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Porto Hussong Plans Moving Forward

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By John Freeman

ENSENADA - It might seem like a stretch now, but developers of an upscale resort and marina just north of Ensenada have visions of transforming Ensenada into "the Santa Barbara of Baja."

That's what Christopher S. Merson, CEO of Meridian Development Group, told media members during a recent tour of the now-tranquil 16-acre oceanfront property known as Porto Hussong.

The project's name comes from Meridian's partnership with Walter and John Hussong, descendants of the famous Baja family whose somewhat infamous cantina has been an Ensenada landmark since the 1900s.

Full funding has already been established by outside sources and equity from Meridian's other Mexican properties, assuring that the project won't be halted by lack of pre-sales, which often happens in Baja.

"At first, we were a little afraid of the bar image, but we quickly learned that the family enjoys a very positive reputation throughout Baja," Merson said. "We're not just here to do a project for ourselves, we're here for Ensenada, which we firmly believe is destined to become one of the premier destinations along the West Coast - the Santa Barbara of Baja."

The \$350 million project, to be developed by the Hussong brothers, will include an array of amenities, such as 450 private oceanfront condominiums (priced to \$3 million), a 90-suite boutique hotel and private residence club, a 300-slip marina, including 60 slips for mega-yachts sized 80 ft. and larger and a retail center, featuring high-end retail outlets.

Merson's firm, with headquarters in Reno, Nev., has developed successful resorts in the Mexican cities of Cabo San Lucas, Manzanillo, Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco.

These days, Porto Hussong's future location now houses Quintas Papagayo Resort, a collection of modest 1940s-style rental units at the edge of Todos Santos Bay. Nearby are two worn-out tennis courts and acres of already-bulldozed dirt. Starting this month, all that will be gone, a prospect that doesn't faze John Hussong in the least.

"After several misses, we finally met the right developer at the right time," Hussong said. "This is a jewel of a project on the best property in Baja Norte."

Its oceanfront locale will make it especially attractive for cruising yachts, said John C. Corrough of Newport Beach, whose marina design firm has been contracted by Meridian.

"I remember in the '70s when Ensenada was known only as the last stop on the Newport to



Baja Santa Barbara - From left, brothers Walter and John Hussong are shown with Chris Merson, CEO of Meridian Development Group. The Hussong brothers have partnered with Meridian to develop Porto Hussong, a \$350-million, 16-acre luxury hotel, condo and marina development just north of Ensenada.

Photo by: John Freeman

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Ensenada (sailing) race," said Corrough, a veteran sailor and member of the Newport Beach Harbor Commission. "Among those of us who know Baja, that's no longer the case."

Ensenada mayor Cesar Mancillas also attended the tour, saying he welcomed the project, which is expected to create hundreds of much-needed jobs for local construction workers.

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