

Gildehaus buys Sni-A-Bar Farm

Residential community slated for 1,100 acres south of city

**By Scott Williams
Of The Examiner**

In what is being called the largest land deal in Jackson County in recent years, former Grain Valley Mayor Steve Gildehaus has purchased a 1,100-acre farm owned nearly a century ago by the founder of The Kansas City Star.

Gildehaus, a real estate developer, has purchased Sni-A-Bar Farm from the heirs to Texas rancher Ray Batman, who bought the property after World War II from the estate of newspaper pioneer William Rockhill Nelson.

Located in unincorporated Jackson County just south of Grain Valley, the farm was put on the market about 15 years ago and has recently carried a sale price of \$1.8 million.

The price agreed to by Gildehaus and the former owners has not been disclosed.

Gildehaus confirmed the sale Wednesday and said he has been laying plans for the farm purchase for several years, making smaller deals along the way to build up the needed credibility.

The sale was completed in recent weeks, with financing provided by Blue Springs Bank, Bank of Jacomo and Bank of Odessa.

Gildehaus said the timing of the real estate deal — coming about a month after he stepped down as mayor of Grain Valley — is strictly a coincidence.

"It just happened that way," he said. "It's something that I've looked at for years."

The 36-year-old businessman said he plans within a couple of weeks to unveil plans for redeveloping Sni-A-Bar Farm into what he described as a sprawling residential community.

The Kansas City engineering firm

of Bucher Willis & Ratliff has been hired to develop the plans.

Stephen G. Lewis, a Bucher Willis & Ratliff planner with 10 years of experience in the metropolitan area, said the 1,100-acre farm is the largest project he has worked on in Jackson County.

"Anytime you get up to a thousand acres," Lewis said, "you're dealing with a large piece of property."

Gildehaus said he hopes his development of the farm will be a boon for nearby Grain Valley, a city whose downtown area is dwarfed in size by Sni-A-Bar Farm.

The property is made up primarily of rolling farmland, although it also includes some dilapidated farm buildings and the home once occupied by Nelson.

After the newspaper founder's death in the early 1900s, the farm was donated for agricultural research for about 30 years. It then was purchased by Batman, a Texas farmer and cattle rancher.

The farm was put up for sale after Batman's death in the early 1970s.

For the past three years, the marketing of the farm has been handled by Scott Martin, a real estate salesman with Coldwell Banker in Blue Springs.

Martin calls the farm the largest piece of property he has sold during his 17-year career. He also says the sale might be the largest deal of its type ever for Coldwell Banker in the Kansas City area.

"It's the biggest land sale in Jackson County in I don't know how long," he said Wednesday. "There's not that many large parcels of land left."

Martin said the farm took long to sell mainly because the owners felt