

# NORTHWEST ARKANSAS BUSINESS JOURNAL

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## Farm Comes to Town

### Arkansas' first 'agrihood' taking shape in Bentonville

By Paul Gatling

A niche movement in commercial real estate development will soon make its debut in Arkansas.

Springfield, Mo.-development and property management company Green Circle Projects is nearing completion of an agricultural neighborhood in Bentonville known as an "agrihood."

In the simplest explanation, an agrihood is a residential community with an urban farm as part of the property. The Urban Land Institute (ULI), a Washington, D.C.-based thought leader

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PHOTO BY PAUL GATLING

Melissa Millsap, from left, her husband Adam Millsap and Jonathan McArthur work for Farm Team, the urban agriculture development wing of Springfield, Mo.-based Green Circle Projects. Farm Team is focused on building the urban farm at Red Barn, an agricultural neighborhood Green Circle is developing near downtown Bentonville.



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## BARN

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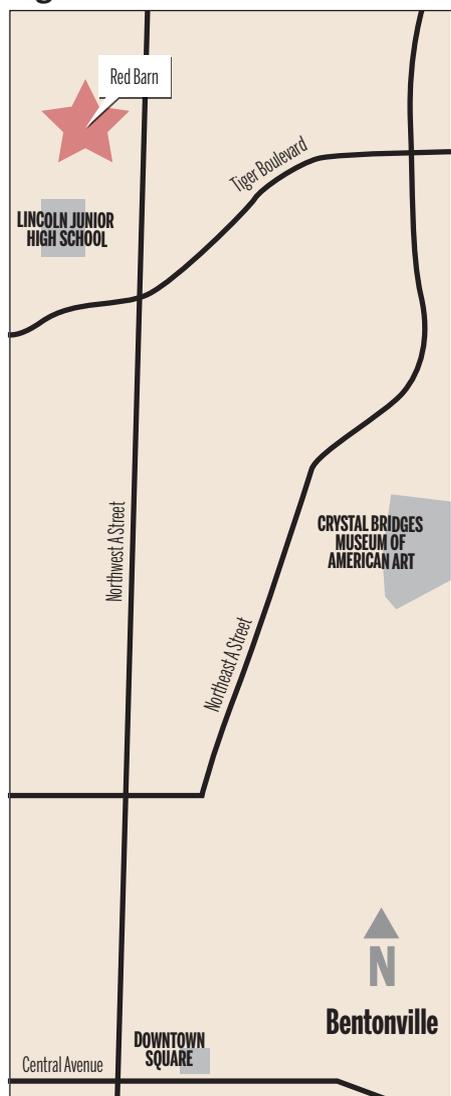
on housing and land use, says the idea of focusing on food within real estate projects can “translate into enhancements to health, environmental sustainability and the bottom line.”

The community-building concept dates back several decades, but agrihoods still represent only a small percentage of the overall housing market. In fact, the agrihood in Bentonville, called Red Barn, is thought to be the first of its kind in the state.

“I am not aware of any other agrihoods in Arkansas,” said Ed McMahon, a senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington, D.C. “Several other developers have expressed interest in the concept, but this is the first one that is coming out of the ground [in Arkansas].”

The residential component of Red Barn — so named for a distinctive red barn situated on the southeast corner of the property — is being built along Northwest A Street, north of Lincoln Junior High School. The 15.5-acre project is on 55 acres that once belonged to the late John Shores, a prominent civic leader and former business owner in Bentonville who died in September 2015. He was 75.

## ‘Agrihood on A’



Source: Google Maps

Shores and his wife, Mary Kay, owned and operated Bentonville Furniture Inc. in downtown Bentonville for 40 years. The store closed in May 2000 when Shores retired.

A limited liability company controlled by Bentonville-based Walton Enterprises — the business that manages the family’s considerable fortune — bought the land in July 2016 for \$3.17 million.

Matt O’Reilly, a driven entrepreneur and descendant of the family that founded publicly-held auto parts retailer O’Reilly Auto Parts, is the developer behind Green Circle Projects. He is also the founder of TrailSpring, a nonprofit focused on multiuse trail design and construction, and for 13 years he operated a specialty outdoor store in Springfield called Dynamic Earth. He sold the business in September 2014 to Austin, Texas-based Backwoods.

“I have been coming to northern Arkansas to climb and hit the Buffalo [River] for years,” O’Reilly said of his connection to the region. Green Circle Projects now has an office at 326 S.W. A St. in Bentonville. “As the trails started to emerge, we were coming to [Bentonville] more and more. With the unique work that we do, I have always focused on areas we know. Coming here enough over the years, I became confident and familiar enough with the area to want to do some work here.”

O’Reilly, 38, echoed the ULI’s list of benefits by integrating food production with the urban environment.

He also hopes agrihoods like Red Barn can fill one of the biggest gaps of the local food economy — training the next generation of farmers.

“People want to do this, but they don’t necessarily want to wear overalls and live out in the country,” he said. “They want access to amenities, and it’s possible to do both. Our thesis is that we can provide urban farm infrastructure as sort of a symbiotic amenity with real estate development. And that provides salary-based farming jobs that are the gateway jobs to the next generation of farmers.”

“It’s an opportunity for people to learn on a farm and practice [farming] and eventually, hopefully, open their own farm.”

## Farm Team

Even as Red Barn is a farming incubator of sorts, it will be professionally managed by a group of horticulturalists and agriculture experts who work for Green Circle Projects’ urban agriculture development wing, called Farm Team, which is focused on two projects: the farm at Red Barn and an agri complex with greenhouses powered by waste near at the Noble Hill landfill north of Springfield.



This aerial rendering depicts Red Barn, an agricultural neighborhood in development along Northwest A Street in Bentonville. The 2-acre urban farm will be situated on the northeast corner of the property.

Adam and Melissa Millsap, a husband-and-wife team of urban farmers, moved to Bentonville from Springfield in December and will be the on-site farmers who design and build the Red Barn farm. In Missouri, they own Urban Roots Farm, a four-season farm on approximately 2 acres in downtown Springfield. O’Reilly described them as “major players” in Springfield’s local food economy.

Melissa Millsap said she has noticed a high curiosity level about Red Barn in the short time she’s lived in Northwest Arkansas.

“As soon as you tell people there’s going to be a farm a half-mile from downtown, they want to know more,” she said.

About 2 acres of Red Barn’s development footprint will be dedicated to field crop production for as many as 60 varieties of vegetables. It will include an apiary for honey bees and a chicken tractor, a mobile coop that allows chickens to be rotated across a pasture in a controlled pattern.

Red Barn will also have two movable high tunnels and a state-of-the-art greenhouse system that stores thermal energy in the ground and uses that energy to moderate greenhouse conditions during varying temperatures.

“We have so much need and desire in this market for fresh and local produce, we could open 100 farms in Northwest Arkansas and not make much of a dent,” said Farm Team member Jonathan McArthur, a Rogers native and formerly the founder and manager of the community gardens for the Samaritan Community Center in Rogers. “The restaurant industry is really growing, and more people are moving to Northwest Arkansas from places where they had access to this kind of thing.”

Besides being an amenity, the business model behind the farm at Red Barn is to actually make money.

McArthur, who has a master’s degree

in horticulture from the University of Arkansas, will oversee Red Barn’s community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, designed for people to become members and investors in the farm and share in its vegetable production.

“It’s subscription farming,” Millsap explained. “People purchase shares in the beginning of a season, and we’re basically hired to be their farmers. We grow the food, and every week we harvest and they come pick up the basket. Some farms have a system where you can choose like a buffet, and it’s itemized. We’ll have a few different sizes and shares.”

Produce from the farm will also be sold to restaurants and at farmers markets.

The farm at Red Barn will be a Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) farm — meaning grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or genetically modified organisms — and is expected to harvest hundreds of pounds of produce every week.

The first round of produce is expected by May.

## Tenant Talk

Red Barn’s housing options include townhouses clustered around green space and flats over tuck-under parking.

“It’s designed for young professionals and for families relocating to the area,” O’Reilly said.

The developer said with the property’s 138 units, he expects between 200 and 225 people will live at Red Barn. Lease rates average about \$1.35 per square foot, but 15% of the units are earmarked for core housing, or workforce housing, and will be discounted by about 30% below market rate.

“Those are targeted for people who work in Bentonville and the core workforce,” he said. “Our goal is to have those fully-leased before we open.”

The units will be coming online in phases from April through June, O’Reilly said.

Red Barn residents will also have opportunities to integrate with the farming operation. They can be trained in a variety of recurring tasks, such as picking, planting or washing the produce.

“It’s not a requirement, but we think they’ll get involved for sure,” O’Reilly said. “Most urban farms have a really good volunteer base. Getting them trained is key. It’s almost like earning a merit badge in Boy Scouts. They can specialize or learn all of it.”

Crystal Anthony is counting the days until she and her boyfriend relocate from California to Red Barn later this spring. Anthony, a former middle school teacher in New England with a master’s degree from Harvard, moved to the West Coast in 2017 to start her own business, Crystal Anthony Coaching. The focus is on cross-country and marathon running, as well as various disciplines in cycling, mostly mountain biking.

Anthony also races for Liv Cycling, the only cycling brand in the world dedicated solely to women, and she was in Bentonville this past October for an event. She said her boyfriend’s work in the cycling industry allows them the flexibility to live anywhere in the country.

“We’ve been looking at where some of

### Ramsay Ball Departs Colliers for Green Circle

Ramsay Ball, a commercial real estate broker in Bentonville, is the new principal broker for Green Circle Projects. The Springfield, Mo.-based real estate management development company has opened an office in Bentonville at 326 S.W. A St. inside Cast, co-working space operated by Green Circle.

Ball was previously a broker for the Northwest Arkansas office of Colliers International Arkansas in Rogers. Ball and Steve Lane, who is managing partner of the Colliers office, founded Lane Real Estate Services Inc. in 2002. Three years later, the firm merged with Colliers Dickson Flake Partners (now Colliers International Arkansas) in Little Rock, which established the Colliers office in Northwest Arkansas.

Ball says he will continue to work on existing projects while in transition between companies. In his new job, Ball will focus on site and building acquisitions for both Green Circle and a handful of clients.

Ball is a board member for emerging technology firms BlueInGreen, CardioWise and Sevo Nutraceuticals. He is also a member of Gravity Ventures, Tonic Fund and the Natural State Angel Association.

Ball also is a governing board member for a number of nonprofits including the House of Songs Alliance, the Arkansas Community Foundation, NorthWest Arkansas Community College Foundation and the Bentonville Parks Conservancy.

Matt O’Reilly is the developer behind Green Circle Projects, whose properties include Green Circle Shopping Center in Springfield, a 23,000-square-foot shopping center built in 2008. Two years later, it became the first shopping site in the country to earn the U.S. Green Building Council’s top rating of LEED Platinum status.

Green Circle is currently overseeing about \$200 million in construction projects. Two of those are in Bentonville — an agrihood/urban farm along Northwest A Street called Red Barn, and Crystal Flats, a mixed-use residential project between Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art and Memorial Park. ▶



Ramsay Ball

— Paul Gatling

the best places for mountain biking are in the U.S., and Bentonville is one of them,” Anthony said.

Anthony said her boyfriend’s online research about living in the region led the couple to Red Barn. Anthony said

her other passion is cooking and baking. She also keeps a recipe blog on her website at [crystaljanthony.com](http://crystaljanthony.com). And the Red Barn concept was immediately appealing.

She said she would love to be involved

in the neighborhood’s farming operation.

“I had my own garden before when I was in New England, and I love using fresh vegetables in what I cook and eat,” Anthony said. “Having the fresh produce there on-site is certainly a draw.” ▶