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Entrepreneurs Redefine Community to Meet Evolving LGBT Demands How a wilderness resort transforms into a regional center aimed at a flourishing Gay market

December, 2015 - South Florida – A small dedicated team have been quietly developing a haven for the LGBT community in one of South Florida’s last remaining undeveloped areas. The primary vision is to create an eco-friendly refuge in the state’s heartland tropical forests to target not only the metro areas’ thriving LGBT population but also the throngs of tourists and snowbirds that flock to the Sunshine State. Steady growth over the past five years has brought Vitambi Springs Wilderness Resort & Camp to a point requiring expansion to meet demand. By implementing new approaches, they have also revealed how a large property in a rural area can serve as a connection hub between metro areas and provide a regional center to meet evolving LGBT demands.

Company President, Steve McCloud, believes guests have been confirming business principles in place since the start, “We have a unique opportunity here, a responsibility even, to focus on problems in a way that others haven’t been able to. This may be the best opportunity our community will have to create a regional center that can offer educational programs, conference center space, recreation facilities and in the not so distant future, develop a gay-centric aging center that includes health, wellness and housing options. Not only can we do all of that, but we can do it in a beautiful tropical setting that also attracts international guests to a destination resort. At 269 acres, this property is larger than the original Disneyland. We can manage an expansion that will reshape the landscape for not only LGBT hospitality and tourism but future lifestyle community development as well.”

Vitambi Springs is a secluded forest preserve only 90 minutes away from 12.5 million nearby urban residents. South Florida’s Gay population has grown to become the nation’s greatest concentration of LGBT households while Florida tourism and LGBT leisure travel are on pace for record growth in 2015. Vitambi Springs has positioned itself ahead of these trends.

What Gay campgrounds have in common is a passion for fun, connecting friendships and providing an escape from complicated city life. They have grown to more than 100 camps throughout the U.S. and Canada. Vitambi Springs took the camping model, raised the level of resort comfort and expanded the variety of activities that connect guests together. Feedback from guests and business growth confirms the approach is succeeding but the team knows there is more that can be done.

Martin Ruddock, the company's Vice President, explains the project's evolution, "The goal from the beginning was to provide a quality experience: comfortable lodging, good food and exceptional fun; and we soon learned guests also wanted a place to take a yoga class, play a game of kickball, get a massage, celebrate a birthday and learn about astronomy...all in the same day. We are the *country club* that urban communities can't offer. We found we are unique in the way we bring people together; guys in Miami rarely meet guys in West Palm much less hangout with guys from Fort Myers. We knew this model would bring together people with diverse interests but in a remarkably striking way it also brings together people of all ages and all income levels. I've come to realize what we're doing is important. I was touched to my core the first time someone asked permission to spread their partner's ashes under an oak tree. After the third and fourth time that request was made, I realized what an important touchstone we represent for our community. There is nowhere else I know of where all these things are happening in one place."

The team is now turning their attention to the next stage that will grow this development into the world's largest year-round entertainment, hospitality and lodging facility aimed at Gay men and women. The immediate goal will increase the number of RV sites and cabins to reach a wider audience. Imagine a vibrant resort with conference and event facilities able to offer educational services and bring together community leaders; Vitambi Springs does that now. Just beyond these improvements are potential solutions to the greater need of addressing the requirements of the aging Gay community. The talent and passion are in place as is the acreage and county approved plans. This all-encompassing resort model is the foundation for a new LGBT community vision and has people paying attention, partly to see if it can be replicated in other regions but also because efforts to build a stronger sense of community are important.

About Vitambi Springs Wilderness Resort & Camp www.vitambi.com

Vitambi Springs Wilderness Resort & Camp, located in Clewiston, FL, is a year-round resort campground set on 269 acres of rare old-growth forest. Amenities include a full restaurant and bar as well as a spacious pool and entertainment venues. Vitambi Springs is conveniently located between South Florida's urban coasts providing a tranquil escape for the area's LGBT community. Their slogan: Your natural adventure awaits...come find your fun. To learn more about Vitambi Springs expansion plans through crowdfunding view their fundraise profile at www.fundable.com/vitambisprings.

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