

**Robyn Barnes**  
**2/12/2007**  
**Word Count: 967**

## **HILL COUNTRY FLIGHT MOVES WEST**

It wasn't so long ago that San Antonio residents thought that The Dominion on Interstate 10 was The Great Frontier for upscale housing in the area. As The Dominion began filling up, people pushed further north to Boerne, Comfort and Kerrville. Highway 46 east of Boerne became the road to hundreds of high-end homes. Today, prospective homeowners are setting their home buying sights on Pipe Creek, Bandera and Medina.

Area Realtors, developers and builders cite one reason for this migration: the cost of property. Scott Asher of Scott Asher Custom Homes has constructed homes around the Bandera/Pipe Creek area for years. "It's the end of February and I've got more work on my books now than I did all of last year. I think this is because the price of land around here in relationship to the price of land in the rest of the Hill Country is a whole lot less expensive. Even so, I invested in some land here in Bandera and my lot prices have doubled in value since last year when I purchased them."

Demand for Hill Country land is on the rise; finding reasonably-priced lots for home sites in Boerne, Comfort, Wimberly or other nearby communities is a challenge because they are located in such hot real estate markets. Buyers are just now turning their attention westward to the Cowboy Capital of the World and developers are responding.

Luxury neighborhoods are sprouting in the Bandera/Pipe Creek/Medina area. Ask anyone who lives out that way about upscale neighborhoods and chances are they'll tell you about Bridlegate Ranch. Bridlegate, developed by Southerland Communities and located on four miles of the Medina River, offers two- to five-acre home sites priced from \$60,000.

“We opened in June of 2006 and quickly sold out the first phase,” says Jay Patterson, vice president of sales and marketing for Southerland. “We’ll hold the grand opening of the second phase in the beginning of March.”

Patterson says Bridlegate offers a central water supply, underground utilities, paved roads, clubhouse, equestrian facilities, hiking & riding trails, and recreation facilities. “The beauty of the project is that a buyer doesn’t have to build on the lot right away,” he says. “You can buy now and build later, during retirement, if that’s what you want to do.”

Dancing Bear Ranch is another popular upscale community. Post Oak Development owns these 3000 acres of rolling terrain 26 miles northwest of San Antonio. Dancing Bear offers residents a 10,000 square foot clubhouse, access to a lakeside park, miles of nature trails and a boat ramp on Medina Lake. Preferred builders include David Umbel Custom Homes, Wall Homes, Dave Voss Construction.

Brett Lum of Post Oak Development says his company loves this area of the Hill Country. “Dancing Bear Ranch has been well-received,” he says. “So well that we’ve got a new proposed development called Latigo Ranch planned for a property between Interstate 10 and Highway 16 on Highway 46, west of Boerne. We have a preliminary plat for tracts of two to five acres. Children who live in Latigo will go to Bandera schools, which have strong academic ratings similar to Boerne schools, but with smaller environments.”

“We consider Highway 46 as the next Loop,” he continues. “So much business is moving from Loop 410 to Loop 1604; Highway 46 is a natural progression. We look at Highway 16 as a spillover road for Interstate 10. The access on Highway 16 is great; it’s about 30 minutes or less from Latigo Ranch to Loop 1604.”

San Geronimo Ranch is another Post Oak property in preliminary development. The 1766-acre property is located in the far north portion of Medina County on the border with Bandera County, along Highway 16 and Park Road 37. According to the company’s website, retail and commercial sites will be adjacent to Highway 16 and Park Road 37 “This will be a high-end project, much like The Dominion on Interstate 10,” says Lum.

Cielo Rio Ranch, located between Pipe Creek and Bandera, is an upscale gated community. The 630-acre community offers five- to ten-acre home tracts with access to lakes and the beautiful 5,000-acre Hill Country State Natural Area. More than 40 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails wind through the wooded property.

“There are four phases in this development,” says Cielo Rio sales representative Tom Bodiford. “Currently, we’re in phase two. Land sales are good. The parent company, Cielo Ranch Inc., likes this area so well that we’ve just purchased another ranch that’s about eight miles west of Bandera. That property will be very horse-friendly, with about 40 miles of equestrian trails. It also backs up to Bandera State Park.”

Denise Graves, chief executive officer of Bradfield Properties – The Graves Group, acknowledges that land costs are expensive in the Hill Country. “However, you can get property much more reasonably in the Bandera/Pipe Creek area,” she says. “The reason we’re beginning to experience so much growth along Highway 16 up to Pipe Creek is because you can still achieve an affordable lifestyle there.”

“People want a lot that allows them to have a house with a little land around it,” she says. “They want good schools. Taxes out here are lower, so you can afford to build more house. The land is a little wilder than it is around Boerne and people like that.”

Many developers and Realtors alike caution prospective buyers interested in moving to this area to make haste. They suggest that demand will increase and property values will follow.

Making the next great frontier...Leakey?