

Hernando subdivision created with city's origin in mind



By Wayne Risher
Tuesday, October 23, 2007

Developers of The Jefferson reached back to 1836 to name the planned community on Hernando's eastern edge.

They turned back the clock to the late 19th century for the design of a gazebo that stands near the main entrance on Holly Springs Road.

For architecture, they're going for a look that falls somewhere between the founding of Hernando -- originally known as Jefferson -- and the gazebo that once stood on the DeSoto County Courthouse lawn.

The planned development, on nearly 100 acres at the southeast corner of Jaybird and Holly Springs roads, is intended to bring something different to the Hernando housing market.

Developers are banking on buyers being tired of French Country architecture that's dominated the market in the past few years.

They hired Looney Ricks Kiss, an award-winning Memphis firm, to tweak designs and toss in some New Urbanist community planning concepts.

The first home is completed, furnished and open daily as a model, and four others are in varying stages of completion.

Jefferson Group LLC -- Richie Burnette of Hernando, Pat Davis of New Albany, Roy Holmes of Hernando and Rip Walker of Memphis -- welcomed real estate agents, prospective buyers and others during a recent open house.

The development of 220 homes was approved by DeSoto County supervisors in early 2005 and subsequently was annexed into Hernando.

The first phase contains 66 lots of 10,000-12,000 square feet. Dream Homes is building the first five homes, priced between \$300,000 and \$395,000.

Burnette, a commercial and industrial real estate broker, said, "We thought we'd like to do something different, because there are lots and lots of nice subdivisions in Hernando."

Looney Ricks Kiss created an architectural pattern book for builders to follow, rather than leaving it up to builders to use stock designs.

Burnette said developers "didn't want to sell a few lots here and there and not have them go together."

The 1 1/2 - and 2-story homes have raised foundations and classical lines commonly seen in Southern homes of the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Architect Carson Looney said The Jefferson employs New Urbanist planning principles: "The homes face the street. The garages are secondary. We've

got some nice common open space. We're trying to create a sense of neighborhood."

The development is separated from the main roads by a generous band of landscaping, lawn and white rail fencing. The gazebo anchors amenities including a lake and sidewalks with benches placed at strategic intervals. A community pool is planned in a later phase.

Brian Hicks, executive director of the DeSoto Museum, said architects borrowed archival photos of the old gazebo.

It stood on the northeast corner of the Hernando square, Hicks said. It was taken down after a 1940 fire destroyed the French castle courthouse that preceded the current structure.

Looney said while French Country also has timeless appeal, "People are saying, 'I like it, but I'm tired of it.'"

"The developers came in and said 'We want something classically American, regional vernacular, etc.,'" Looney said. "So the homes that are being built there now they have a more universal, Southern, small town, timeless appeal."

Burnette said Looney Ricks Kiss is reviewing the master plan for the community with an eye toward creating diversity of home and lot sizes in future phases. Changes would have to be approved by Hernando.

Bob Leigh & Associates is listing agent for The Jefferson. Brian Couch, sales team leader, said, "Just the response we've gotten since we put the sign up has been unbelievable. There's been nothing done like this in DeSoto County. That's what made me want to be involved."

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