

Mill Creek Ranch Resort

By Emmitte Hall, TravelHost Magazine

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Across from First Monday Trade Days in Canton, Texas, on an old cattle ranch near I-20, sits the evolution of vision, an idyllic vacation resort, a romantic setting for weddings, a dream of preserving jobs for a local community and a showcase for what may be the future of the vacation get-away, the Park Home Cottage.

Mill Creek Ranch RV and Cottage Resort is the culmination of the vision of community leaders, business executives and two brothers, Phil and Bud Surles. Phil Surles worked in the manufactured housing industry for over 40 years and was the Chief Operating Officer of Champion Enterprises, one of the largest builders of manufactured housing in the nation. In the early 1990's, he was general manager of Champion's Athens plant and decided to return to Athens after he retired.

When Champion Enterprises decided to close the Athens facility, one of the largest employers in Henderson County, community leaders mobilized to save the plant and preserve jobs. Phil joined the group of local investors and with help from the Henderson County Economic Development Corporation started Athens Park Homes, LLC, to build a new kind of recreational living, the luxury Park Model Cottage.

These unique cottages feature built in microwaves, dishwashers, granite counter tops, counter top ranges, convection ovens, fireplaces, French doors, laminate flooring, stereos with ceiling speakers, lofts, porches and other customized amenities and a variety of floor plans.

Brian J. Malone, President of the Athens Economic Development Corporation says that "Athens Park Homes (www.athensparkhomes.com) currently employ over 100 people and they produce a very high quality product." Athens Park Homes is one of the top employers in Athens.

With the plant in high gear and producing high quality cottages, the investors needed a place to showcase the park homes and cabins. They found 200 beautiful acres in Canton, on a bend on Mill Creek and purchased the old ranch with its gentle hills that sat across from First Monday Trade Days.

Meanwhile, Bud Surles spent his career with the nation's Park Services, designing, building and managing parks all over the nation. After graduating with a degree in Parks and Tourism from Texas A & M, Bud oversaw one of the largest expansions of the state park system in Arkansas before becoming Assistant Superintendent for Yellowstone National park. He later worked for the National Park Services in Washington, DC and retired as Associate Director of Parks for the Rocky Mountain Region, a six state area headquartered in Denver, Colorado.

After years of private consulting for public and private parks around the county, Bud said “the Lord hit me between the eyes with a 2 by 4,” and he earned a Masters and PhD degree in seminary and began ministering. In 2006, his brother Phil called in need of someone to plan, build and manage a new type of park featuring the Park Model Cottage. “We all fell in love with the park model industry,” says Bud, “we believe there is about to be a major paradigm shift in the outdoor hospitality industry, as there is in any major economic change.” Park Model Cottages allow everyone to enjoy outdoor recreation.

Mill Creek Ranch offers a variety of cottages to rent or purchase. Buyers can choose their floor plan and amenities and have their cottage built to their specifications. Owners have unlimited use of their cottage any time they want. When not in use, Mill Creek Ranch will rent the cottages to guests to help off-set the cost of the home. Mill Creek provides complete maid and lawn service for each cottage as well as telephone, water, sewer, cable, internet and trash services. Owners don't need to worry about coming into a dirty cottage or cleaning up when they leave.

Mill Creek Ranch Resort offers great outdoor fun including two pools, a gated playground, stocked fishing ponds, hiking trails, outdoor hot tub, nature and bird watching sites. There is a pavilion for activities and group events, bath houses, laundry facilities, a store and convenient access to area golf courses and lakes, First Monday Trade Days, Splash Kingdom Waterpark, and WIRED Zipline Adventures in Canton, the Outlet Mall in Terrell, Caldwell Zoo in Tyler and more.

A white wooden bridge over Mill Creek leads to Wedding Island, a romantic and memorable location for any sized wedding with an outdoor gazebo and wedding arch. The wedding planner can arrange catering, a professional photographer, an old-fashioned horse drawn carriage ride and help arrange all the details to make the bride's day perfect.

The Grand Lodge provides busy executives privacy and solitude, away from the constant buzz of cell phones and the demands of email. Meeting rooms and meals are available for executive retreats, reunions and wedding parties.

Mill Creek Ranch is located at 2102 N. Trade Days Blvd in Canton, Texas and on the web at www.MillCreekRanchResort.com. Call 866-488-6020 for information about the resort, to make reservations, or inquire about cottage sales.