



Hospital groundbreaking

Gold-painted shovels in their hands and a piece of earth-moving equipment at their backs, dignitaries on Sunday participated in symbolic groundbreaking ceremonies signifying the start of \$5,709,000 Sonoma Valley Hospital project. In addition to construction of a new one-story east wing and new parking lots, the project will also include proper strengthening of three-story west wing declared seismically unsound in 1977. IN PHOTO, from left:

William Markey, hospital administrator; Marie Chermis, chairperson of the hospital district board of directors; Marjorie Youngdahl, 1981 president of the Sonoma Valley Hospital Auxiliary; Sonoma Mayor Henry Riboni, Peggy Savage, director of nurses; Dr. Hal Peterson, president of the hospital staff and Charles Laird, former hospital administrator. (Story, additional picture on Page A-13).

George ranch subdivision is given approval

By JERRY PARKER

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Monday approved a 56-home subdivision for the George ranch, El Verano.

The Supervisors attached 65 conditions to their approval, said Supervisor Bob Adams, who made the motion to approve the project.

The vote on the subdivision was unanimous.

ONE KEY SET of conditions calls for a conservation easement that will insure that approximately 685 acres of the 1000-acre ranch will be kept in agriculture.

In addition, a management plan for these 685 acres must be developed by the Sonoma Valley Resource Conservation District, said Adams.

With such a plan, it was said, it will be possible to run just as much cattle on some 600 acres as were kept on the total ranch.

THE MANAGEMENT plan will include recommendations for preventing erosion and runoff on the property.

The County Planning Commission earlier recommended that the George Ranch subdivision be scaled down to 36 units.

Protests from neighbors cited concerns about agriculture and the environment, in addition to such factors as traffic and water supply.

Adams told the I-T Monday that the subdivision as proposed, with 56 homes, was consistent with the county's general plan and with special zone

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George Ranch subdivision

Continued from A1

studies made of the northern Sonoma Valley.

ADAMS STRESSED that he and the board didn't want their approval of the George Ranch development to be construed to indicate they were looking for more agricultural land to divide up.

"We don't see it that way and we don't want others to think that this sets a precedent," said the First District Supervisor.

"The land was zoned this way and there is no way this should indicate to anybody that this is going to be the norm.

"This is only because this was zoned that way in the General Plan."

OTHER MAJOR conditions Adams said went with the approval were:

-- The developers, a local group, will reconstruct the 2/10 of a mile on Grove st. the county was originally going to do.

-- A scenic easement will be placed on the ranch to prevent it being divided again.

-- Public trails will be included in the layout.

-- Additional engineering for drainage, submitted by the county water department, must be followed.

-- The county planning department will have the say on where the water tank for the mutual water system will be placed.

-- AT THE entrance to the ranch, there will be a left-turn lane and an acceleration lane.

-- Widening of White Alder rd.

-- Various conditions as requested by Mrs. Marilyn Goode, nearest neighbor of the George Ranch, especially relating to landscaping, setbacks, setting back road banks and the like.



San Francisco Chronicle

Wed., March 30, 1983

"ONE CRAZY WOMAN!" That's the message on the VW Rabbit driven by Sally De Haven, an undercover cop in the SFPD. Her license plates read "1 800 X," 800 being police code for "crazy," X denoting "female" ... Niek Sandmann, the high-flying newcomer from Holland who recently bought the 1000-acre George Ranch in Sonoma for \$2 million, is the first purchaser of a \$1 million penthouse at 101 Lombard, the condo complex nr. Levi's Plaza put together by Gerson Bakar, Jim Joseph and Al Wilsey. The penthouse will be used as a pied-a-terric by Sandmann's Piombo Corp. execs ... The S.F. Opera's fall season opens Sept. 9 with Verdi's "Otello." These things are usually top secret till the official announcement, but Sherrill Milnes, who'll sing Iago, debagged the cat in a TV interview ... I'm surprised, too, that the hottest box office movie in town at the moment is "Night of the Shooting Stars" at the Gateway.

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San Francisco Chronicle

Tues., May 17, 1983

★ ★ ★

SONOMA is a good place to catch spring by the tail. On the George Ranch near El Verano, 1000 greenswept acres now owned by Dutchman Niek Sandmann, Jack Dupen led his first-string Red Garter Band in "The Good Old Summertime." Not yet, but soon. On a barbecue pit, Sonoma country sausages, the very best, sputtered and spat. Dunk one in mustard, wash it down with San Miguel Beer, and you have something. Perhaps heartburn, perhaps not. On the pond, two ducks nuzzled romantically. A male and a female, I think, or perhaps they were gay. You never know, even in Sonoma.

★ ★ ★

San Francisco Examiner

Want Ad Supermarket

SECTION



Dwight Chapin



Seeing what develops

NIEK SANDMANN DOESN'T come on like a high-flying Dutchman who has 25 expensive cars and 700 antique clocks and 1,000-acre, \$2 million ranch in Sonoma County.

He's calm and smooth and rather quiet. But behind that unruffled exterior beats the heart of a hustler.

When he got out of the army in his native Holland in 1966, he decided he wanted to be a famous antiques dealer (which figured since his father, once a fashion clothing manufacturer, was a famous antiques collector).

But Sandmann wasn't going to trade on his father's reputation or fortune. He went to work at Sotheby's auction house, a year in London and a year in Amsterdam, and became fascinated with old French farm clocks, the ones with big pendulums, from the 1700s.

HE BORROWED \$1,500 from a banker and began buying the clocks from gypsies who had acquired them in trade with farmers.

"I got them very cheap," he says. "Seven dollars a clock. I doubled my money when I resold them in Holland, and I put the unusual ones aside."

The unusual ones are now in a Dutch museum, and Sandmann is in a new line of work. He took the "substantial" amounts of money he made from the clocks and poured it into restoration of canal houses in Amsterdam — a risk that paid whopping dividends.

When the challenge of rehabilitating and reselling historic buildings wasn't fun anymore, Sandmann turned his attention to the world at large.

"I began looking all over the United States," he says, "for something I could invest in and believe in."

He went to Florida and didn't like it. He went to Texas — Houston, specifically — and found a whole pack of Dutch developers already at work. "Most people don't realize it," he says, "but the Dutch are the biggest foreign developers in this country now in terms of dollars, far more than even the Hong Kong Chinese."

Soured on the South and the Southwest, Sandmann next scoured the West.

He did some construction in Sacramento in the late '70s but saved the biggie for Sonoma, buying the James George Ranch.

THE DEAL BETWEEN the 37-year-old Sandmann and the 83-year-old George was quick ("We cut a deal in three days," Sandmann says) but not uncomplicated.

"Mr. George had lived there alone, with his family, for 39 years," Sandmann says. "He didn't have the property for commercial reasons; he had it because he liked it. I tried to explain what I wanted to do if I bought it — and that I wanted to live there, too. He had another offer on the ranch — a million dollars more than mine — from a group of Iranian people. But he came from Greece. I think he felt very at ease with me because I was European."

European roots aside, George asked for and got a \$300,000, non-refundable deposit from Sandmann — and a promise he could keep 35 acres for himself.

Sandmann is deep at work on the rest of the \$7.5 million project. He'll be offering 55 lots for sale. Average size: about eight acres. Average price: about \$200,000.

All of that is not nearly as flamboyant as it may sound. The development seems closely tied to Sandmann's low-key demeanor. It will have all-underground utilities and unusual privacy. A third of the property will be reserved for vineyards, agriculture and livestock. As a sales tool, Sandmann will be conducting wildflower and nature walks on the property.

He and his wife and two children are living on the Bouverie Ranch, a Sonoma wildlife preserve, but he has plans to build a dream home on the George Ranch. On a clear day, he'll be able to see San Francisco, if not any of the other home sites or his neighbors.

Piombo associate plans a Dutch treat

By JACK PHILLIPS

SONOMA — From peddling cheap blocks in Amsterdam to American real estate, millionaire Dutchman Niek Sandmann took a quantum leap that put him in fast company operating Piombo Corp.

Sandmann's entry into major real estate in Sonoma County — developing one of the county's largest and most exclusive housing projects, George Ranch — was particularly well-timed with take-over events occurring at Piombo.

With a little coaxing from his friend and business associate Sid Shah, Sandmann got in on the ground floor and acquired 15 percent of new Centennial Savings stock while the small savings and loan was in the process of buying Piombo, a Belmont-based heavy construction company.

The stock move seemed most strategic since he was trying to launch one of the county's most exclusive housing developments on the sprawling 1,000-acre George Ranch in the lush hills west of Sonoma.

Thus, Sandmann, 37, gained a significant stockholder's position and ready access to a financial source, Centennial Savings in Guerneville, plus a construction company, Piombo Corp., to develop the ranch into a 55-house subdivision that's estimated to cost \$7.5 million for street work and supporting infrastructure alone.

Sandmann and Shah, who inspired the takeover of Piombo Corp. with the help of the savings and loan, have worked on several joint projects throughout the county, namely the historical Stone House on Santa Rosa's Highway 12, which is planned for office spaces and perhaps an exclusive club; the high school in Geyserville, being turned into a restaurant, hotel, shops and wine tasting facilities; and two housing projects.

Four years ago, when Sandmann optioned — for \$300,000 — the right to buy the 1,000-acre George Ranch, situated on the wooded slopes, Shah approached him for the development work.

Shah was then an employee with Piombo Corp., managing the company's operations in Sonoma County.

After nine years as manager, Shah "left Piombo," returning to his own operation in Santa Rosa, Lakewood Enterprises, in March 1982.

Before 1982 was over, Shah eventually engineered a stock takeover of Piombo and emerged as chairman of the board and chief executive officer.

The move was made through Centennial Savings and Shah's friend Erwin Hanson, president of the savings and loan.

In a complicated stock deal, Centennial made a successful offer to buy all of Piombo's stock for about \$13 million and took over the company's operations and its assets scattered around the Bay Area, including the Lakewood Hills housing development in Windsor.

The George Ranch project is a joint venture between Sandmann and his partners in a company called Damstraat, named after a street in Amsterdam, and Centennial Savings and Loan.

Centennial gets the first \$1 million recouped in ranch property sales, according to Hanson.

To raise \$13 million cash, Centennial had to issue new stock of its own. Shah introduced Sandmann to Hanson and they became good friends.

Shah picked up about 24 percent of

that stock and Sandmann acquired 15 percent, both becoming major stockholders in an association that would own Piombo.

One of first moves by the new Piombo management was to buy a penthouse in the new Opera House Plaza in the heart of San Francisco to be used for "entertaining prospective clients."

"I'm trying to bring a lot of Dutch investors into this area, particularly to Sonoma County," Sandmann said.

Heavy rains last year prevented Sandmann from completing the George Ranch, named after its former owner, wealthy oilman James George.

"We should have the infrastructure, streets, gutters and utilities, done in two or three months," said Sandmann who learned his excellent English about two years ago although he conducts much of his business in Dutch with close associates.

The ranch will be developed to a lot stage with property sites offered at prices ranging at \$175,000 to \$200,000, he said.

Sandmann, whose wealthy parents own a clothing factory in Holland, is building his house on sloping 300 acres of the ranch.

Sandmann, a former Dutch army officer, started his business career selling antiques in Holland, a move that proved rather unsuccessful.

He tried another venture, buying \$7 clocks in France and selling them for \$15 in Holland. He made good money.

Sandmann took some profits and jumped into real estate, buying property to rehabilitate, which he claims is his expertise.

"Real estate boomed in Holland, in-

creasing 30 percent a year in the late 1970s," Sandmann said.

But because of heavy socialistic pressures in his homeland, he decided on some more secure ventures in the U.S.

His first was a building on Fourth Street in Santa Rosa, which before leaving the planning stages, was purchased by the McDonald's Restaurant chain. He completed a similar building in Sacramento.

He and Shah also worked two housing projects together, Quail Ridge and Spring Meadows.

But when Sandmann first saw the George Ranch, "I went crazy for it. Mr. George liked what I had in mind for it and I got the option."

For several years, Sandmann struggled with the county planning commission and reviewing stages to get his plan approved.

However, he spent far too much time flying between California and Holland. Frustrated with that, he chose to live here.

Three months ago, he moved to the U.S. with his family in Glen Ellen.

Meantime, he concentrated heavily on getting the George Ranch tentative maps through the commission.

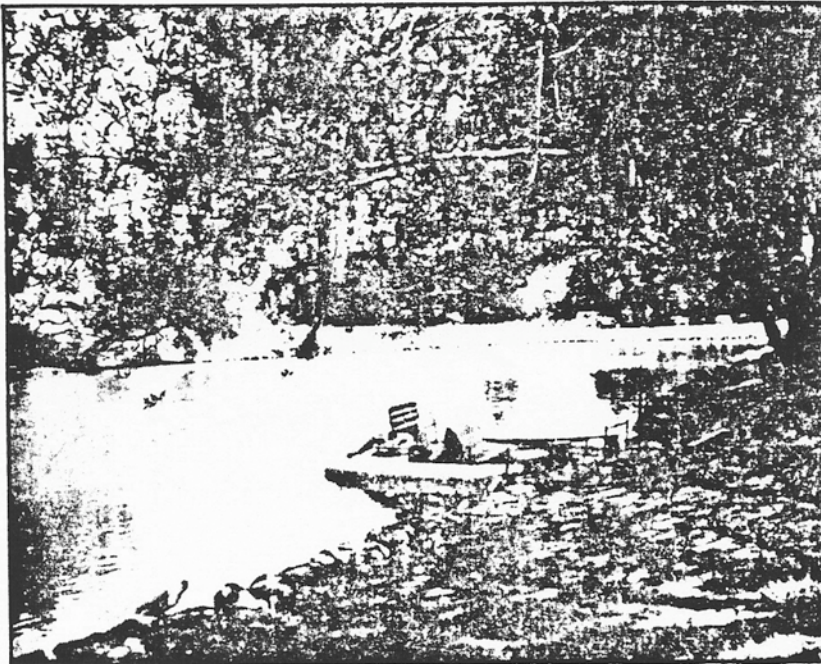
Last February, he received approval on the final map.

"We had 62 conditions to meet for approval," he said, acknowledging that it's been a tough haul and something he may not repeat again.

When completed, the George Ranch — which was once part of Gen. Mariano Vallejo's 150,000-acre estate in the 1800s — will have a recreational center built near a man-made pond, riding trails and underground utilities.



Niek Sandmann likes Sonoma County



Tranquil pond by George Ranch sales office



Lots will be developed on wooded hillsides

— Jeff Lee

Luxury homes planned for Sonoma development

Keeping the George Ranch 'natural'

By JOHN LYNCH

Sonoma Valley's George Ranch, nestled idyllically in the western foothills off Grove street, is one of the area's unshaken, undisturbed pockets of paradise.

Deer, quail, a few foxes, several species of birds frolic in and amongst the array of white and black oaks, bays and various other varieties of trees. Once inhabited by an Indian tribe, grave sites and old relics still abound there.

In the winter and spring, the chameleonic hills turn a deep, lush shade of green. The landscape—dotted by moss-covered rocks, stone and wood-railed fences—projects a sort of Irish coastal vision, especially when mist and fog creep over the hills and descend into the valley.

It is some paradise. And James George wants to keep it that way.

That's why when the time came to do something with a portion of the property, he sold it to Niek Sandmann, a Dutch developer.

George, founder and president of Pacific Oil and Gas Development Company, who has lived on and owned the ranch for the past 40 years, has all the confidence in the world in this 37-year-

old developer, a bit of an eccentric himself in that he collects expensive automobiles (he has about 25 now) and restores antique clocks.

Confident that is, that Sandmann will keep the ranch in its natural state and not spoil it. "I'm happy that he's not one of these fast buck guys," remarked the 83-year-old George. "He's laid out a program. It's going to be a high class subdivision."

Once finished, Sandmann figures that he will have invested about \$7½ million in the project.

ONE-THOUSAND acres of the ranch are currently in the process of being developed into lots to accommodate 55 luxury homes. Average price per lot is about \$150,000 to \$200,000. The lots vary in size—from 3½ to 28 acres—the average being about eight acres.

Buyers will abide by very specific and strict guidelines when building their homes. They will be erected in such a way that the houses are not visible to one another.

The idea, he explained, is to "have people feel the ranch is theirs."

It's an ambitious effort which Sandmann admits would not be possible without George's determination. "This is his vision and no one else. We couldn't have done this without him. He kept the land beautiful for 40 years—the nice little bridges, all the trees, everything just very, very nice—for his home and pleasure, not for commercial reasons."

"And we intend to go ahead with that idea—keep it as natural as possible."

He'd better. George and his wife, Blanchette, emphasize that they haven't "sold out." They have retained their home and some 34 acres for themselves. And they aren't about to leave. "I wouldn't sell it for all of Fort Knox," stated George, very emphatically. "This is our home. We love it here."

Sandmann, he and his wife, Peggy, and children—Valerie, 4, plus their dog and cat—will also live

GE Ranch development will include five miles of in and hiking trails that will meander close to a 35-40 acre Chardonnay vineyard is planned all private winery. Areas will be preserved for

also be a recreational area, including tennis courts and a small reservoir (Lake Blanchette) for the

enjoyment of homeowners.

To preserve the natural beauty of the ranch, there will be no overhead wires or cables to clutter the scenery. Everything will be underground.

Homes must meet stringent specifications—roofs have to follow certain contours that jive with tree and rolling hill lines. Persons will not be allowed to cut trees over six inches in diameter. Gaudy campers and motorhomes cannot be left out in the open.

There will be private gates. A special security force will be considered. The property, serviced by three wells, will have its own fire protection and hydraulics system (Valley of the Moon Fire Protection District's Station 3 is also nearby).

SITTING in his portable office near the ranch's Lake Blanchette on a sweltering May afternoon, Sandmann looks at the piles upon piles of studies and reports stacked around the room. (He notes that he spent over \$300,000 alone for Environmental Impact and other reports). A large model of the subdivision lay out sprawls at one end of the room.

During the planning stages of the project, he's had some opposition from "a handful" of residents (mostly in regards to widening of Grove street and removal of some trees, which is all being planned and carried out by the county). And he's endured the "foreign investors" tag from some. But Sandmann feels the George Ranch project was for the most part well-received by both neighbors and county planners.

Interestingly, Sandmann admits that he has little experience in land development. Born and raised in The Netherlands, he has been primarily involved over the years in rehabilitating and restoring canal houses in his native country where he still owns a home on some 50 acres of property.

Before he stumbled on to the George Ranch quite by accident (while jogging in the nearby Diamond A area one evening, a neighbor told him that a portion of it was for sale), Sandmann had looked high and low for land he could invest in. First Florida. Then Houston. Finally, he came to the Bay Area. When he couldn't find anything appropriate around San Francisco, he looked north. Napa Valley looked nice. Sonoma even better.

"I had a meeting with Mr. George and explained to him that I wanted to make a top, top subdivision here; that I wouldn't disappoint him."

If the natural charm of the George Ranch can be retained, undoubtedly he won't.



THE PICTURESQUE GEORGE RANCH
and developer Niek Sandmann (inset above)

Independent Journal

Saturday-Sunday, July 23-24, 1983

Subdivision has idyllic setting

By Wat Takeshita

IJ business writer

From the dim and distant past come memories of a pastoral scene, where cows graze on gently rolling hills, and moss-covered rocks and trees line a meandering brook that winds through a meadow.

Such scenes, now increasingly rare, are being preserved at the 1,000-acre George Ranch, three miles west of Sonoma on the slopes of the Sonoma Mountain range along the western edge of the Valley of the Moon.

Nick Sandmann, a Dutch millionaire who bought the property with a fortune made from rehabilitating buildings in his native Amsterdam, has divided the land into 56 estate-size lots.

Each parcel has its own special features — some have views of San Francisco, others are surrounded by lush flora, trees and wild flowers on rolling hills.

The land is subdivided so that when homes are built there, they will be nearly invisible from each other.

To protect the country setting, strict controls are imposed on construction. For example, trees cannot

be cut without permission. All utilities will be underground.

The subdivision, named George Ranch after Sonoma philanthropist James George who sold the land to Sandmann, will have its own fire truck, an ample water supply and a good security system.

The lots will range in size from three acres to 17 acres and sell for \$140,000 to \$200,000. Two lots of 305 and 235 acres respectively have been set aside for agricultural use where vineyards can be planted and cattle can be run.

Sandmann has imported hundreds of thousands of architectural antiques for the property, including cobblestones, fences and gates.

A paved one-lane road meanders through the site, providing access to the open spaces where cattle graze.

The George Ranch, still occupied by George, contains two well-maintained farmhouses and two barns/sheds. The ranch consists primarily of grassland and woodland ranging in elevation from about 400 feet to about 1,600 feet. Two perennial streams drain the site of the water that bubbles up from

natural springs, and a small pond is kept by the ranch owner for recreational purposes.

Dense tree cover at lower elevations gives way to scattered grassland openings and broken tree groupings on higher slopes and ridgelines. Vegetation and terrain will remain undisturbed to provide a natural habitat for animals, birds, and flowers.

Recreational facilities will include an association clubhouse equipped with cooking facilities and a large all-purpose room with a fireplace.

Residents will be able to enjoy the miles and miles of natural trails for hiking and riding, family outings, and solitary rides back to nature. They will be able to fish in the pond, watch sunsets over the ridgeline, and share nature with deer, hawks and an occasional grey fox.

The George Ranch is 12 miles from the Napa wine country, 30 miles from Marin County, 48 miles from San Francisco, 56 miles from Lake Berryessa, 60 miles from Sacramento and 156 miles from Lake Tahoe/Squaw Valley.

For information on the George Ranch, call Thomas J. McGinley, project manager, at (707) 938-1277.



Idyllic scenes such as this will be preserved on the George Ranch in Sonoma.