

Lanier Islands announces partnership with Margaritaville Development, SafeHarbor

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By Trevor McNaboe



Lanier Islands is adding a joint partner to its business following an unanimous approval by the Lake Lanier Island Development Authority Tuesday morning.

Lanier Islands, which has been owned and operated by the Virgil Williams family's LLI Management Company, LLC since 2005, will partner with Margaritaville Development and SafeHarbor effective Feb. 1.

"This a happy day for Lanier Islands," said LLIDA Chairman Lonice Barrett.

SafeHarbor and Margaritaville Development will take over management duties at LanierWorld, while LLI Management will continue to hold ownership over Lanier Islands.

"Over the last 11 years, the Williams family has been committed to elevating quality, product and service standards at Lanier Islands, in order to create a venue that Georgians can be proud of," said Virgil Williams, chairman of the board for LLI Management Company, LLC. "We have been searching for a long time to find a creative financial and operations partner who shared our vision of what Lanier Islands could and should be. Darby Campbell and his team at Safe Harbor not only share that vision, but also our passion for providing an unsurpassed guest experience," he said.

SafeHarbor, a Knoxville, Tennessee-based company, will also operate the marinas and campgrounds at Lanier Islands. The group will also manage the destination's special events programming, including the annual Magical Nights of Lights.

"Our goal is to take what the Williams family has done and enhance it," said SafeHarbor Development Owner and President Darby Campbell. "The bones are terrific, we just want to take some parts of it to the next level."

Campbell said the short-term focus is to have improvements to the marina to provide additional business opportunities and also to re-brand the food and beverage service at LanierWorld.

Part of the food and beverage re-branding will be with the help of Margaritaville Development, a Jimmy Buffett-themed chain restaurant that also has hotels and casino under the same name. Previously, SafeHarbor and Margaritaville worked together to open up a restaurant at the Island in Pigeon Forge, an entertainment complex in northeast Tennessee.

“This new partnership is a huge step in taking the Islands to the next level for the benefit of not only our guests, but for the great state of Georgia,” said Williams. “Safe Harbor brings a new level of expertise and energy in the areas of camping, boating and entertainment to our partnership, which is exciting to all of us.”

Williams says there is tremendous upside to this partnership with most of the 1,500 acres and 27 miles of Lake Lanier undeveloped and approved for future development by the Corps of Engineers.

“We’re looking for projects all over the world and Atlanta was a target market for us,” said Margaritaville Development President Jim Wiseman. “I came here one day and couldn’t find a parking space. As a developer, that’s a good sign.”

With the deal in place, the focus between the three groups turns to making Lanier Islands into more than just a warm weather destination.

“We want to make this place attractive to visitors year round,” Campbell said. “There’s things you can do to attract people. We want to extend the season from just the summer to 10 or 11 months.”