

RECREATION & INVESTMENT PROPERTIES

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Paradise FOUND

KATHY McCORMICK
CALGARY HERALD

You have to have a lot of faith to buy a recreation property sight unseen, but that's just what the Quantz family did — and they weren't disappointed.

"We jumped in with both feet," says

Colleen Quantz, a 52-year-old empty-nester who, with husband Ken, put

her money down on a villa on Mexico's western edge facing the Sea of Cortez on the mainland. "We bought into Sam's dream, basically."

Sam Sidham is a Calgary entrepreneur who discovered his dream in the Sonoran area known as Puerto Penasco, about a

three and one-half-hour drive from Phoenix, Ariz. "I'm passionate about Puerto Penasco," says Sidham, president of LBV Holdings Ltd. "It's a magical stretch of beach."

The area was a magnet for Sidham's keen eye, which has been turned on to the development field for the past three decades. "I want to create something that people will see and feel and touch."

La Bella Vita is his project — a 73-hectare development within the 15-hectare master-planned and gated community of Playa La Jolla.

SEE PARADISE, PAGE K2



Courtesy, LBV Holdings Ltd.
La Bella Vita in Puerto Penasco on
the Sea of Cortez in Mexico.

FROM K1

PARADISE: Luxury villas offered

"My husband, Ken, has known Sam for 20 years through business dealings, and we knew he was somebody you trust," says Colleen.

"We wouldn't have been so adventurous if we didn't know Sam, but we'd been looking for a while and we called him up. Two days later, we put a deposit down."

The 14.8-hectare community consists of luxury villas, apartment units, single-family homes and fractional ownership properties in a master-planned development in Playa La Jolla, one of the most pristine beaches in the Puerto Penasco area.

Full-ownership units in the first three phases of La Bella Vita are

sold out and just a few fractional ownership opportunities remain.

These phases comprised a mix of 22 two- and three-storey townhouse villas — with all but one sold and all built.

ALSO SEE

■ Mexican area 'Arizona's beach' **K3**

■ Buyers seek oceanfront haven **K3**

■ Snowbirds enjoy snorkeling **K4**

Phase four was released earlier this year, this time offering a mix of 24 bungalow-style walk-up apartments and eight three-storey townhouse villas.

To date, half of the bungalow apartments have been pre-sold and construction is set to start this spring.

The entire project is expected to be completed within three to five years.

Once Colleen and Ken signed on the dotted line, they decided to see

what they bought.

"It's a little piece of paradise down there and when you see what else is available, it hits you what you've got," says Colleen. "The work they did is absolutely stunning, like the granite and tile — better than what we've got at home."

Development in the area is just starting, she says.

"In five years, you won't recognize the place," she says. "Right now, it's about 15 minutes out of Puerto Penasco on a desert road and nothing much there, but we like the peacefulness and quiet of the beach."

However, golf courses are nearby and expanding. The Marriot Hotel recently announced a 22-storey hotel and a Jack Nicklaus golf course in the area, bringing the number of golf courses to five.

The airport is expanding to allow international connections, which is scheduled to



Photos courtesy, LBV Holdings Ltd.

An outdoor pool for buyers to soak up the sun is part of the La Bella Vita development.

open this fall to accommodate various airlines and charter flights.

Meanwhile, AeroMexico's regional airline has three flights a week from Los Angeles and flights from Las Vegas are set to start in the near future.

"We love the idea, too, that we can drive to Puerto Penasco," says Colleen.

"That means we can take a camper, spend some time in Phoenix, if we want, fly part way and drive from there. There are lots of options.

"That's another part of the package that we liked and the other reason we were tempted to buy there. We could just go to Phoenix for

the day. We're not trapped in one place."

A major highway (the Pacific Coastal Highway) is now under construction along the coast, which will link the Mexican hotspot with the West Coast from San Diego and southern California, reducing the drive time from San Diego to five hours.

The opportunities to buy in La Bella Vita include:

■ 120 bungalow-style walk-up apartments in five buildings. The first building of 24 bungalows has been released with 50 per cent pre-sales.



The elegant kitchen of one of the homes.

Three options include one-bedroom units of 696 square feet to two-bedroom units of 818 or 940 square feet, each with two bathrooms.

Pre-sale prices range from \$145,900 to \$194,900 US.

Features include granite countertops, tile flooring, nine-foot ceilings, gas stoves and air conditioning. A roof-top terrace is on each building for residents' use.

■ 52 townhouse villas. Twenty-one units have sold to date, including one that the Quantz couple bought.

Of the remaining built inventory, a few two-storey fractional ownership opportunities remain, offering one-eighth shares starting at \$48,800 US.

Phase four's eight three-storey townhouses each have three bedrooms and three bathrooms, a single-attached garage and a rooftop terrace.

These units have unobstructed views of the Sea of Cortez.

Features include high ceilings, air conditioning, marble floors and granite countertops.

Prices are from \$399,900 US and two are reserved.

Other home-buying opportunities in La Bella Vita include:

■ 62 single-family custom homes starting at \$325,000 US for a 920-square-foot custom home containing two bedrooms and two baths. The houses also have rooftop decks.

A spec home containing more than 2,000 square feet is also available for sale at \$554,900 US. Such homes are built in advance for people who want to take immediate possession of their dwellings, rather than wait for them to be built.

The home contains three bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths, and a double-attached garage.

■ Casa Del Mar, a custom-built beach front home with three bedrooms, three bathrooms, and a two-bedroom guest house has one-eighth fractional ownership opportunities at \$248,800 US.

The first phase of landscaping is now complete within the project, and amenities to date include a beach front pool with hot tub, an amenity building with owners' lounge, a tennis court and an outdoor fire pit.

Future amenities will include a negative edge pool, spa, exercise room and fitness studio, convenience store, outdoor amphitheatre, volleyball court, mini-golf, and concierge service with shuttle to the airport and town.

An optional furniture package is available for those who want it through a Calgary-based design firm.

Homeowners who may want to earn extra money when their units are not in use can also use an optional rental management program.

For further information, visit www.la-bella-vita.com or call 288-3777.

A new sales centre recently opened at the Springbank Airport near Calgary, where there is a full-scale floor plan of the main floor of the villas and two of the three bungalow apartments.

The sales centre is open by appointment only. Again, call 288-3777.



Snowbirds can enjoy such things as this golf course.

Mexican area 'Arizona's beach'

Four-hour drive from American city

GERALD VANDER PYL
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Yet interest in Puerto Penasco remains high and almost 25,000 Americans already live in the area full-time.

People from countries such as Canada are beginning to discover it, says Francis.

When it comes to recreation real estate, the overwhelming choice of buyers is condominium units in one of the many large hotel resort developments, she says.

"We're definitely condominiums," says Francis.

"I think if you were to contrast Puerto Penasco with, say, Cabo San Lucas, it's a different market. Cabo is comprised more of homes; it's a higher-end market."

With the recent price correction, she says buyers can get a one-bedroom unit for as low as \$145,000 US, with a two-bedroom unit priced from \$245,000 and a three-bedroom unit starting at \$345,000.

Prices can go upwards of half-a-million dollars, depending on the quality of the beach, the quality of construction and the reputation of the developer, she says.

For single-family homes, most people buy a lot and then build, although some resale homes do occasionally come on the market.

Francis says a recent listing for a beachfront home in a neighborhood comparable in quality to Scottsdale, Ariz., was priced at \$645,000 US.

For people willing to be a few rows back from the beach, a similar home might be available for about \$300,000 to \$400,000, says Francis.

Whatever type of real estate that people choose, the ocean lifestyle that first lured adventurous Americans 60 years ago remains the number-one attraction.

SEE BEACH, PAGE K4



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

THE BUYERS

Colleen and Ken Quantz.

AGES: 52.

BACKGROUND: Colleen and Ken Quantz are an empty-nester couple with three children who have been looking for an opportunity to buy a recreation property. On a whim and with a lot of faith, they leaped into the La Bella Vita project, sight unseen, late last year. It all boiled down to trust — trust in a man whom they'd known for two decades and who had discovered his dream property on the shores of the Sea of Cortez on Mexico's western coast. "We bought into Sam's dream basically," says Colleen of the developer, Sam Sidham, who is building a luxury master-planned resort — La Bella Vita in Puerto Penasco. "We've been looking for a while for somewhere on an ocean beach and the way it happened, it was meant to be." The couple were looking for a spot for Christmas vacations. "Everywhere we looked came up Mexico," says Colleen. "We had Sam's card with this sunny beach on it, so we phoned him up and asked, 'What have you got going there?'" Two days later, the couple put a deposit down on a villa. They later went to see the property and were impressed. "It's a little piece of paradise there," says Colleen. They purchased a three-storey villa on the beach. While both are still working (they own their own business), they will use the place for holidays and retreats, and love the fact it is close to the U.S. border (just a three-and-a-half-hour drive from Phoenix), allowing them many options, flying and/or driving, visiting other spots and golfing. "Our three kids are all on their own, but they're pretty pumped about the Mexico thing," says Colleen.

LOCATION: La Bella Vita in Puerto Penasco on the western coast of Mexico's mainland, facing the Sea of Cortez.

BUILDER/DEVELOPER: LBV Holdings Ltd. of Calgary.

POSSESSION DATE: The couple took possession of their unit in January.

Back in the late 1940s, a few adventurous Arizona residents started building rustic cabins in the sleepy little beachside community of Puerto Penasco, only a few hours' drive south across the Mexican border.

They used the cabins as a place to stay while enjoying the beautiful beaches, warm waters and spectacular fishing in the area.

"That was how it started, but I think it was inevitable that this would end up being a destination of more popularity than just those who had a sense of adventure and were willing to cross the border and go fishing," says Jonni Francis, the owner of Coldwell Banker Rocky Point real estate and a full-time resident of Puerto Penasco since 1999.

The close proximity to several major communities in the southern U.S. made the community Americans call Rocky Point a natural place to own recreation property, says Francis.

"We're a drive-in destination," she says. "We're only four hours from Phoenix and four hours from Tucson. We're Arizona's beach."

Because most of the demand for real estate in Puerto Penasco up to now has come from Arizona residents, the slowdown in the U.S. housing market has had an effect on the resort community, she says. "Obviously, we're a resort — we're not a have-to-have real estate."

Real estate sales have slowed a bit from a few years ago, with prices that had been rising rapidly currently undergoing a bit of a correction to more normal levels, says Francis.

ALSO SEE

■ Snowbirds enjoy snorkeling **K4**



Courtesy, LBV Holdings Ltd.

The exterior of La Bella Vita in Puerto Penasco.

FROM K3

BEACH: Many places to explore

Besides the superb fishing and beautiful beaches, people can enjoy other water-based activities such as kayaking, scuba diving, snorkeling and kite surfing, says Francis.

The community also has many places to explore, she says.

"This is a fishing village, so we have an area called the Old Port that is a shopping mecca," she says.

"You can go there and buy shrimp right off a boat. It's very charming."

As it has increased in popularity as a place to buy real estate, Puerto Penasco has also attracted more stores and services.

With the population of Puerto



Courtesy, LBV Holdings

People enjoy a beachfront promenade in Puerto Penasco.

Penasco about 55,000, the community now has major grocery stores along with many familiar retailers and restaurants from the U.S., such as Burger King and Subway, says Francis.

New developers are also coming to the area to build real estate projects, with several Mexican and Spanish companies joining the American and Canadian firms who have developed most of the real estate to date.

Snowbirds enjoy snorkeling

GERALD VANDER PYL
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

The following is some information and facts on Puerto Penasco in Mexico:

■ **Location:** Puerto Penasco is located on the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortez, in the northern Mexican state of Sonora about 100 kilometres south of the U.S. border.

■ **Access:** Rocky Point International Airport handles private planes and small aircraft flights from selected U.S. cities.

Most recreation property owners drive to Puerto Penasco from Arizona. It is about a four-hour drive from Phoenix.

■ **Attractions:** Puerto Penasco has a population of about 55,000, including the surrounding area, and is called Rocky Point by the many American residents, although the literal translation is Rocky Port.

The population of the community

more than doubles each March during spring break when up to 80,000 college students from Arizona, California, Texas and New Mexico flock to Puerto Penasco's beaches.

Due to its location at the northern tip of the Gulf of Mexico, the waters off Puerto Penasco experience large tides of up to six metres, revealing impressive areas of coral reefs and abundant marine life.

People can also learn more about the inter-tidal zone at the Center for Technological Sea Studies and Aquaculture (CET MAR) which has aquarium exhibits with sea turtles, sea horses and other species.

Many beach areas have shallow water, making them safe for swimming and perfect for snorkeling and learning to kite surf, which has become hugely popular in many beach resorts around the world.

Charter companies offer fishing tours, or you can rent a boat and purchase tackle at an area store and head out to try your luck at catching

grouper, sailfish, sea bass, yellow-tail, black skipjack or one of dozens of species of the Gulf waters.

The Pinacate biosphere reserve, which is less than an hour's drive, is a world-famous area of spectacular volcanic formations, including hundreds of cinder cones, lava tubes and unique upthrusts that resemble craters on the moon.

■ **Information:**

- www.puerto-penasco.com
- www.cometorockypoint.com
- www.cbrockypoint.com