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BRUNSWICK COUNTY, N.C. | THE NEW MAIN ATTRACTION

Quiet area explodes with housing growth

By Jenny Burns

The Sun News

Developers in Brunswick County, N.C., say booming residential lot sales and national home builders moving in proves the area has "woken up" to its potential.

More residential lots were sold in Brunswick County in 2004 and 2003 than in Horry County, and Brunswick County's lot sales increased 53 percent during that time. Horry County's lot sales increased 32 percent, according to Market Opportunity Research Enterprises, a real estate research group in Rocky Mount, N.C.

Builders say they aren't surprised - it was bound to happen.

"Brunswick County has always been a sleeping giant," said Forrest Taylor of Elite Homes and president of the Brunswick County Homebuilders Association. "It was just waiting on the sewer."

Many builders have put in their own sewer systems, and the county has started the process of running its own lines.

Bernard Helm, president of the research group, said the boom is simply a matter of supply and demand.

"In Horry County, a lot of the desirable land has been used up closer to the ocean," he said. "There is more available desirable land in Brunswick."

And that land soon will have houses on it, as national builders such as D.R. Horton are plowing land, adding roads and setting up sales offices for new subdivisions.

D.R. Horton decided to build The Farm at Brunswick after company research showed that many people are moving to southeastern North Carolina.

"It's one of the fastest-growing areas in North Carolina and in the country," said D.R. Horton division manager Doug Brown.

The addition of the national tract builders such as D.R. Horton and Centex will create needed affordable housing in an area that primarily has been a custom home market, said Tori Humphrey, president of the Brunswick County Association of Realtors.

The median price of a new home in Brunswick County in 2004 was \$187,000. That means half of the homes sold for more and half for less.

The average price was \$239,788. Horry County's median home price was \$162,900.

Home buyers looking at The Farm at Brunswick can buy a single-family home or town home for \$130,000 to \$200,000, Brown said.

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A Virginia family might soon build on this lot in Woodsong at Shallotte, N.C. Lot sales in Brunswick County, N.C., have increased 53 percent since last year, outpacing Horry County's figure by 21 percent. CHARLES SLATE/The Sun News

Centex Homes, the Grand Strand's largest builder, also is moving into Brunswick County. The company is building \$180,000 to \$260,000 homes in Savannah Lakes on Meadow Lands Golf Course. Another Centex subdivision in Brunswick County that has not been named will bring town homes from \$180,000 to \$240,000.

Developers say home buyers are attracted to Brunswick County because it is a secluded place for lying on beaches and playing golf but still close to the vitality and entertainment options of Myrtle Beach and Wilmington, N.C.

"Our buyers are coming from big cities and the hustle and bustle there," said Mike Lods of Sea Trail Golf Resort and Conference Center in Sunset Beach. "Coming here, they are protected from what they were trying to get away from back home."

Developments such as Sea Trail give residents and vacationers close access to the beach, the Intracoastal Waterway and golf in a slower, out-of-the-way environment.

Brunswick County now also has the critical mass of shopping, medical and financial services that home buyers need, said Buddy Milliken, founder of Woodsong, a traditional neighborhood in Shallotte. Milliken is working to bring an urban village town center of shops and commercial offices with residential living above the stores to the area.

Taylor said the price of land near water has tripled and builders are moving inland.

"There's been a lot of land sold this past year, and it's just going to continue to escalate because it's bought up and they're not making any more of it," he said.

The lots have been sold, and the rash of building will begin.

"We are in a building boom that will continue for the next five years," Taylor said.

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