

## Still upscale, they say — but affordable is new building motto

### Ruby Group buys tony Oxford Landing project, downsizes house plans

by Edie Johnson

**BLOOMING GROVE** - Just a few years ago, property in Orange County was marketed boldly with tags like “Horse friendly!” and “Spectacular views!”

Now, with the economy and homeowners struggling, McMansions are out and affordable is in. Builders are downsizing, both in lot size and house size.

The Berman brothers, operating as The Ruby Group, are carrying on work done by their father, Julius Berman, who was a cabinetmaker and then homebuilder in Brooklyn and Staten Island. With a range of projects in the sights in Orange County, sons Marty and Howie are trying for a compromise — keeping houses upscale but affordable.

One such development is a remake of one of the area’s most upscale projects. Oxford Landing was first envisioned as an equine community by developer Enrique Mazada. Construction began in 2006 and was to include 17 lots.

Mazada built several homes on a cul-de-sac on Craigville Road near the Blooming Grove/Chester border. But the lovely-looking houses except one remained empty and sometimes delinquent on taxes.

The Ruby Group, based in Goshen, has now purchased the property. They will finish the 14 remaining houses but are downsizing the layouts, hoping to hold down the assessment. Prices range from \$379,000 to \$409,000, far less than the \$600,000 the original design anticipated.

The layout of the project remains the same, with lot sizes ranging from 2.3 acres to almost 19 acres. But the footprints of the homes will be smaller, under 2,500 square feet.

Two colonial styles, “The Aspen” and “The Bayberry,” will offer either four bedrooms and three bathrooms, or three bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms. The four larger lots will still be suitable for a limited number of horses. The site is also accessible to The Heritage Trail.

Halfway between Chester and Monroe, Vista Woods will have easy access to transportation. It’s less than a mile from the new Mediacom headquarters now being built on Old Mansion Road, and could provide housing opportunity for employees expected to enter the local workforce.

After completing projects in Canarsie, Brooklyn and Carteret, N.J., the eager young men of The Ruby Group have so far completed a stalled townhouse project in Ellenville, built a large estate in Slate Hill, and are currently expanding and renovating a banquet hall at The Brotherhood Winery in Washingtonville. Another stalled project of 20 lots in Shawangunk will have the same basic floor plans and exterior designs as Vista Woods.

Progress on their projects can be seen on their Facebook page, The Ruby Group.