

## **Multimillion East Tennessee development will mean more jobs in Sevier County**

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SEVIERVILLE, Tenn. (WVLT) -- A multimillion dollar development in Sevier County next to the town's new event center is well on it's way to completion in advance of a December grand opening.

The new condos and an indoor/outdoor water park just the latest project along the parkway. But with a looming economic downturn, how is Sevier County dealing with that while trying to attract more businesses that cater to tourists?

Economic concerns along with always increasing gas prices can be a concern. But Sevier County officials tell me the area has continued to progress over the last thirty years despite previous downturns in the market.

Resort co-owner Pete Helland says, "The sky is the limit in terms of the impact it's going to have in this area." There was a belated groundbreaking Tuesday for the new Wilderness in the Smokies development. It's a project that includes condos and outdoor and indoor water park. The hope is to model the project like the one the company currently has in Wisconsin. "What it did in the Dells area is essentially created a second peak season. It really expanded the traditional 180 day season." Helland believes it will become a tourist destination of it's own that will bring more tourist and more investment.

Doug Hogan with the Bridgemont Group says, "Well over 720 million dollars in private capital investment will be invested in this development by 2011."

But with a perceived downturn in the economy and gas prices at record levels, why invest? Hogan says it's all about location....location....location. "This market has been bullet proof through the late 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's, 90's, from good times to bad."

Record gas prices are having an effect. If you're from New York state...it costs a lot. New York tourist Gary Bisbee says, "Yeah, they're starting to hit the pocketbook. If they continue to go up, we probably won't come back next year." But if you live closer, like Jennifer Roach of Georgia, it's all about reaching out to

new customers. "This is actually closer than most place we take vacation. It's closer, so it was a little bit easier."

Hogan says, "It's a drive to market. It's within two-thirds of the population of the United States. It's an easy market to get to. There's a lot to do."

The new development is expected not only to bring more tourists to the area but more jobs as well. They're looking for 250 various positions to fill as the complex comes to completion.

A job fair will be held at the events center May 1 through May 3, 2008.