. The deal closed last week.

Community Bank of San Joaquin President Jane Butterfield said the sale is a relief.

"We're not in the business to run the golf course," Butterfield said. "Banks, as you know, need to get rid of their problem assets sooner rather than later. It is a relief. We can all move on, hopefully."

The bank had been trying since 2009 to foreclose on Trinitas and get its loans to former Trinitas owners Mike and Michelle off its books.

The 180-acre parcel secured about \$2.3 million in loans. With interest, the Nemees had owed the bank about \$2.9 million in connection with that parcel, according to court records.

It wasn't clear whether the golf course was still in operation Monday. A call to the course phone number went to an answering machine that invited callers to reserve a tee time. The Trinitas website was still operating.

Mike Nemees responded Monday to a voice message left on his personal phone with a text message that linked to an online story by a golfer mourning the demise of Trinitas.

In court documents, the Nemees had previously said the course would cease operation by the end of May.

Community Bank of San Joaquin also foreclosed on and owns a second 120-acre parcel that is also part of the golf course.

The bank may have more difficulty finding a buyer for that parcel, both because it does not have a house and because Mark and Michelle Rishwain of Stockton hold a \$600,000 first mortgage on it.

"We'd have to sell it for at least \$600,000," Butterfield said.

Trinitas has had a long and contentious history. After building the course in an agricultural preserve without permits, the Nemees waged a half-decade-long battle to legalize the operation.

In 2009, Calaveras County's Board of Supervisors twice voted against measures that would have granted Trinitas legal status. That same year the bank foreclosed and the Nemees filed for bankruptcy.

Fast forward to late 2011, and the Nemees lost a trial in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in which a judge decided that golf is not a legal form of agritourism under Calaveras County's zoning code.

The Nemees are appealing that decision now in U.S. district court.

The Nemees have also filed a federal civil rights suit against Calaveras County officials, saying they were denied equal protection because officials would not allow golf on agricultural land even as other Calaveras tourist attractions, such as Kautz Ironstone Vineyards in Murphys, do operate on ag land.

Lance and Renee Dami did not respond to a telephone message Monday.

Renee Dami was a 1987 graduate of Linden High School. Her parents are Barbara Dondero and the late Joseph Dondero.

The Donderos are part of a large, well-known farming family in the area.

Barbara Dondero said that her daughter and son-in-law purchased the land so they could move close to family.

"I am just thrilled to have them coming back. And they are too," Dondero said.

Dondero also said the Damis have no plans to operate a golf course. Instead, she expects that cattle will graze where there were once greens and fairways.

The former golf course is on Ospital Road on the western edge of Calaveras County just a short ride on Highway 26 from Linden.

Dondero said that means a grandson who is just entering high school and a granddaughter who is in middle school will leave their home in urban Fresno for a life in the country.

"We are excited to have them back home on the ranch. They are 20 minutes from my house," Dondero said.

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