

Loreto Bay - sustainable housing

story by Richard Basch

Real Estate developers often have a bad name. The monsters who kick defenseless old ladies off their property, usually strictly legally, but often heartlessly. “Developers,” there’s often a disturbing ring to the title.

However, there are developers who appear to have taken a different approach to the work. **Sustainability** is their watchword and this alters virtually everything they do. Sustainability means leaving the world in a better condition than what we found upon arrival, creating environmental, social and economic capital.

We have entered a time when the resources of the planet are constantly challenged, animal species are becoming extinct, the planet is warming at an alarming rate, and there is a sense that a “devil take the hindmost” attitude is outmoded.

Onto this platform steps **David Butterfield**. Butterfield, a man with dual US and Canadian citizenship, is the winner of numerous awards for the creation of **sustainable housing**, and recognized by Canada’s British Columbia Government with the “Building Better Futures Award” for his “Commitment to Innovation, Energy Efficient and Environmentally-Friendly Development, Affordable Housing, Youth Employment, Live/Work Design, and Public Art, That Extend Beyond the Industry to Enhance the Community in Which he Builds.” He is the developer behind Loreto Bay in Loreto, Baja Sur, Mexico. Additionally, Butterfield is the president and founder of **The Trust for Sustainable Development**.



In partnership with Fonatur, Mexico’s government tourism office, he is creating a multi billion pound community on 5 and ½ kilometers on the shore of the Sea of Cortez. In an unprecedented move, the Federal Government of Mexico sold the rights to this property in it’s entirety to Butterfield.

30 years ago the government of Mexico began a beach project to develop 5 coastal towns, Cancan, Ixtapa, Los Cabos, Huatulco and, finally, Loreto. The internationally celebrated success of the other towns gave the government confidence that in developing Loreto they wanted to go above and beyond what they had previously achieved, to address the environment.

Butterfield created the Loreto Bay Company in 2000 and purchased 8,000 acres of property in and around Loreto, Mexico. In that property, the largest part, some 5,000 acres is to remain undeveloped, left in it’s natural state. Ultimately, there will be 6,000 homes on 3,000 acres. To leave the majority of the property in a development in a wild state is virtually never done.

This, however, simply begins the list of exceptions. Butterfield is donating 1% of the gross sales in the community to create the “**Loreto Bay Foundation**”, an independent group which does projects within the small city of Loreto, like building a hospital in a town which previously had none.

He is paying the highest wages in Mexico to the workers who are building the houses. “The burden to the company is \$11 an hour, most of which is in benefits. The workers see just over \$5.00 an hour.” In a country where exploitation of laborers is commonplace, this is close to amazing.

He has begun an **organic farm**, where much is being learned about growing vegetables and shrubs with brackish water. This is, after all, the desert, bordered by sea water. Dan Murphy, an American farmer/agronomist from Iowa, who has done projects in the Middle East of a similar nature, is the CEO **Echoscapes**, the Loreto Bay farming company.

Loreto Bay has also brought organic farming to a new level, by growing plants and food by Echoscapes, which is founded to pioneer methods of growing vegetables which are nourished with brackish, unpalatable water. "This makes the plant fight harder for its nutrients, work harder to grow. In the end it makes a vegetable which is tastier."

He also adds that it takes longer for the plants to ripen, "We plant in September and harvest in December. If I used conventional methods we could harvest a month earlier."

Butterfield is pioneering new methods of homebuilding as well. Using **adobe**, a kind of mud based block construction material, long used by indigenous people in the American southwest. He claims, "These houses will last a thousand years. Look at Acoma and Taos" He is referring to adobe housing built by indigenous people in the PreColumbian period in the USA, still standing. He adds, "Adobe

absorbs moisture in the night as the air cools and gives it back in the day as evaporative cooling".



The Villages of Loreto Bay are served by a private fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) network from Road9Loreto that gives residents and local businesses access to advanced communication and entertainment services. This future-proof fiber optic infrastructure runs through the entire community and connects to every home, using strands of glass as thin as a human hair to carry voice, internet data, and video information in pulses of light. This lets Road9Loreto deliver advanced services such as Voice-Over-IP telephones, digital video with Video-On-Demand, and broadband Internet access - plus it has virtually unlimited capacity to expand in the future.

Construction on the homes is well underway, although a two year wait from start to finish is not unusual. Prices began three years ago in the 125,000 pound range and now are twice that for a base model and can mount to over 1,000,000 pounds for a custom home. Presently there is but one family with roots in Britain, but more are expected and welcome.

What's to do in Loreto? Much of the entertainment is within the homes. The community seems to attract similar kinds of people, folks with an **environmental interest** and, one assumes, likely liberal politics. In the nearby neighborhood there is swimming, fishing, boating and all sorts of water based activities, not to mention the picturesque Gold course which has been cultivated on the brackish water. Nearby, 100 kilometers across the Baja on the Pacific side in **Magdalena Bay**, there is [whale watching](#), a fascinating experience, where the massive creatures come close enough to be touched.

Dave Evans, a former member of the US Congress is one of



the earliest homeowners in Loreto Bay. He says, "I find the place magical and the people agreeable. It wonderful to be surrounded by people who I enjoy and to be living in a beautiful setting, this is an exceptional place and it clearly draws exceptional people as homeowners. I'm happy here."

David Butterfield, developer, is well on his way to altering the conception of what the definition of a developer is. With the success of this project more and more ensured on a daily basis, "developer" may just be re-defined.