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Courier News January 16, 1996

Battle is on for those interested in old racetrack

By Nina Bernardi
STAFF WRITER

Carpentersville — Left to indulge her motherly ways, Nature is taking back the track where racecar engines roared.

Trees have crumbled the pavement near the "Monza Wall," a 45-degree banking curve that tested the skill of drivers such as Woolworth heir Lance Reventlow.

Spectators came from miles around in the 1960s to the Meadowdale Raceway in what then was rolling countryside west of Illinois 31. With the help of taxpayers, Nature nearly has transformed a park-owned, 92-acre section called Raceway Woods. But development pressure hugs every hairpin turn of the remaining 140-acre track.

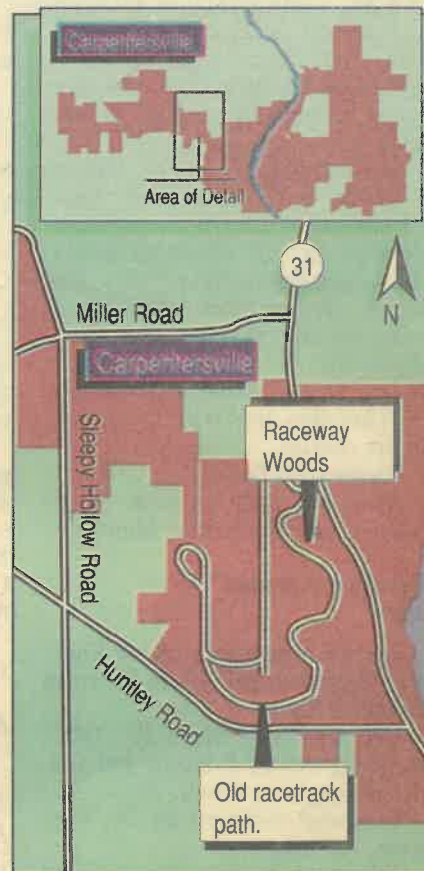
A different kind of race — among open space, village and development interests — could heat up the old course in the coming months. Village leaders want to attract light industry and jobs there and have zoned it accordingly. Open space advocates want Dundee Township taxpayers to buy and preserve the rest of it, as well as 12 other properties.

The family of Leonard Besinger Sr., who built the raceway and much of Carpentersville, likely will determine who leads the final lap.

"This property is not 'on the market' until somebody comes in and I think they're

❖ See **Racetrack** on page A4

Proposed open space



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Racetrack

❖ From page A1

right," said Greg Besinger, who lives in Carpentersville.

"Everything we have is for sale, but I don't waste my time (if it's not) what I think is right for the community."

Another raceway?

Developers recently have eyed the remainder of the track, bordered in part with frontage on Huntley Road and Illinois 31. Besinger indicated big housing-commercial developers have shown the most interest in the property.

"There's two people getting ready to throw contracts out," he said in a phone interview from

West Palm Beach, Fla. "There will be a contract before November."

Racing may even make a comeback in Carpentersville, he said.

"I think Chicago needs a road racecourse, and that's an ideal spot," said Besinger, whose 24-year-old son, Ollie, races Formula cars.

"There's been some big names in racing that have contacted me and have shown some interest recently. Racing has become so big now. You could make it a whole race sports complex."

"They could put in little over a two-mile track, it depends on what they want."

That's bad news to open space advocates such as Billita Jacobsen, who hope to ask voters to buy the land by referendum in the November election. Dundee Township voters approved a \$1.5 million referendum in 1992 allowing the

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Dundee Township Park District to buy half of Raceway Woods. The Kane County Forest Preserve District bought the other half of the property and manages the entire preserve jointly with the park district.

Jacobsen is part of an advisory committee that designated saving the raceway property as its top priority among 13 properties the committee hopes to set aside in Dundee Township. A final open space list will be presented at a March public hearing.

She said the 140-acre portion would provide a good buffer from

surrounding development for the already-protected woods. Open fields, which comprise half the property, also could be developed for baseball or soccer.

"What kind of nature preserve are we going to have if there's factories around it?" she asked, adding that a racetrack would be yet another impact on the woods, not to mention the homes next to it.

"People want open space in the area of Newport Cove. Plus, it's right in the center of the township. It would give us a nice, big preserve."

High price

But the price of sparing land from the bulldozer would be high. At an estimated \$45,000 an acre, the raceway property alone would cost taxpayers roughly \$6.3 million, according to the advisory committee's estimate. Besinger declined to reveal his asking price.

To buy all 13 properties on the open space list, the township would

have to issue about \$33.5 million in bonds, said Jim Peterson, Dundee Township supervisor. The owner of a \$150,000 market value home would pay about \$192 more in Dundee Township taxes the first year after it takes effect, Peterson estimated.

Saving the 92-acre Raceway Woods would cost taxpayers about \$6.60 a year in additional taxes for a \$150,000 home, said Thomas Mammoser, park district director.

"They better get their ballot ready and their checkbook out," Besinger said of the open space effort. "If they want it, they'll have to pay for it."

June Keibler, a park district board member who favors open space, maintained that development costs taxpayers more in the long run than open land. Village services and traffic congestion all carry a price, Jacobsen added.

Referendum is a challenge

Carpentersville Village President

John Skillman says he would like to see the land developed.

"We have plenty of open space in Carpentersville," Skillman said, adding he would be against a race-track returning to the site. "I'd like to see a resort hotel high on top of the hill."

The property is zoned general industrial, "the least restrictive zoning we have," said Neal Hopkins, chairman of the Carpentersville Plan Commission. But a developer could ask the village to rezone the property for other uses, such as housing.

"That's a bad place to put industrial. That's essentially a residential enclave," Hopkins said, adding he would like to see it remain open space.

Besinger said the land's topography is better suited to housing or a racetrack.

He predicted an open space referendum would fail. "Everybody wants it in their back yard," he said, "and they don't want to pay for it."

LOCAL WARRANTY REPAIRS

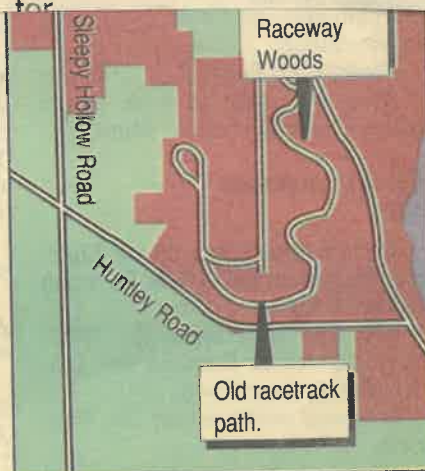
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