

## Business really developing for Lowcountry newcomer Gramling

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With three years under his belt in the local market, Ben M. Gramling III is a relative newcomer to the real estate development business in Charleston. But his short tenure in the Lowcountry hasn't prevented the Upstate native from making inroads.

Gramling estimated that his King Street firm, Gramling Brothers Real Estate and Development Co., has had a hand in building 900 housing units in the region over the past 36 months.

For instance, his family-run business developed the 170-unit Arbor Oaks and the 280-lot Summerhaven, both in Summerville. Gramling is now developing the 320-lot Summer Park, also in Summerville, and hopes to start construction later this month on Reverie on the Ashley, an upscale 88-unit condominium complex near Leeds Avenue and Interstate 526 in North Charleston.

Gramling said his company's client list ranges from mom-and-pop general contractors seeking one or two lots to large national tract builders, including Ryland Group Inc. and Centex Homes.

"I buy the land, work out the zoning, do the site work and sell," he said in a phone interview Thursday. "That's how we do it most of the time."

Gramling said he's not yet sure which approach he'll take to his firm's biggest project to date: the 2,051-acre Cane Bay Plantation and its proposed 5,000 housing units off Highway 176 in Berkeley County.

His company will probably take on some of the development work itself while handing off pieces to local and national home builders.

"I see it probably as a combination," he said. "But whatever happens ... I'm not going to go in there and sell off parcels and say, 'You do whatever you want with whatever you can get approved.' "

Gramling's family made its name in the Upstate farming the land, not developing it. His late grandfather was an important figure in the state's peach industry. The town of Gramling was named for him. In the early 1970s the family donated one of its orchards to help jump-start the creation of the University of South Carolina's Spartanburg campus.

"But we didn't sell off any farmland to get into the development business," he said.

The blood ties and the ties to the land remain strong, Gramling said. The family owns two Upstate golf courses, Village Green Country Club in Gramling and the Gary Player-designed River Falls Plantation in Duncan.

His main financial partners in Cane Bay and other ventures are cousins Marion R. Gramling and John T. Gramling, who are based in the Upstate. Their varying business interests include the development firm, a construction company, a land-surveying business and a financing arm.

Gramling said he's been working in real estate for more than 22 years, earning his real estate license at age 18. He has spent most of his career in the Greenville-Spartanburg area.

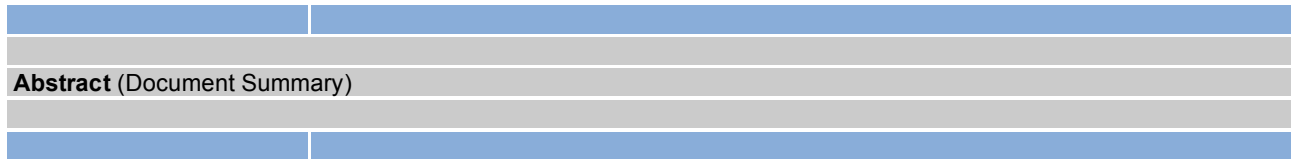
"I was involved in everything from brokering real estate to buying and selling real estate for investment groups," he said.

Gramling said he got the itch to work in Charleston after having visited the area regularly for years. "I've always wanted to do something down here," he said. "It just happened."

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