

# The Woodlands History

THE WOODLANDS, THE INSIDE STORY OF CREATING A BETTER HOMETOWN

## The Name Game

By Roger Galatas

There was one unforeseen problem with the original decision to persuade the City of Houston to include The Woodlands within its extraterritorial jurisdiction, which George Mitchell had pushed so hard for back in the 1970s. It complicated the naming of our streets because all names had to be approved by the City of Houston and none could duplicate those already in use in the city.

“In keeping with the way The Woodlands has been developed as a community in harmony with nature, of course we always have kept to the nature theme,” recalls Susan Vreeland-Wendt, a marketing executive with The Woodlands Corporation. “Despite the fact most tree names had already been used in Houston, we found a way to keep using them. If you

add enough words together you can come up with something like Oak Pond, Oak Court Place or Woodhaven Wood.” Or as Susan jokingly said, “We cheat.”

“But frankly, we’re kind of running out of ideas,” she said. “You know we’ve done every species of bird, every species of butterfly, and tree and wildflower. I do a lot of research. We look for names that have a very fluid, lyrical sound. Something that looks good on engraved stationary and makes you want to buy a home on that street. It’s all part of the marketing process.”

The Woodlands Corporation has tried to fit names of streets and neighborhoods with the names of each residential village. It is useful here to review those village names and their origin.

First to be established was the Village of Grogan’s Mill in 1974. Many of the original community residents still live there. The village is currently seeing a period of selective renovation and remodeling. It’s an attractive village with historic character. It has three golf courses, more than any other village, and is the closest to I-45. A portion of the original land purchase for The Woodlands was from the Grogan-Cochran Lumber Co. Grogan’s Mill is named for one of the families that owned that company.

Since the Village of Grogan’s Mill was the only village for the first several years, it got the full attention of everyone on the team, including planners, marketing people, management, residents and George Mitchell to name a few. To remain consistent with the environmental theme, original neighborhood entry markers were sandblasted wooden signs with earth tone colors and hew. Street signs with no cross arms had street names sandblasted as a vertical inscription into the vertical wooden

post. To read street names while driving a car, the driver had to cock his or her head to the left. There was a joke among some within the county that you could recognize a resident from The Woodlands by the way they held their head.

The second to be developed was the Village of Panther Creek, which is named for the creek running through it. The community’s first public high school, McCullough, and the original Interfaith facility are in the village. It is centrally located fronting the western shore of Lake Woodlands. It is the smallest residential village in The Woodlands.

Next came the Village of Cochran’s Crossing, again named for one of the families who owned the lumber company. It opened in July 1983 on a very hot day. We had the grand opening in Shadowbend Park and George Mitchell was present. He had been down on Galveston Island for a weekend visit, his typical routine, and he came in his fishing hat, light blue trousers and a slightly wrinkled shirt. He didn’t know it was going to be a formal event. Members of the Cochran family were also there. The Village of Cochran’s Crossing is also complete, including the 27-hole Arnold Palmer Golf Course.

Following closely behind was the Village of Indian Springs opened in 1984. There was limited archeological evidence suggesting that an Indian tribe hunted and perhaps camped within the flood plain along Spring Creek, which formed the southerly boundary of this village. Thus, street and neighborhood names such as Flintridge, Rushwing, and Shawnee Ridge were used to recognize and honor possible past settlers. The Spring Creek flood plain remains undeveloped and protected.



### The Woodlands Entrance

The Woodlands’ original entrance sign sat in a sea of bluebonnets, the official Texas flower. The sign stayed in place until 2001 when a new entry sign was installed on Woodlands Parkway.

The Village of Alden Bridge was next to be developed with its grand opening in 1995. The name, Alden Bridge, actually came from my fond memories of a sawmill town near where I grew up in Benton, Louisiana. The original town of Alden Bridge had a millpond that I fished in when I was a kid. That old mill is gone, the town is gone and the forest has retaken the entire place. The original town was developed where a railroad bridge crossed a flowing stream and included a sawmill, a general store and houses for mill workers. Its founder, Philo Alden, who migrated to Louisiana from New York, was an ancestor of John and Priscilla Alden, who were among the original signers of the Mayflower Compact and settlers of Plymouth Colony in the 1620s.

The sixth village is Sterling Ridge, named in recognition of The Woodlands' 25th anniversary celebrated in 1999. It includes the neighborhood of Carlton Woods, a gated golf course community named in honor of Carlton Gipson, our very talented long-time golf course superintendent. Still under active development, it has a higher percentage of upscale housing than the other villages with value driven by its two signature golf courses, one designed by Jack Nicklaus and the other by Gary Player.

The next in the sequence of development came the Village of College Park, a mixed-use village that has significant housing but also a major retail component. A portion of its residential development is on the east side of Interstate 45, and its amenities are consistent with the quality and the style in other parts of The Woodlands. College Park includes a 100-acre community college campus and the University Center, from which the village derives its name, in addition to a significant medical campus that includes St. Luke's, Texas Children's and M.D. Anderson. The age-restricted neighborhoods of Windsor Hills and Windsor Lakes and the community college make great partners for lifelong learning opportunities.

The last residential village, currently under development, is the Village of Creekside Park, the only village of The Woodlands not located in Montgomery County. It lies entirely in adjacent Harris



### Cochran's Crossing

*In July 1983, the formal opening of Cochran's Crossing, the third residential village built in The Woodlands, was attended by Roger Galatas, Bill Cochran, Rev. Don Gebert, Ed Lee, Montgomery County Commissioner Weldon Locke, George Mitchell, State Representative Jim Turner and Montgomery County Judge Jimmy Edwards.*

*Photos courtesy of The Woodlands Operating Company, LP/Ted Washington.*

County. Public education is provided to village residents by the Tomball Independent School District as opposed to the Conroe district that serves the other villages. A centerpiece of the village is a Tom Fazio signature golf course constructed as an extension of the gated country club experience provided by the Club at Carlton Woods, Creekside.

Public schools in The Woodlands are named to honor heroes of Texas history (Mirabeau B. Lamar), famous American leaders (Sally K. Ride, Colin Powell, Barbara Bush) and former school board members and school administrators (Knox, Hailey, Buckalew, Collins, Tough, Wilkerson, McCullough and Galatas). And appropriately, one school is named in honor of George Mitchell.

One school is named for David, the youngster who lived his entire life in a plastic bubble to protect his weakened immune system from disease and infection. David received special education assistance from the public school system and was an inspiration. His father, David Vetter Sr., served as mayor of Shenandoah and as a board member of the Town Center Improvement District. The plastic bubble that was home to David for many years is in the Smithsonian in Washington D.C.

Barbara Bush came to the opening of Barbara Bush Elementary School. As I recall she arrived in a rather plain, unmarked white Ford automobile, driven by what appeared to be a Secret Service agent. As her car approached the event,

an alert local constable on routine traffic duty pulled her car over for entering a restricted parking area near the school. He approached her car, looked into the back seat and upon seeing Mrs. Bush recognized his dilemma. He quickly recovered by saying, "Welcome to The Woodlands, Mrs. Bush. May I escort you to your school?" And he did. They arrived on time.

Having a school bear my name is something I still don't know how to deal with. It is a great honor and I appreciate it more than I can express, but it was not anything I expected. I visit the school several times each year and remain impressed with the quality of its learning environment. The faculty, staff and students are all so bright and enthusiastic. It is a school with great participation by parents, which is such a key element in education. Just amazing.

Four schools in The Woodlands are named to recognize individuals who played a role in the development company: George Mitchell, Coulson Tough, Joel Deretchin and me. I think we all believe that this primarily recognizes an element of trust between the community and the Company rather than a personal accomplishment.



#### Roger Galatas

*Roger Galatas is the former president of The Woodlands Corporation and the author, with Jim Barlow, of the popular book, The Woodlands, The Inside Story of Creating a Better Hometown. For more information, please visit [www.rgiwoodlands.com](http://www.rgiwoodlands.com).*