

Lanier Islands new partners could include Buffett's Margaritaville

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By J. Scott Trubey



Lake Lanier could soon get an infusion of Margaritaville.

The family that operates the Lanier Islands resort said Tuesday it has reached a partnership with a Knoxville development group that plans to take over management of LanierWorld and bring with it singer Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville brand.

Details about future upgrades at the sprawling Hall County resort were few, but in a news release the companies said they planned "a phased multi-million dollar transformation" of the property.

Under a new joint venture, Safe Harbor Development will assume management of LanierWorld — which includes the waterpark, marinas and campground — at the 1,500-acre resort.

LLI Management Co., the long-term leaseholder and operator of the resort, will continue to manage the Legacy Lodge hotel and conference center, golf course, wedding venues and equestrian center.

Mike Williams, a partner with LLI Management, said guests will see new dining options at LanierWorld. A makeover of the resort's campground to target large recreational vehicles is in the works.

"We've been running the property for 12 years, and we've brought it a long ways," Williams said. "But we felt like it was time to bring in a new vision ... and more or less take it to the next level."

The Lake Lanier resort stands on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property. The corps leases it to the state through the Lake Lanier Islands Development Authority. LLI operates the resort under a lease with the development authority.

A spokeswoman for the resort said the future improvements also will cater to the boating community. The islands' Sunset Cove restaurant and nightlife complex, which will be managed by Safe Harbor, would be a match to Buffett's beach bum brand.

Safe Harbor also will control special events such as Lanier's "Magical Nights of Lights" Christmas light display, the companies said.

Safe Harbor President Darby Campbell was a partner in the development of a Margaritaville hotel in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., and in another under development in Nashville. Margaritaville also has branded resorts and casinos throughout the southeast, Las Vegas and the Bahamas.

The Margaritaville brand also includes apparel, barware and spirits.