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Faltering Grand Beach campground for sale

By: Murray McNeill

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winnipeg free press archives The Grand Beach Entertainment Centre, seen here from the air, relies on word of mouth to bring in campers.

THE driving force behind the once-ambitious Grand Beach Entertainment Centre is looking for a buyer to breathe new life into the near-dormant development.

Lawrence Hadiken, owner of Selkirk Quarries Ltd., is asking \$5.8 million for the 477-acre property located about 6.5 kilometres south of Grand Beach Provincial Park on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

Developed over a three-and-a-half-year period between 1999 and 2003, the site includes an outdoor amphitheatre capable of holding 20,000 to 40,000 people, washrooms, concession stands, a VIP lounge and a campground/recreational vehicle (RV) park with 3,000 campsites and 1,050 RV sites.

Although classic rock bands like The Doors, Journey, Boston and the Beach Boys performed there between 2003 and 2005, the amphitheatre has sat silent since 2005.

Hadiken said he's been able to keep the campground open on weekends for the past two summers. But he's had to rely on word of mouth to bring in campers because he doesn't have the money to advertise or promote it.

He also doesn't have the money or marketing prowess to organize any more concerts or other musical events at the amphitheatre.

Hadiken said he tried unsuccessfully for two or three years to find a well-heeled partner to help organize some new concerts and develop the site to its full potential. Ideally, that would include building a condominium complex, a hotel or motel, and a water park.

He said that was the vision he and his partners had for the site. The plan was to use the revenues from the campground operation and three or four concerts a year to help pay for some of the other projects on their wish list.

"But it just never worked out."

At one point in 2010, the idle site was even put up for tax sale. But Hadiken said he paid the taxes and retained ownership.

He said he's the only investor left still putting money into maintaining the campground. And when he was unable to find another partner, he tried last year to sell it on his own.

"There were a few tire kickers, but nothing ever happened."

He said one local group of investors toured the property two or three times and said they're still interested. But they haven't made an offer.

So last month he hired real estate agent Suzanne Mariani of Re/Max Performance Realty in Winnipeg to beat the bushes for a buyer.

Mariani said she's had the property on the market for about two weeks and has received a couple of inquiries. She said it was appraised two years ago at a value of \$12 million, so she's optimistic a buyer will be found.

"He put everything he had into it just to get it going," she said of Hadiken. "But he's a construction guy, not a marketing guy. Everything is there. It just needs the right person to take it and run with it."

The chief administrative officer for the RM of Alexander, in which the entertainment centre is located, said it's premature to comment on what kind of new developments the municipality would allow on the site.

"It really comes down to what ultimately its ownership is, what their plans are for the site and what's permissible under our bylaws," Scott Spicer said.

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