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Article published Mar 18, 2007

ND serves as magnet for home builders

ED SEMMLER

You almost need a scorecard to keep track of all of the projects going up or proposed around the University of Notre Dame campus.

Condominiums, townhouses, villas and even a hybrid called a condo-hotel that allows owners to rent their property out when it isn't in use.

Most of these projects are aimed at graduates, fans and parents of students from Notre Dame and Saint Mary's College.

We decided to devote a two-day package of stories to the topic beginning in today's A Section because we were curious what is prompting this building surge in the community.

Heck, the real estate market is OK at best in these parts, so what's with all this construction and is it something we should be worried about? Don't think so.

Hard to imagine much bad about \$200 million or more in new construction completed, planned or proposed for the community.

Area contractors are staying busy as well as those who provide lumber, shingles, flooring, appliances, bathroom fixtures and much more.

Such housing booms are happening in other college towns, says Craig Taelman, president of South Bend-based Signature Homes.

Taelman is the builder at The Cottages of Pendle Woods, a villa community on Pendle Road on the north side of the Notre Dame campus. Pendle Woods is a first class project with units ranging from \$250,000 to \$600,000. The project got under way in May 2005 and today there are only about 14 out of 49 lots left.

Taelman says about 80 percent of the villas have been purchased by out-of-town folks who simply want to live close to Notre Dame. The remaining 20 percent are Notre Dame faculty or others associated with the university.

"It's a fantastic location and a quality product," says Taelman.

No doubt.

And it's also part of a trend in which baby boomers are purchasing second or third homes close to the campuses where they attended college. Taelman is so enthused about Pendle Woods that he

is embarking on another project on the east side of campus called Stadium Village. This project, which is aimed at the same market, will entail townhouses or what many of us would call row homes.

And they won't be cheap. We're talking about \$420,000 for a 2,800-square-foot, three-level unit.

Though some of the campus area projects have more modest price tags, it's entirely possible that there could be a market for even more expensive units.

"I think this trend will continue for at least a couple of years," Taelman says. "And there probably is some demand for super luxury housing."

So are there any downsides? Greg Ayers, executive director of the South Bend/Mishawaka Convention & Visitors Bureau, doesn't believe area hotels will suffer.

Demand for rooms is greater than the supply for Notre Dame home football weekends, and developers wouldn't be planning or building new hotels if there wasn't additional need, he says. "We have 4,000 hotel rooms, and get 50,000 to 60,000 visitors on football weekends," Ayers points out.

Mayor Stephen Luecke and Commissioner Mark Dobson also see no downside to the developments.

Those folks who are buying the condominiums and villas around campus are helping the local community by paying property taxes, which are used to support public services, they say.

Though some worry that the character of the community surrounding campus might change, it also could help by giving a hefty push to once-stagnant property prices.

And some of the new part-time residents might even like the community well enough to move here permanently. Can't see anything but positives in this trend.

Spring cleaning

Just in case you missed the news: Goodwill Industries of Michiana is absolutely desperate for donations.

"This is about the worst in 30 years, in terms of donations," says Pat Cichos, executive assistant for public relations.

The local organization started noticing a decline in donations over the summer, and the problem seems to be affecting Goodwill locations across the nation, Cichos says.

"I'm not sure if it's higher gas prices, higher food prices or what," Cichos says. The work of sorting and preparing gently used clothing or household items is performed by Goodwill employees. If there isn't enough work, the jobs of some of those workers could be in jeopardy.

"Donations have picked up, but we're not out of the woods yet," she says.

So please try to take a half hour today to look through your closet or attic for something to drop off at a local Goodwill.

If there is nothing in your closet, consider shopping at a Goodwill.

Or if you need some assembly or packaging work performed, consider the services offered by Goodwill. **Ed Semmler's The Bottom Line column appears on Sundays. If you have a comment or suggestion, contact him at esemmler@sbtinfo.com or at (574) 235-6466.**
