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OCEAN ATLANTIC ASSOCIATES: FOCUS IS LAND PRESERVATION  
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When Preston Schell, co-founder and new president of Ocean Atlantic Associates (OAA), starts talking about the projects currently under OAA development in Sussex County, the excitement and pride in his voice are clear. The company has more than 20 real estate projects in different stages of completion, but what impassions him is the non-profit Sussex County Land Trust (SCLT) that he and Craig Hudson, a local real estate business partner, founded in 2002.

The trust is dedicated to protecting natural, cultural, agricultural and recreational resources in southern Delaware through land preservation, stewardship and education. Hudson and Schell have contributed more than \$400,000 to the trust and are on track to contribute another \$2,000,000 over the next three years.

How can a real estate developer truly be interested in land preservation? This seems diametrically opposed to the profession and image of real estate developers across the country. But to truly understand what drives this company to both develop and conserve land in this costal area, it helps to understand a little of their history.

Schell's father grew up in Delaware and his collective family has inhabited the state and Sussex County for decades. Schell and his twin brother, Chris Schell, spent many summers playing on Delaware beaches and exploring the natural beauty of the region. After spending college in Massachusetts, Schell accepted a job with Merrill Lynch in Chicago. After a year of investment banking and cold Chicagoan winters, the draw of Delaware's beaches and natural beauty became too strong and although he did not have a clear cut career path, he knew he wanted to return to his roots.

He returned to Rehoboth Beach in 1997 and was taken under the wing of a local real estate developer, Gene Lankford, who also owns two premier hotels in the area: the Atlantic Sands and The Breakers. Together, they purchased a small piece of property on which to build the final phase of Beachaven condominiums in Rehoboth Beach.

After multiple trips to the library and bookstore to learn more about real estate, Schell acted as chief liaison on the project. From negotiating the land purchase to designing the building and associated marketing materials to selling the units, Lankford placed a huge amount of faith and trust in Schell, who was only 23 years old at the time.

After nine months of hard work, Schell and Lankford successfully sold the project and together formed Ocean Atlantic Associates with the purpose of developing local projects. From that time forward, they, along with Justin Healy and the other members of the Ocean Atlantic team threw their efforts into building a successful company.

Currently, Ocean Atlantic Associates is developing projects that are designed to incorporate community values and atmospheres. These include Paynter's Mill in Lewes, featuring a closely knit community plan with neighborhood walking paths and wooded

parkland, and Paynter's Meadow, a community field for outdoor gatherings and sports activities.

Also under development is the Vineyards at Nassau Valley in Lewes, located within the confines of the only operating vineyard in the state of Delaware – Nassau Valley Vineyards. The current land owner, Bob Raley, first introduced the vision for this community in an effort to preserve the vineyard's inherent beauty. Architectural styles, amenities and scenic features used throughout that development will offer unique living experience for residents as well as maintain the natural beauty of the setting. In addition, Ocean Atlantic I a partner in developing The Tides and Oyster Bay Villas in Rehoboth Beach and The Villages of Five Points and The Villas at Bay Crossing in Lewes.

In similar fashion, the Sussex County Land Trust was born out of this same love and passion for the Delaware cost. Schell feels this land has provided him and his family so much happiness and joy that, in return, he is driven to ensure open space and agricultural preservation remain a cornerstone of Ocean Atlantic's efforts.



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