

DEVELOPMENT



Villas at Peppers Ferry was one of the first to recognize a trend.

Tim Jackson

In NRV, housing for how people live >

By **Tim W. Jackson**

A national survey showed home prices dropped a record 15.4 percent during the second quarter of 2008. Virginia saw slumping home prices and home sales in the second quarter, as well. Yet in the New River Valley, new developments have been popping up frequently and more are underway or are in the planning phase.

The Virginia Association of Realtors relates that home sales in the NRV fell 14 percent in the second quarter of this year. That sounds

Executive Summary:

New River Valley developers are reacting to the way people live and the result is much less of a negative housing market.

pretty bad until you consider that they dropped 44 percent in South Central; 39 percent in Williamsburg; 36 percent in the Dan River region; and 22 percent in the Roanoke Valley.

Susan Brickhouse, sales consultant for The Colosseum, a planned hotel-condominium development in Blacksburg, and former marketing director for the Villas at Peppers Ferry, says that the NRV's universities help buffer the area in economic downturns: "With Virginia Tech and Radford University, we have steady employment, which helps the housing market here."

Mary Wright of NRV Gateway Realty in Christiansburg says the small dip the NRV saw is leveling out. NRV Gateway is involved in housing developments across the area. Hogan's Retreat in Riner is a new subdivision of about 80 acres that will offer large lots of 1.5 acres and up on rolling land that was a family farm (and former tavern site) from the 1800s.

Wright contrasted Hogan's Retreat to Walnut Creek, a new development of 106 acres in Christiansburg: "That development will have more amenities such as walking trails, a big playground, and a basketball court." Walnut Creek falls more in line with a trend of "lifestyle communities" that offer more convenience and amenities than one might find in a more traditional subdivision. The Villas at Peppers Ferry is a large development built by Cornerstone Homes just behind the New River Valley Mall. Two-year-old Villas was one of the first

developments to move toward a community with amenities (clubhouse, fitness center, heated pool, bocce court, putting green).

The new Fiddler's Green in Blacksburg strikes a balance between traditional subdivisions and the new "lifestyle communities." According to Jim Sarver of Steve Bodtke & Associates, the development will offer two sections: The Villas is a patio home type development with about 50 lots. The Estates section has 91 lots. Prices range from \$335,000 to around \$1 million between them.

The Villas are low maintenance with manageable lot sizes so they are attractive to retirees, young professionals and families. Townhome and condo development is up, in part due to needs of students and staff at Virginia Tech and Radford University. Radford Professor Theresa Burriss was a single, working mother in an older home with a big yard. Her schedule was too overwhelming to stay in the house. She bought a townhome in the Cedar Ridge development in Radford, which she says gave her peace of mind. "It is huge that everything is new and there is little concern about the typical problems associated with an older house," Burriss says.

Sarver works with Bennett Hill condos in Blacksburg, a small and modestly priced development of 12 units with an average

cost of about \$150,000. The target market is first-time homebuyers, students and young professionals. "I would anticipate Tech alumni that want a second home here would be good prospects as well," he says. And speaking of intermittent users and those seeking convenience, the latest trend is condominium hotels. The Collegiate Inn is being built in downtown Blacksburg while The Legends is going up just off campus. The Colosseum will be just off the first exit from U.S. 460 along South Main Street at Dowdy Drive.

Still early in its development phase, The Colosseum will have 241 units when it is completed in 2010. Brickhouse says the target market for The Colosseum is Hokie fans and Tech alumni visiting town several times a year.

Developments such as The Colosseum sell a lifestyle: Units will be packed with amenities such as an indoor pool, a spa and fitness facility, a restaurant and bar, in-room dining service, valet parking in the underground garage, and plenty of others. Brickhouse believes the NRV will continue to see growth in these lifestyle communities.

Wright of NRV Gateway says the area market now reflects what she saw back in 2006. "I thought then that we would see a boom in new development," she says. "And we're seeing that all over the NRV."



The target market for The Colosseum would be Virginia Tech alumni and Hokie fans who would be coming into town several times a year.

DEVELOPMENT POLL

"Urban sprawl" in your town: out of hand, or not so bad?

e-mail your answer to:

poll@vbFRONT.com

put "DEVELOPMENT POLL" in subject line