

Branson On The Ohio? Region Eyed For Complex

By Steve Massey, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

The Pittsburgh region is among three sites being considered for a massive entertainment complex that would include theaters, restaurants, stores, amusement parks and possibly a NASCAR race track.

Sources familiar with the plans of Coraopolis developers John and Richard Swartz said the project would be modeled after Branson, Mo., which features scores of theaters showcasing some of the biggest stars in country and pop music.

The father-and-son team, who own Ace Tire & Parts Inc. and a number of properties near Pittsburgh International Airport, could not be reached for comment.

If they settle on the region over two out-of-state sites, the Swartzes are believed to be considering large tracts south and west of the city, near and possibly crossing the Washington and Beaver County lines.

Their attorneys, Richard and Humphreys Schuchert, yesterday would only confirm through a news release that the choices have been narrowed to southwestern Pennsylvania, southern Connecticut and Orlando, Fla.

The release said a site would be chosen shortly and that the complex would be family-oriented, would cover 1,200 acres and include hotels, restaurants, and theaters featuring Broadway plays, children's shows and music ranging from jazz and rock 'n' roll to gospel and country.

The release also said there would be amusement facilities, shops and water attractions, and possibly an official National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing race track.

The Swartzes were said to be completing discussions with several large entertainment groups and institutional investors. The release also said J.D. DeMatteo, a Connecticut businessman, had agreed to be a co-partner.

The proposal for the complex revives a pitch that John Swartz initially made to Allegheny County commissioners in February 1994.

At the time, Swartz and a California partner, Metro 2000, suggested converting the old Pittsburgh International Airport into an outlet mall and multitheater complex featuring live entertainment.

Swartz said the pair had backing from several union pension funds but needed four to six months to study the feasibility. The commissioners seemed encouraged, but it appears a formal proposal was never made.