



Owner of Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center says he just likes to build

Developer: Roger Norman can look at a piece of property and see the work it demands, the utilities it needs, the trucks that will run on it

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More than half of Storey County, more than 100,000 acres, it's land that takes Roger Norman back to his childhood.

"You know when you're a kid and you have a sandbox and got little toy trucks and everything?" said the 68-year-old owner of the Tahoe-Reno Industrial Center. "Well, this is like an adult sandbox."



Norman, who has a house in San Diego up for sale, said the industrial park is the only place he plays. He lives in a travel trailer at the center where he spends the time he isn't working drawing up plans.

The industrial park's developer, Lance Gilman, said Norman doesn't have any fun.

When Norman rides around the center in his red pickup, he gets excited when he points out the efficiency of the sewer plant, the deadline of a building project or the luck he had when he bought the property that was originally part of the Asamera Ranch. He bought it from an oil company in the late 1990s for \$20 million cash.

Last year, he sold the chunk of the property that lies in Lyon County for more than that.

"We didn't come out here and master plan this thinking that in this year we'd be where we're at right now," Norman said. "We just hung on for the ride."

The industrial park, east of Sparks, has more than 1,000 people building roads, laying railroad track and putting up warehouses, like the nearly 900,000-square-foot PetSmart distribution center.

Crews are also working on an interchange with Interstate 80 that will connect with USA Parkway, the road running through the park. Norman said he expects the 18-mile road to finish and connect to Highway 50 in four years.

Norman is able to organize all this, Gilman said, because he can look at a piece of property and see the work it demands, the utilities it needs, the trucks that will run on it.

"The Lord gave him a calculator that sits right in the center of his head," he said.

But Norman said he never expected it. In his late 20s, he was working in an auto body shop in San Diego. The business needed another store and he ended up building that. Then his friends wanted help with their shops too, and eventually, "I found out I liked building more than I liked working on cars."

Miles Ottenheimer, an industrial park representative, called him the perfect example of an American self-made millionaire.

But 30 years ago, Norman couldn't read or write yet, Gilman said. But when he met Norman then, he knew he found someone he could work with, he said.

Gilman said the best way to describe Norman is to mention when he bought part of the South Meadows/Double Diamond area in South Reno. He came to the seller and said, "I'm Roger Norman and I want to tell you right up front that I can only do two things. I can paint your car and I can build you a shopping center."

As for any other work, Norman said he's not interested in anything else besides the world's largest industrial center. He said he doesn't always know what business is coming in next or what it's doing, he just likes building.

If a semi-truck is parked along the road, he'll probably stop to see what the problem is. If construction workers are talking, he might tell them he hopes to be reincarnated as one of them so he can have such an easy life.

When he bought, he said, "I never really thought about how big it would be. It just turned into its own monster."

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