

BUSINESS

4,000-home development in Pinal County under way

DAVID PITTMAN, Tucson Citizen

One man's sprawl is another man's castle.

Those disparate views are being expressed about Red Rock Village, a master-planned community being built by Pulte Homes 30 miles northwest of downtown Tucson in Pinal County.

Nearly 100 people attended a groundbreaking ceremony at the development Friday morning. Almost 4,000 houses are planned at the 1,000-acre community.

Pulte officials project the development will feature new homes at prices that will be \$20,000 to \$40,000 less than comparable homes in northwestern Pima County. That means the dream of home ownership will be attainable to more Tucson-area families.

"Our research has shown that Tucson home buyers seeking entry- and mid-level priced homes are the largest and most underserved market segment in Tucson," said Amy McReynolds, who will oversee the development as vice president of operations for Pulte. "At Red Rock Village, we are seeking to offer affordable housing opportunities that are very rare in the Tucson market."

However, Daniel Patterson, a desert ecologist with the Center for Biological Diversity, called Red Rock Village an example of "leap-frog development" and "urban sprawl."

"We should be directing home building inside our existing urban boundaries," he said. "People want affordability, but they want to live closer to things."

Patterson said those living in Red Rock Village who commute to Tucson will pay through the nose for gasoline. He also said vehicle traffic by commuters between Tucson and the development will add to local traffic and air pollution problems.

Home sales at the community are expected to begin in October and the first home closings are planned for early 2007.

Shawn Chlarson, president of Pulte's Tucson Division, said there are two reasons homes at Red Rock Village will be more affordable than other new houses in the area: cheaper land prices and lower government fees and taxes.

Chlarson said government fees and taxes paid by the home builder will be \$8,000 to \$10,000 less per house than if built on the other side of the Pinal-Pima county line. He also said land prices tend to drop the farther one goes from the urban core.

"This is a great example of market forces at work," Chlarson said. Red Rock Village "will provide an opportunity for people that can't afford homes to get into a home in a really nice environment."

Plans for the community include a 25-acre community park, several smaller parks, an 8,000-square-foot swimming complex, more than 150 acres of open space and 11 miles of trails interconnecting the community.

Pulte will offer single- and two-story homes ranging from 1,200 to more than 4,000 square feet. The community is being built just west of Interstate.

"The accessibility of Red Rock makes it an attractive location for many home buyers, with convenient access to employment corridors in both Tucson and Phoenix," Chlarson said.

According to the 2000 Census, there are more than 1,200 people who commute from the Phoenix metro area to the Tucson metro area and more than 1,800 people who commute from Tucson to Phoenix for employment. There are nearly 2,000 people who commute from Pinal County to Pima County and about 2,600 who commute the other way.

John Strobeck, publisher of the Southern Arizona Housing Market Letter, said the move of Tucsonans to the Pinal County development will mean lost revenue for Pima County.

"Tax revenue from this development will go to Pinal County, but the costs for roads and services will be borne in Pima County," he said.

At Friday's groundbreaking, Pulte officials presented a check for \$10,000 to The Anza Foundation for its efforts to build and preserve the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, which runs near Red Rock Village.

A public school is located near Red Rock Village and Pulte Homes has donated 26 acres for two more school sites.