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## Religious retreat looking for buyer in deep Southern Illinois

By DENNIS GRUBAUGH

Efforts continue to market one of the more unusual properties in the Midwest, a getaway in deep Southern Illinois that one broker calls a scenic wonder.

San Damiano Retreat Center in Golconda is nestled along the Ohio River, a 167-acre, mostly wooded spread whose location is both an attraction and a deterrent when it comes to marketability. It's been for sale well over a year and recently was reduced in price.

"We got the listing in December

Getting people to the remote location has been a challenge — it's three hours southeast of the population center of St. Louis.

"But when you show them the property, they seem more interested. Right on the Ohio River, you have riverbank access, 17 buildings, a large convention center, and various rooms that can accommodate people. It becomes more of a positive light," Durbin said. "But it's still far from a lot of population."

There are other natural attractions in the area, which could eventually entice the right buyer wanting to take advantage of a regional destination. Places include Cave-in-Rock State Park, Garden of the Gods and Dixon Springs.

"This is a great place to go and relax," Durbin said.

The original conference center and visitors' center opened first, with other buildings later. One of the larger buildings, a lodge, was once used as a retirement residence by a priest who headed the nonprofit Golden Shrine Pilgrimage. Today, it is used a lot by visiting clergy.

And while the retreat was formed around the Catholic religion, it is open for use by various people who want to get away.

"Half the people I interacted with while at the site were just folks wanting to get away for a few days and rent a cabin. They want to wake up, walk out on the porch, watch the river flow and hear the birds chirp — the whole reason you go somewhere far away."

Many people have held weddings and similar events there through the years.

Amid the woods and sprawling hills are 49,600 square feet of buildings, including six quadplex rentals, three duplexes, three standing lodges, a caretaker's residence and more. Quad rental refers to

2019, and we had an appraisal performed in January 2020. At that time it was for \$2.3 million. That included all the grounds and the mineral and riparian rights along the Ohio River. We have actually lowered our price to \$1.95 million to drive the interest and move the needle," Mike Durbin said.

Durbin is the listing broker, along with colleague Wayne Barber, the founding coprincipal of BARBER-Murphy, the largest commercial real estate agency in Southern Illinois.

Durbin is attempting to find a

the amount of rooms in a specific building. A quadplex is four rooms available to rent in a building. Those suites are all connecting and can be one large rental, but are themselves, individual rooms.

Some of the rooms have had recent updates, such as high-end whirlpool hot tubs and full kitchens. More than half the rooms have new vinyl flooring, and others are being done as they go.

The plan is to continue updating buildings as long as interest continues, Durbin said.

The roads are paved once you get off the main drag from San Damiano Road. The nearest main road is Illinois Route 146 to the north, which connects to Interstate 24 several miles west.

The property has been well maintained by the onsite caretaker, who has been there more than 20 years, said Durbin.

Anyone seeking information is invited to contact Durbin at [miked@barbermurphy.com](mailto:miked@barbermurphy.com).

buyer on behalf of the retreat's owner, Catholic Shrine Pilgrimage Inc., the organization behind San Damiano Retreat Center and Golden Frontier Tours, which leads pilgrimages around the world, via cruises and tours.

The center was established and built in 1990 and is still operational, although usage has mostly gone down during the last several years, Durbin said. Perhaps ironically, occupancy swung upward a bit after the pandemic arrived, perhaps because people were wanting to get away from the chaos.

"Luckily, 2020 was good for them toward the second half, where people were wanting to get away, were wanting to be in a remote area," Durbin said.

To gauge interest, Durbin said he reached out to quite a few different groups, including those in the nearby Shawnee National Forest area that had successful businesses in camping and cabin rental, the idea being that the retreat could be a perfect extension of an existing business, or perhaps for a winery or recreational destination.

