

A ROAD LESS TRAVELED

by Liz Newall



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hile countless movie-goers sat enrapt at the Oscar-winning movie *Forrest Gump*,

Lowcountry resident Calvert Huffines '75 admits he was a little distracted.

"I had to watch it several times before I could get into the plot," he recalls. "I was too busy taking in the scenery."

Huffines explains: "The setting for much of the movie was on a plantation in the Beaufort-Yemassee area. I grew up next to that plantation — the crested driveway, the river, the log where *Forrest Gump* sat to fish, the huge live oak with low-reaching limbs that he climbed as a child."

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Huffines should know the plantation for another reason; as one of the most successful real estate brokers for Southern plantations from North Carolina to Florida, he was among those who made filming there possible.

He's continued to find Lowcountry sites for other movies including the new Robert Duvall, Julia Roberts, Dennis Quaid movie — *Something to Talk About* — shot in the Ridgeland area, and the Jim Carrey sequel to *Ace Ventura*, filmed in Colleton County.

But finding movie locations is not Huffines' main concern; he's much more intent on preserving the great plantations of the Lowcountry. As president of The Huffines Company and the exclusive S.C. Affiliate of Sotheby's International Realty, he carefully matches plantations and country estates with buyers who are also conservation minded.

Huffines grew up on Cherokee Plantation on the Combahee River (where the *Ace Ventura* sequel was recently shot). His father — a textile executive, a director of ABC-Paramount and a successful industrialist — entertained the likes of Joan Crawford, Bing Crosby and other guests from the film and business worlds.

The younger Huffines spent his boyhood on Cherokee Plantation hunting deer, fishing and roaming the 3,700 acres he called home. When his father later sold the plantation to Detroit industrialist Robert Evans, president of American Motors, he recalls understanding the need to sell it but experiencing a deep sense of loss.

Although Huffines didn't start out with a real estate career in mind, his strong connection to the land led him to major in agricultural economics at Clemson. "At Clemson, I learned that we are only stewards of the land," he says, "and that when our time passes, it is important to pass the land on to future generations in a well-preserved condition."

After graduation in 1975, Huffines began stints in teaching and managing a beef and dairy farm in Walterboro. During this

time, he was asked to manage White Hall Plantation near Yemassee and later to help sell it. From there, he managed several other plantations and gained expertise in both appraising and selling.

These experiences, along with the growing national attention to wildlife preservation and his innate love of the country life, evolved into the founding of his own real estate company in Walterboro.

As a real estate entrepreneur and conservationist in the 1980s, Huffines was perhaps the first to realize the unique opportunity for both historic and environmental preservation by linking the great plantations of the area to the nationally mandated need to preserve the ACE Basin.

The Basin — a 350,000-acre preserve along Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers — has been designated by the National Park Service as one of the 40 "Last Great Places on Earth." Huffines describes it as "a big, beautiful block of wildlife and natural resources that is just about the same as it was 200 years ago."

Since the company was founded, Huffines has sold 14 plantations in the Lowcountry, carefully selecting buyers who share his enthusiasm for preservation. But his work goes far beyond the sale; he has been instrumental in efforts of more than 60 government agencies, conservation groups and private landowners to preserve and protect the ACE Basin in its natural state.

"Some may say it's a playground for the rich," Huffines says. "But preventing overdevelopment and protecting the land benefit all walks of life — from the timber industry to wildlife enthusiasts to the thousands of species that depend on the Lowcountry ecosystem for survival."

And as for the movies? "It's nice for the rest of the country to see some of the beauty we have here," Huffines says, "and better still to know we're working hard to keep it that way." ☺