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Commercial Real Estate

The developer changing the feel of Apopka, plus 4 more real estate game changers for 2025



Tony Benge, owner of Benge Development, is one of the faces to watch in real estate for 2025.

JIM CARCHIDI/OBJ



By [Trevor Fraser](#) – Staff Writer, Orlando Business Journal
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If Apopka is one day seen as a model of dense, urbanist development with walkable neighborhoods, public squares and shopping centers, a lot of the credit will belong to Tony Benge.

As president of Orlando-based Benge Development Corp., Benge has had his eye on the Orlando suburb for decades. "Apopka has been on the radar since the company we hired in 1994 to be our landscaping company had part of their nursery in Apopka taken by the Expressway Authority for State Road 429 right-of-way."

That land formed the beginning of the [\\$500 million Floridian Town Center](#), a 65-acre, mixed-use development that will include 600 apartments, retail and industrial space, as well as a [hotel](#) by Huntsville, Alabama-based Doradus Partners.

The Floridian Town Center is only one of Bengé's projects in the area. Across the street, he's developing the 202-acre Crossroads at Kelly Park, where national homebuilder Dream Finders has started construction on the first round of single-family homes and Bengé is developing a 300-unit apartment complex. Elsewhere in the city, Bengé is developing more multifamily properties and retail space on 40 acres he bought from Tyler Crusades Inc.

Bengé's developments have attracted more interest to the area as well, such as the 255-acre Wyld Oaks, which is scheduled to bring in 4,000 residences. All told, Apopka has more than 15,000 new residential units and 14 million square feet of industrial and commercial space in the works, with much of it coming – directly or indirectly – from Bengé.

But the numbers don't capture the totality of these plans, the parks, common squares and village centers, the trails and walkable streets set to transform the feel of the sleepy, rural suburb.

Bengé said he has locked down core tenants for Crossroads and the Tyler Crusades property, which he has yet to reveal. "These will be very well received and should promote additional growth."

Bengé expects 2025 to be not the culmination of a plan, but the beginning of the next era of plans. "We will see multifamily and retail become priorities as the demand is pent up and new space is desperately needed, especially in Apopka. Single-family will continue to be strong so it should be all the right economic conditions for a great four-year run for real estate."



Jaime Douglas, CEO, Montierre Development
MONTIERRE DEVELOPMENT

Jaime Douglas

CEO/owner, Montierre Development

Why he's important: Ocoee has seen a lot of the growth pouring into Central Florida, and the city has responded with a [series of projects](#) that provide new residents with places to live, work and play. The largest of these is [The Dynasty](#), a 159-acre sports complex from Hobe Sound-based Montierre Development.

The brainchild of CEO Jaime Douglas, the \$1 billion project is expected to create 9,800 short-term jobs, 5,000 permanent jobs, and have an annual economic impact of \$540 million a year.

What's happening in his industry: Metro Orlando was named the [No. 1 market for sports tourism](#) in 2024. The Dynasty is capitalizing on this designation by including 1,100 hotel rooms to serve the athletes and their families visiting its 17 multipurpose sports fields. The massive complex, which will be designed by infrastructure firm Aecom, also will feature 500,000 square feet of commercial space with retail, restaurants and even more sports arenas indoors.

Benchmarks for 2025: The main goal for the next year, according to Douglas, is to break ground and take the project vertical.

Quotable: *"Montierre Development is not just catching a trend here. We're creating an innovative wave that's going to change the face of sports tourism as we know it. This is huge, and it's going to have ripple effects throughout the entire industry."*



Daryl Carter, president, Maury L. Carter & Associates
JIM CARCHIDI

Daryl Carter

President/broker, Maury L. Carter & Associates

Why he's important: A driving force behind the [2,400-acre, \\$165.5 million land deal in Lake County](#) 10 minutes outside of Walt Disney World, Carter is both the namesake and the reason for the Daryl Carter Parkway Interchange at I-4 and

Apopka Vineland Road set to open in 2025. In a partnership with Orange County, Carter put together an assemblage of 198 acres for the overpass parkway and sold it for \$130 million. Additionally, Carter's company, with Celebration-based Dowd Properties, has assembled 34 acres south of Orlando International Airport for the [highly anticipated Bennett Place](#), a mixed-use project that will see the start of its first shopping center next year.

What's happening in his industry: Carter's land brokerage is poised in Lake and Osceola counties and beyond to capture much of the incoming growth to Central Florida. His company is handling the site selection for projects by Encompass Health, one of the largest physical rehabilitative hospital corporations nationwide, and is working on economic development projects with Orlando Health, AdventHealth, Lake Sumter State College and the UCF South Lake campus in Clermont.

Benchmarks for 2025: Carter is expanding the boundaries of his business with three major land investments in the Nashville, Tennessee, area and closer to home with investments in Ocala and the city of Alachua.

Quotable: *"I am optimistic for 2025. Florida replaced New York as the third most populous state in the U.S. Folks will continue to move to Florida. In addition to population growth, there is significant wealth relocating to Florida. Our young workforce, low tax, pro-business environment, great weather and natural beauty of our state create a favorable environment for businesses and families."*



Chuck Whittall, president, Unicorp National Developments Inc.
JIM CARCHIDI

Chuck Whittall

President, Unicorp National Developments

Why he's important: It's almost hard to overstate the impact Whittall and Unicorp have had on the Central Florida landscape. O-Town West, Icon Park, The Dellagio in Dr. Phillips, Uptown Altamonte, The Gardens of Ravaudage and dozens of projects big and small that have come to shape the character of the region flow from Whittall's firm. In 2025, Unicorp has over \$2 billion in committed projects, such as breaking ground on the [700-room Intercontinental Hotel](#) at Sand Lake Road and International Drive.

What's happening in his industry: Interest rates over the past two years have hampered multifamily construction around the country. As those rates are coming down, [Whittall is jumping with both feet](#) into apartment projects in 2025, including the 100-acre Sutton Lakes near Kissimmee that will feature hundreds of single-family homes and townhomes as well as 500 apartments. Other projects include the Elysian at Horizon West, the Selene at Lake Nona, and phases 2 and 3 of Glasshouse at O-Town.

Benchmarks for 2025: Whittall wants to begin work on the long-anticipated Tao Hotel at O-Town and various restaurants. Out of the state, Whittall said he has 30 projects in the Ohio Valley area set to start construction next year.

Quotable: *"My outlook for 2025 is very positive. I believe interest rates will continue to come down and we will get a little relief on construction pricing and things will start to happen again in our community."*



Image: Orange County Government

Alberto Vargas, manager, Orange County Planning Division
ORANGE COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Alberto Vargas

Manager, planning division, Orange County

Why he's important: In terms of changing the game, it's hard to imagine anything will have the impact of [Orange County's Vision 2050](#) and [Orange Code](#), the new building codes and development plans that will guide the county's growth management for the next 25 years. Set to be unveiled in spring, the new codes spearheaded by Vargas will update zoning rules that have been on the books since the 1950s and a comprehensive plan that was adopted in 1991.

What's happening in his industry: Amendments passed by voters in November gave Orange County greater [control over annexations by municipalities](#) and

development in the rural boundaries on the east and west sides of the county. On top of this, metro Orlando is tackling a shortage of affordable housing options for local workers. Vargas is attempting to craft a code that will handle an anticipated 500,000 additional residents in the next two decades and encourage a wider mix of housing types in targeted sectors around the county.

Benchmarks for 2025: Releasing Vision 2050 and Orange Code, which were due to be released in fall of 2024, will mark the culmination of five years of planning.

Quotable: *"We wouldn't have gotten where we are today without an incredible amount of public outreach, ensuring diverse voices in the county were heard and woven into the fabric of the comprehensive plan. Everyone owns this. This is our collective future. This is history in the making."*

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