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The Daily Tar Heel

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Do as I pay, not as I do

Even developers have a place in environmental discourse

Editorial Board

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Is the University for sale? You might think so as you stroll across campus past academic buildings, dorms, libraries and stadiums all named for major donors.

On its face then, the funding of a professorship at the UNC Institute for the Environment by Michael Meldman, a resort developer, seems like just another business transaction. He coughs up a few million and gets a professorship in return. But even though Meldman might be no friend to the environment, having a professorship named after him still can be a positive development for the University.

Meldman, the chief executive officer for the Discovery Land Company, is a controversial selection to have an environmental professorship named after him. At this time, the DLC is under fire for its Baker's Bay project on Great Guana Cay in the Bahamas, a seven-mile long island known for its pristine beaches and reefs.

Naturally, Meldman's company wants to develop this slice of unspoiled paradise into a massive golf and marina resort that will include 385 residential and rental units and cover almost every square inch of the island.

Perhaps the most amazing part is the DLC attempts to pass itself off as an environmentally friendly development company. According to the DLC's mission on its Web site, each of its communities "will embrace the natural grandeur of their settings and celebrate the traditions of the land upon which they are built."

We'd love to know how killing the reefs embraces the natural grandeur, and exactly what local traditions will the multi-million dollar mansions, golf course and marina be celebrating? It seems unlikely that the 150 Bahamians who live on Grand Guana Cay and rake in an average \$21,300 per year are accustomed to the golf and yacht club lifestyle.

In response to the DLC's plans, the residents of Great Guana Cay have organized protests, created a Web site, [www.saveguanacayreef.com](http://www.saveguanacayreef.com), sued in court and called in experts to testify on the damage that will happen to their island's reef system if development proceeds. Clearly, the people of Great Guana Cay don't want Michael Meldman's development on their island.

So, why is he even allowed in the door at UNC's Institute for the Environment? The answer is discourse.

As explained by the institute's director, Douglas Crawford-Brown, one of the institute's main goals is to facilitate discourse among all relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders include environmentalists, government representatives, the public and, yes, even developers.

Finding environmental solutions is difficult because there are always a lot of interested parties. By getting these parties to sit down together and discuss their issues, a lot can be accomplished by the UNC Institute for the Environment.

We might disagree with Meldman's development style and find his initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of his projects weak. But he does have the right to participate in the discussion - he just shouldn't expect to like what he hears.

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Protest

What did you think of the protest at Tancredo's speech?

It was justified/appropriate, and I agree with all the protestors' actions

It was justified/appropriate, but ultimately got out of hand

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