

Candy's Dirt



Waggoner Ranch is located northwest of Wichita Falls. / Photo courtesy of CandysDirt.com

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Bubbly Boy, wait.
We are not talking
Veuve, right? Isn't
that what New
Jersey Governor
Chris Christie
calls Marco
Rubio? The way
our property
values are
heading, he may
be calling us all
"Bubble Boys"
during the next
Republican
debate.

Honestly, have
you ever seen
better theater?

I was discussing the theatrics of American politics with a British gent the other day, Mr. Nick Churton of Mayfair International Realty. And what does London real estate have to do with Dallas real estate?

Well a lot, NOW! Dallas-based Virginia Cook Realtors has forged a relationship with Mayfair International Realty, granting Cook a London office and the ears of the entire British press. The London office is just off Oxford Street “shopping!” and more vitally, the gents are advisors to top UK publications, which means that now Virginia Cook listings will have the eyes and ears of not just the entire U.K., but anyone who reads the British press when their homes get published. Kind of neat because it's international marketing efforts like this that bring in the buyers. Remember, you can no longer stash cash in New York City and Miami real estate without the IRS knowing about it, no sir.

An international audience was sure paying attention to the 510,000 acre Waggoner Ranch that was just approved for sale Tuesday, Feb. 9 by a Texas judge, clearing the way for the sale. Who is the buyer? Not a Texan per se, but the owner of the L.A. Rams, Stan Kroenke, and his wife, billionaire Ann Walton Kroenke, a niece of Walmart founder Sam Walton and heir to the Walton family fortune. Heck, football and a Walton “that's practically Texan. They were approved by the courts to buy up the \$725 million Waggoner Ranch, located northwest of Wichita Falls near the Red River.

Dating back to the wild west of 1849, it's the biggest contiguous ranch property in the U.S. The King Ranch is about 825,000 acres across multiple parcels, while the 510,000-acre Waggoner Ranch is spread over six counties and is almost 800 square miles.

It is quite possibly also the most expensive piece of dirt currently in the U.S. Local brokerage Briggs Freeman Sotheby's International Real Estate was the major broker involved in the historic transaction. Closing will take place in "a normal time for a deal like this," said the Briggs Freeman agent who pulled off the deal; Bernard "Bernie" Uechtritz.

And what a deal: This is the first ever sale of the historic ranch.

"This shows that iconic ranches like this can be sold in today's market with the right strategies and international exposure," said Robbie Briggs. "We had potential buyers from all over the world. But it turns out the buyer has very strong Texas connections."

Uechtritz's office, of course, is on Fairmount Street at BFSIRE's Ranch and Land office, but Briggs said he spent more than half his time at the Waggoner Ranch headquarters in Vernon, where he put together an information data room, a veritable sales War Room that sure paid off.

"It was a series of rooms at Waggoner headquarters, tables and tables of folders and schedules, maps, anything you could think of relative to a complex operation like this," Uechtritz said. "We created an intensive electronic data room one could only visit once they had been heavily pre-screened, and that was, of course, available virtually as well."

Uechtritz told me there was also a "low level" data room for the hundreds who came by inquiring. When asked how many potential buyers were from foreign countries, Uechtritz said, "Many." That man's Rolodex should probably be stored at Fort Knox.

"We had a tremendous amount of international interest from South Korea, China, Russia, South America, really from everywhere," Uechtritz said.

Briggs told me there are layers and layers of detail and strategies that go into making a sale like the Waggoner Ranch happen. Uechtritz said, in the end, it was a competitive bidding process and great team effort by more than 20 or 30 individuals and their teams.

"There were a half a dozen bidders in the final group (each of whom had to pony up a \$15 million refundable deposit), out of whom we chose one," he said. "The Judge approved the choice today."

The property has more than 1,000 producing oil wells, with the new buyer inheriting roughly 42 percent of the entire mineral estate.

The Kroenkes were represented by Joe Leadletter, who works out of Bozeman, Mont. with Hall & Hall. The Waggoner Ranch brokerage team pulled in the state's top ranch marketing brains: Briggs' Bernie Uechtritz and Sam Middleton of Chas. S. Middleton and Son in Lubbock.

"Sam Middleton is great broker," Uechtritz said. "You don't do deals like this unless you have great brokers. There were extraordinarily combined efforts; no one person outshone the other. And Joe Leadbetter is a consummate professional. He and I worked together shoulder by shoulder under the radar."

The buyer is pro sports team owner and real estate developer Kroenke. The Missouri-born businessman has investments in a number of sports franchises, including the NFL's Los Angeles Rams, the NBA's Denver Nuggets, the NHL's Colorado Avalanche and the English Premier League's Arsenal F.C. in London.

You may recognize his real estate company, the Kroenke Group. They are building out the new Preston Hollow Village complex over on North Central Expressway at Walnut Hill Lane in North Dallas in partnership with Provident Realty.

Kroenke is also a partner in the Midtown Park development on Meadow Road, and still owns the land under the old Sam's Club on Park Lane east of Greenville, plus other properties in Uptown and downtown. He also has interests north of Dallas in Denton and the high growth area on Highway 380.

Kroenke has a farm and ranch subsidiary that is one of the largest ranch operators in the country.

"This is an incredible opportunity and an even greater responsibility," Kroenke said, who is owner of Denver-based Kroenke Sports Enterprises, in the press release. "We are honored to assume ownership of the Waggoner â€” a true Texas and American landmark â€” and are deeply committed to continuing the proud legacy of W.T. 'Tom' Waggoner, his family and his descendants."

"We will continue to preserve and protect this uniquely American treasure," Kroenke added.

The 167-year-old ranch includes thousands of cattle, hundreds of horses and oil wells and 30,000 acres of farmland. Waggoner Ranch was first put on the market in August of 2014, but Uechtritz said he really stepped up the marketing in January of 2015.

Like most families, the heirs of cattle and oil baron W.T. Waggoner argued over whether the ranch should be sold. Finally, a judge decided. Texas Monthly's Gary Cartwright wrote one of the best stories on the decades-long family fight.

Apparently the Waggoner descendants â€” Bradley Wharton, Helen Biggs Willingham and Electra Biggs Moulder â€” were pleased with the deal struck with Kroenke and passing the Waggoner ranching legacy onto him and his wife, a niece of Walmart founder Sam Walton.

Waggoner Ranch will be folded into the operations of the U.S. division of Kroenke Ranches â€” an affiliated company of Kroenke's Sports Enterprises â€” and the land will come first, said the group's general manager Sam Connolly.

"We are excited about integrating this second-to-none ranch with our ranch holdings in the United States and in Canada," Connolly said. "This acquisition ties in perfectly with our cattle,

wheat, horse and natural resource operations. We look forward to learning from and building on the remarkable heritage of this crown jewel of ranching."

Kroenke has recently moved the Rams from St. Louis to Los Angeles and is building a new stadium in nearby Inglewood, Calif. Besides the sports interests, he is also one of the nation's biggest landowners with ranches throughout the U.S. and Canada, including Montana and Wyoming and now, of course, Texas.

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