

Lauderdale Lakes, Lauderhill attracting developers as hub for affordable housing

By Toni Marshall
South Florida Sun-Sentinel

April 4, 2006

When Lloyd and Marcia McGhie bought their restaurant in Lauderdale Lakes four years ago, it was as if the couple could see into the future.



They took a chance in a city that promised economic progress but had little evidence of growth at the time.

"The city was improving its image and in doing so I knew they had to do something about the whole area," said Lloyd McGhie, whose restaurant, Marcia's Café, has become a popular dining spot.

Two new developments are popping up to the south of his business, in the 3700 block of State Road 7, and a mixed residential and retail apartment complex opened across the street a little more than a year ago.

"It was just luck that we bought the place before property values started going up," he said.

Developers are courting Lauderdale Lakes and Lauderhill.

Business owners such as the McGhies are hoping the developments will bring more patrons to their establishments, while homeowners are hoping for significant boosts in property values.

"Now that the greater part of the county has developed, people are looking back toward these areas where housing is less expensive," said Lauderhill Mayor Richard Kaplan, who chairs the Metropolitan Planning Organization. "Now they see the opportunity to bring the area back."

In 2005, the median sales price of a single-family home was \$237,750 in Lauderhill and \$214,000 in Lauderdale Lakes, compared with the county's average price of \$361,100, according to sales data from RealEstat.com, a real estate sales tracking firm.

Census numbers show that the area once known for retirees is attracting younger residents. For example, 30 percent of Lauderhill's population was over the age of 65, according to the 1990 U.S. Census. Ten years later, that fell to 16 percent.

The companies investing hundreds of millions in new homes and businesses in these central Broward towns include Lennar Homes, The Cornerstone Group, Tarragon South Development Corp., Centerline Homes, Amera Corp. and United Homes International, among others.

A Super WalMart is going up at the southwest corner of State Road 7 and Oakland Park Boulevard. Most of the projects have broken ground over the past 18 months.

"When we looked at the 441 corridor, we saw a real void and a lack of middle-income housing," said Ron Elkman, vice president of marketing for Centerline Homes, the company building Georgetown, a town home community of 320 residences just north of Sunrise Boulevard in Lauderhill.

"We are building right next to the new park, 441 is a great location. You are not going to recognize 441 down the road, it's going to be a whole little gateway."

Centerline is placing its town home project near the new county park on the northeast side of Sunrise Boulevard and State Road 7 and the adjacent planned Caribbean marketplace. The community will feature two- and three-story town homes of 1,300 to 2,000 square feet, and will start at \$200,000.

Other developers are heading north to Oakland Park Boulevard and Northwest 31st Avenue in Lauderdale Lakes.

"We have no choice but to add density and to go vertical," said Gary Rogers, Lauderdale Lakes community redevelopment administrator.

Under new designations, buildings in Lauderdale Lakes may rise to eight to 10 stories. One of the hottest projects is Bella Vista, United Home International's \$130 million mixed-use, 32-acre project with 450 residential units that will connect to the new town center and library.

The Lauderdale Marketplace a few steps west will be redeveloped to include the city's downtown. It will include a Main Street and 1,000 residential units.

The city is working on the owners of Lakes Mall to revamp that center.

"The old ways of thinking and doing things in South Florida are over," Rogers said.

The idea is to get traffic to stop and not just pass through one of the heaviest-traveled intersections in the county, he said.

Staff Researcher John Maines contributed to this report.

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