



FRED SQUILLANTE | DISPATCH
Albert Breech is part of a crew installing sanitary sewers in the Walker Meadows development in Union County.



Shorter commute

Homes in Marysville's Walker Meadows being built for area's affluent executives

By Mike Pramk
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

There are plenty of high-profile industries in Union County: Goodyear, Honda, Nestle and Scotts, to name a few.

But executives of those companies won't find many high-end places to live in Marysville, the county seat. They've flocked instead to swankier stomping grounds in Dublin, Powell and other parts southeast.

Two Dublin entrepreneurs hope to change that with what they say will be Marysville's first

planned, upscale residential development.

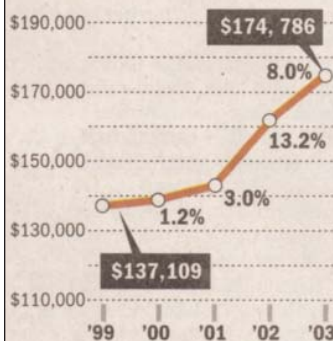
Debbie Lutz and Don Saul say most of the site work has been completed on their project, Walker Meadows, a 45-acre swath of houses and condominiums near the intersection of Rt. 38 and Boerger Road. They expect 56 houses in the \$300,000 to \$450,000 range to take shape beginning in November.

The development also is expected to include 26 condominiums starting at \$225,000. Lots of one-third to two-thirds

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On the rise

Average home prices in Marysville since 1999 and the percentage increases:



Source: Union County development office
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MARYSVILLE

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of an acre are priced from \$63,000 to \$79,000.

"There are many people here who make executive salaries, and it would be nice if they had a place to live that's convenient to their companies," Lutz said.

Walker Meadows isn't the only development in Marysville with homes that cost more than \$300,000, but it's the first in which homes are expected to begin at that level.

Neither is the project the first in Marysville to include upscale residences.

A housing boom that began in the 1990s prompted developer Phillip Connolly to create Green Pastures, a 261-acre, 422-lot housing development. The community won awards for its combination of homes, parks, schools and a layout that encourages neighborly interaction.

When it was conceived, plans called for homes selling in the \$400,000 range. Recently, that price has fallen a bit. Connolly declined to discuss Green Pastures' progress, but the project is nearing completion.

Columbus builder Joshua Homes purchased the last 34 lots at Green Pastures. The company has sold six homes at an average price near \$350,000, said sales manager Heidi Bennett, who wondered about the size of the market for upscale homes in Marysville.

"We're high-end here, and we've been having a little bit of difficulty," Bennett said. "I don't know who's going to spend more money to go farther out of town."

But Virginia Golan-Elliott, an agent with HER Realty, said Green Pastures and Walker Meadows differ enough to stand on their own. Golan-Elliott lives in Green Pastures and represented the owner of the farmland that was purchased for Walker Meadows.

"(Green Pastures) is about convenience," she said. "It has a grocery, fast food, a hardware store and five parks. It's very close to schools.

"Walker Meadows, while more an executive community, is more of a rural subdivision. I don't view them as competing at all."

Home sales in Marysville were fairly strong last year,

"There are many people here who make executive salaries, and it would be nice if they had a place to live that's convenient to their companies."

DEBBIE LUTZ

Walker Meadows developer

when 577 houses were built in Union County, said Eric Phillips, the county's economic-development director.

Since the boom began, tastes in Marysville have changed to bigger homes, said Tom Hart, a Dominion Homes vice president

Dominion has sold more than 1,000 lots in its Mill Valley development in Marysville. With about 800 lots remaining, Hart said the company has noticed a sharp increase in requests for its higher-priced line of houses, in the \$275,000 to \$330,000 range.

Interest has increased so much that Dominion now is making standard some features once considered upgrades.

"It's very clear to us that there's a surge in demand for upscale housing in Marysville," Hart said. "There's a blossoming of the market there."

Lutz and Saul say the timing and location are right for Walker Meadows. The property includes 8 acres of woods and overlooks Timberview Golf Club. Deed restrictions will include minimum square footage of 2,200, natural materials (no vinyl siding), dimensional roof shingles and minimum roof pitches.

"Most of the subdivisions are on smaller lots with more density and smaller square feet, less features and so on," Lutz said. "People have virtually no control what goes next to them."

Phillips is hopeful that Walker Meadows can convince local high-income earners to stop commuting from other cities.

"You can get to Dublin in 15 minutes from here," Phillips said.

"What we would like to see is top-level managers and executives living in our community. That would be a big benefit to our economy."

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