



The Arbors at Dogwood Creek is 15 years old this July 2012, Section 1 plat having been filed on July 21, 1997. There have been a lot of changes since then, not the least of which is that what was once deemed “un-useable” land is now a “Premier Subdivision”!

Some of the original property buyers still live here, but with the passing of the years many of the properties have changed hands, and the history of our community is fast fading into the past. So with input from the Bastrop County engineer who helped design the roads and drainage for the developer, Sabine Investments, here is a bit of a recap for the history buffs.

The property which defines the Arbors was once part of a much larger parcel belonging to Camp Swift. The Camp at one time encompassed some 52,000 acres and was used from 1942 to 1946 for infantry training and prisoner of war internment. In 1947 however, the Army declared Camp Swift as surplus to the War Assets Administration and over the years that followed, portions of the Camp property were conveyed back to public and private owners. Today Camp Swift occupies approximately 12,000 acres, with over 40,000 of the original acres in the hands of some 2000 public and private owners.

One of the owners of a former Camp Swift land parcel was Elgin’s Dildy family. In fact, our late County Commissioner, Lee Dildy and his brother occupied a farm house on that parcel for a number of years. (That farm house, remodeled and updated, is located at 139 Spanish Oak Tr.)

In the mid 1990’s, Sabine Investments purchased 500 acres of land from the Dildy family; an area that was so heavily wooded that it was considered un-useable for ranching or farming. The news that Sabine planned to develop a subdivision on that property reportedly created a stir in the Elgin area. Long time area residents had seen how agonizingly slow lot sales had been in Cedar Hills, a smaller subdivision across Hwy 95 from the Arbors. Most pronounced that Sabine would fail to sell little or any property at the prices they were asking.

But Sabine had a vision, and it encompassed more than just clearing, cutting roads, and selling lots. The subdivision was to be first class, with wide, well engineered roads and underground utilities. And while Sabine had a successful track record with other developments, this was the first to be built in an essentially unsupported area; that is,

unlike other Sabine developments , this one had no other subdivisions around it for support or comparables.

With the Arbors at Dogwood Creek, Sabine essentially created a market for their product, using potential buyers to guide them to profitable sales. Section 1 properties were originally divided to offer “country-style lots” of several acres, along with a few smaller one acre lots. However, Sabine soon discovered that while city folk might crave ranchettes, when faced with the reality of actually maintaining several acres, they usually turned back to the smaller, more manageable (and cheaper) one acre lots.



As part of their marketing plan, Sabine agents selectively sold lots, holding many back while testing the market for the optimum sale. In addition, some lots were sold at discount to potential builders...who were then advertised as “Approved Builders” to encourage property owners to build with confidence.

In addition to supplying builder credentials, the developer also offered attractive terms: IE, 10% down, with a 10% rate on 3-5 year loans, amortized over 25 years to keep monthly payments low. A balloon payment would be due in the last month. Many buyers purchased lots in hopes of seeing values rise and thus achieve a profitable sale before the balloon note came due. Predictably, year 3 and 5 on any sale saw many properties change hands.

In 1997, Sabine opened Section 2, but not until huge changes were made to the original concept. According to the County engineer, the drainage plans were more complicated in Section 2 with the existence of several natural ditches that had to be incorporated into the plat plan. And all plans had to comply with the Texas State law concerning compromising an area’s natural drainage. IE, the large drainage culvert on Kingwood Dr, though visibly over-sized, was required to accommodate a possible overflow from a stock tank located north, outside the Arbors. Every design had to direct drainage under or around the roadbed, with adequate drainage areas on either side of the pavement.

Some lots had to be redesigned to allow for at least a reasonable building area. Because of lessons learned from Section 1 sales, the original Section 2 layout was redesigned to provide the development of smaller lots. IE, originally Section 2 did not have any of the current small cul-de-sacs (Sycamore Trail, Ironwood Cove, Whispering Cove, Pine Point Cove). In contrast, several lots along Maple Leaf Tr were originally long and narrow; by combining some of these, the current 5 acre lots were created.



During the years that Sabine controlled the administration of the Arbors, the issue of entry gates was raised. The subdivision had not been conceived as a “gated” community, but it soon became evident to Sabine sales department that they could easily create such a market, as it was a concept that was beginning to be more and more in demand. In addition, stats showed that gated properties were valued higher than non-gated ones. In November of 1998 gates were installed at the entrances of the subdivision. Property owners were given the access code or a remote control and encouraged to keep these private.

But this caused an immediate problem. Sabine’s original plan had been to eventually turn ownership of the roads and easements (and thus their maintenance responsibility) over to Bastrop County. But they were quickly informed that State law did not allow public monies to be used for maintaining private roads. And according to the county commissioner, the gates could not only be not closed at any time, they would have to be removed entirely. Thus a decision had to be made.

In May 1999, all property owners received a letter from Sabine outlining the dilemma: Sabine built the gates in order to limit general access...but in doing so, violated the requirements for a public, county maintained road. The letter notified all property owners of record that the gates would remain for now, but when the homeowners association was formed, property owners would have to make a decision on whether to turn the roads over to the County, remove the gates to create public access to the

subdivision...or keep the gates, establish the roads as private, and take on the responsibility for road/easement maintenance. Sabine asked for owner responses; the sales agent indicated at a later meeting that the majority of the responses were “for” keeping the gates. (no official count was publicized for verification)



Then another issue surfaced. In February 2001, property owners were informed by letter from the Department of the Army that the Corps of Engineers was seeking a right of entry for access to land which records showed had once been utilized as a training installation by Camp Swift. The Corps sought to discover and retrieve any old ordinance, scrap or unexploded, that might still be on the property as a result of those training exercises in the 1940's. This took many property owners by surprised as Sabine had already done due-diligence as required by lenders; records show an archeology investigation had revealed nothing, not even a shell casing.

There were only a few lots, all in the far north corner of the Arbors that had been within range of any live fire from the training fields. The Corps however, did their survey but were unable to find anything of significance ...only a few unidentifiable pieces of old metal scrap. The case was finally closed.

By mid 2001, Sabine had sold 75% of the 260 building lots, a number that as per the registered Deed Restrictions (CC&R's) required the developer to turn the administration of the subdivision over to a home owners association. On November 1, 2001 a Transitional Team consisting of resident volunteers was formed and a meeting held with the then Sabine CEO, Steve Mills, to discuss the formation of the Arbors Improvement Association (AIA).

August 2, 2002, was the first official (Annual) meeting of the AIA. As per the By-Laws put in place by Sabine, three Board members were elected and approximately \$9000.00 was turned over to the newly Board appointed property management company (Pioneer Property Mgmt) for the Arbors account. Minutes of the Transitional meeting and the official “turn-over” meeting in August, 2002, can be found on the Arbors web site.

During the year that followed, the AIA Board added several important amendments to the By-Laws (primarily legal enhancements) and enacted several policies on the recommendation of the new Architectural Control Committee. Sabine had unfortunately been lax in enforcing the CC&R's in the last few years before turning the Arbors over to the AIA. Among several violations, the AIA inherited the problem of an abandoned slab which stood empty on a lot for years, though the CC&R's clearly states “All residences must be completed within one year from start of construction.” The lot sold after many

years and with the building of a house on the empty slab, the CC&R violation was finally resolved.

Other obvious violations also occurred that were not so easily resolved: Section 1 CC&R's, specified properties along Dogwood and Spanish Oak to install white rail fencing, a requirement that had not been evenly enforced. Subsequent Architectural Committees have remediated as many of the older violations as reasonably possible, but some simply had to be grandfathered.

At the August 2003 Annual Meeting the Gates issue was finally resolved: a ballot was put forth to the 119 members present concerning the matter. The issue was debated by several residents and it was clearly explained to all present that maintaining both gates & roads would require funds be allocated for that purpose and could possibly require an increase in dues or assessment in the future. The ballot was distributed indicating to vote for or against keeping the neighborhood a gated community. Votes were tabulated by Pioneer Mgmt employees and result was that the majority, by almost 2 to 1, favored keeping the gates and roads private.

Over the years the Arbors has earned a reputation as a first-class community, a desirable place to build a home, and a subdivision that rigorously enforces its deed restrictions. So far, it is still the only such community in the Elgin area, in a large part due to residents who willingly volunteer their time to create and maintain a Piece of Heaven in the country...!

