





A new wave of master-planned communities is redefining housing. Innovative plans and extraordinary features await. Welcome home.

Home

IS WHERE THE AMENITIES ARE

The best and brightest communities these days measure their trails in miles. Their pools are more like swim parks and lagoons. Some still have vivid green golf courses, but they're also investing in polo grounds, velodromes, and BMX courses.

There are farmers markets where residents buy food and produce grown just a few steps away. They have movie nights, holiday festivals, cultural arts centers, rock concerts, state-of-the-art gyms, fishing, and kayaking.

There are small downtowns nestled against a backdrop of woodlands and mountains. There are places where residents can stroll to "old-time" places to get a cup of coffee, then hook up to the Internet via networks that offer connection speeds 200 times faster than average.

Want to get together? Houses are specifically designed for neighbor-meet-neighbor interactions. There are more clubs, activities, and events than you can dream of—from painting parties and book clubs to partnerships with schools for philanthropic causes.

A new wave of master-planned communities is redefining large-scale housing developments with innovative plans and extraordinary features. Today's communities are adding another word to the "location, location, location" real-estate mantra: amenities.

By Joe Cantlupe | Illustration by Lucie Rice



TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, Lake Nona in Orlando. There aren't just sparkling tennis courts—102 of them in fact—but tennis camps and training facilities. The United States Tennis Association now calls the community home. So does the Orlando City Soccer Club.

“Perhaps more than ever, people are looking for unique-looking neighborhoods, a sense of community, and belonging to something bigger than a subdivision tract house,” says Kevin Carson, developer of the Cannery, a 100-acre planned community and farm built around a former Hunt-Wesson tomato plant in Northern California.

Homebuyers are demanding opportunities to live in places where health, fitness, recreation, and cultural opportunities are at their fingertips, and developers are responding.

Land-use development continues to evolve as lifestyle decisions are increasingly driving purchasing practices, says Judy Julison, CMCA, senior vice president of lifestyle programming for FirstService Residential.

Developers of large- and small-scale projects are getting into the innovation act, with some pursuing partnerships with government or other groups to ensure they have the amenities to attract residents, she says.

“It can be dog parks, fitness centers, farms, you name it,” Julison says. “Walking trails are still the most popular. Some have pickleball courts. Who would have heard of that a few years ago? Maybe years from now, there will be something else we never heard of.”



THE MONSTER ATTRACTION

Over the past few years, Eastmark in Mesa, Ariz., sold 500 homes and totaled 275 sales in the first quarter of 2017. Its feel of a small, walkable community over 5 square miles has been a big draw, as have its Orange Monster and cruiser culture.

Designed by kids for kids, the Orange Monster is part climbing park and part giant playground. Constructed of two tandem pipe sculptures connected with exercise and play netting that twists and turns up to 9 feet, the structure stretches for about three-quarters of an acre. There's also a “normal” playground nearby with swings, slides, and fitness challenges for those not quite ready to tackle the Monster.

Since 2014, each home within the community has received a cruiser bike to promote a healthy, active, and social lifestyle. The bikes were designed by the local owner of Soul Beach Cruisers. The neighborhood streets are bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly, intentionally designed to slow vehicle traffic.



MARKED FOR SUCCESS. Eastmark, in Mesa, Ariz., can credit a few young minds with helping to design the Orange Monster (opposite)—part climbing park, part giant playground. The Monster is just one of the community’s many draws.

From the start, DMB Associates has been blending open space with a city feel in Eastmark. At the center of it all is the roughly 100-acre Great Park, which includes a splash pad, events pavilion, the Monster, and a new diner. DMB developed the park, which is now owned and operated by the city of Mesa.

DMB hopes to make Eastmark a place where job creation is mixed with residents who come together and get to know each other. Schools and businesses built into the design and the 60 miles of walking trails—many with views of the Arizona foothills—are giving residents reasons to work, stay, and play.

The homes are carefully juxtaposed near each other to enhance the feeling of community, and all roads lead around the Great Park.

“The idea for this community, unlike a lot of urban development, is that we don’t have a fixed plan,” says Dea McDonald, general manager of Eastmark and a senior vice president at DMB. “The community is designed to be very flexible in terms of what we do, as it grows over time, and

as we understand the market demands.”

That flexibility also comes with surprises. One of the biggest was a decision by Apple to build a 1.3 million-square-foot global command center in Eastmark, a plan never contemplated by the developers, McDonald says. The Apple proposal would create at least 150 permanent jobs.

BUILT FOR BIKERS

For decades, the Celanese Acetate Filament plant in Rock Hill, S.C., made a product important to the textile industry. By the time it went out of business about 10 years ago, it was another aging industrial site near the Catawba River that needed to be cleaned up. The Assured Group/GRH Development Resources bought the old facility and demolished the plant in 2008.

Now bicyclists of all kinds zip through Riverwalk, a 1,000-acre, \$600-million, mixed-use development where more than 850 homes have been proposed. Restaurants, entertainment venues, shopping, and school sites situated along 3 miles of the river also are being planned. A 1-million-square-foot distribution center and an adjacent facility designed to provide

hundreds of jobs also are in the works.

Builders and Rock Hill officials thought about the draw for the community, which is in the Charlotte, N.C., metropolitan area, and settled on a key attraction: sports.

That’s why Riverwalk boasts—or soon will boast—mountain bike trails from beginner to advanced, an Olympic-caliber BMX training facility for amateurs and professionals, a USA Cycling-endorsed velodrome for track cyclists, a paved road course, and trails for cyclocross, a form of racing that includes paved and off-road trails, obstacles, and steep inclines for riding and running.

The velodrome and BMX facilities have already hosted national events.

“We’re seeing a bunch of empty nesters, and they love watching the bicycling and bringing their grandchildren,” says Tara Davidson, a spokesperson for the developer.

Residents currently are occupying 250 homes, which are intentionally a modest size.

“These aren’t big homes because you have so much common area and green development,” Davidson says. “We tried to leave as much (green) as possible as a buffer.”



The community also has miles of multi-use trails, athletic fields, and a canoe and kayak launch along the river. More development is on the way too, including a pool, additional commercial properties, a grocery store, and a dog park.

CRYSTAL CLEAR

Imagine living on crystal clear blue waters more than 20 miles from the nearest beach. That's just what's been envisioned for Epperson, a \$100-million, 1,500-home development in Wesley Chapel, Fla., in the Tampa area.

The community will be home to the first Crystal Lagoon in the U.S., a 7-acre amenity that will hold 16 million gallons of water and be as deep as 8 feet. Metro-Development Group has signed on to bring four of these lagoons, which have already been introduced in places like Chile, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, and Dubai, to the U.S., starting with Epperson.

Greg Singleton, president of Metro-Development Group, estimates the Epperson lagoon will open by the end of 2017.

Pasco County will purchase the water for the lagoon, which uses "50 times less water than a park of the same size and 30 times less water than an 18-hole golf course," according to the developer. The lagoon also uses fewer chemicals than a swimming pool and less energy than a conventional pool filtration system. It is maintained

by an advanced ultrasound technology system that uses thousands of sensors to keep the water crystal clear.

While the lagoon is certainly a primary attraction for Epperson, it's only one piece of the innovative development. The energy-efficient community is part of the proposed Connected City, dubbed the first "Smart Gigabit Community." The area will have some of the fastest Internet and WiFi speeds in the world.

When completed, the Connected City will have 37,000 homes and more than 12,000 square feet of commercial space. The first Epperson homes are expected to be completed this fall.

POLO, PLEASE

Action and adventure sports have been getting a lot of focus in new communities, but there's also room sometimes for a more old-fashioned activity: polo.

Lakewood Ranch, a master-planned development in Sarasota, Fla.,

has nine polo fields and one regulation-size arena, which attract many residents, says Gary Glass,

CMCA, AMS, PCAM, director of community association services.

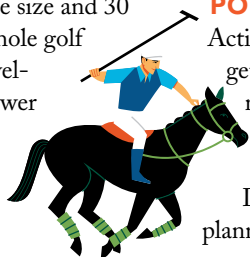
When they aren't playing or watching polo, residents can participate in as many as 66 clubs. Lakewood Ranch also offers a community garden, gun range, tennis courts, golf courses, a downtown, a movie theater, festivals, and restaurants.

There are about 14,000 residents now, and about 30,000 are anticipated when the community is completed.

BACK TO THE FARM

The Cannery, which opened in 2015 in Davis, Calif., features a network of bike paths, solar-powered lighting, a "barn" community center, and a 7.4-acre urban farm where planting and harvesting are taught to its 135 families.

Like Willowsford in Northern Virginia (see "Bet the Farm," *Common Ground* March/April 2017), Cannery residents can pick vegetables just steps from their energy-efficient homes. Residents also can walk or bike to stores in Davis,





FRESH THINKING. Residents of The Cannery in Davis, Calif., can learn how to plant and harvest on the community's 7.4-acre farm (opposite). A network of bike paths allows residents to visit the development's barn (top), farm house (below), and stores in Davis.

near the University of California campus.

The development is expected to be one of the most energy efficient in the country. All 520 homes, upon completion, will have 1.5 kV photovoltaic solar systems and pre-wired electric-vehicle charging; residents can upgrade to net-zero living.

SERENE BEING

Steve and Marie Nygren also were driven by the idea of a farm and preserving open spaces when they began developing their 300-acre, "new urban village" in Chattahoochee Hills, Ga., outside of Atlanta. Serenbe stands for what they envisioned the place to be: serene.

The 25-acre farm and farmers market is a key attraction, the Nygrens say, but so is a host of amenities, such as the

outdoor playhouse, nearby trails, culinary workshops, festivals, films, lectures, and shopping. Artist-in-residence programs also are offered.

Though the first house in Serenbe was built in 2004, and the community is now home to more than 400 residents in four

hamlets, it still has a long way to go.

"Our vision is being built to create a place of well-being, and we are only 20 percent built out," says Garnie Nygren, the couple's 33-year-old daughter and director of operations.

The Nygrens are building what they

term a resort-style pool, a wellness center that will involve Eastern and Western practitioners, a destination spa, and two hotels.

ZIPPING AROUND

From a zip line high above the Colorado terrain to a vast network of trails, the developers of The Meadows in Castle Rock say that their wide range of offerings was always a crucial part of the master-planned community.

"We believe that the popularity of The Meadows is due in large part





CAPTURING SERENE. Serenbe, in suburban Atlanta, captures buyers' attention with a 25-acre farm, farmers market, and a host of other amenities and activities, including culinary workshops, an outdoor playhouse, and trails.

versary parties, community clubs, painting classes, and other events. The community also is known for various festivals, including Music in the Meadow, the developers say.

"We believe that a healthy community must have strong roots that include, among other things, workforce housing, traditional family homes, employment opportunities, schools, and community services," McCandless says.

The community is home to many schools, a hospital campus, and the town's only movie theater. A higher education campus is on the way too.

IT'S A ZOO OUT THERE

The developers of Viera in Brevard County, Fla., wanted to construct a trail system so comprehensive residents and visitors never had to get around in their cars. Via the trails, people can walk, use golf courts, or ride their bikes to go anywhere in the development.

That network of trails is the community's highest-rated feature, but Viera

to the amenities offered within the community," says Stephanie L. McCandless, president of the Castle Rock Development Company.

Located between Denver and Colorado Springs, the Meadows includes more than 5,500 homes, with an estimated 8,800 when completed. It has 24 miles of trails and 1,100 acres of parks and land for public use.

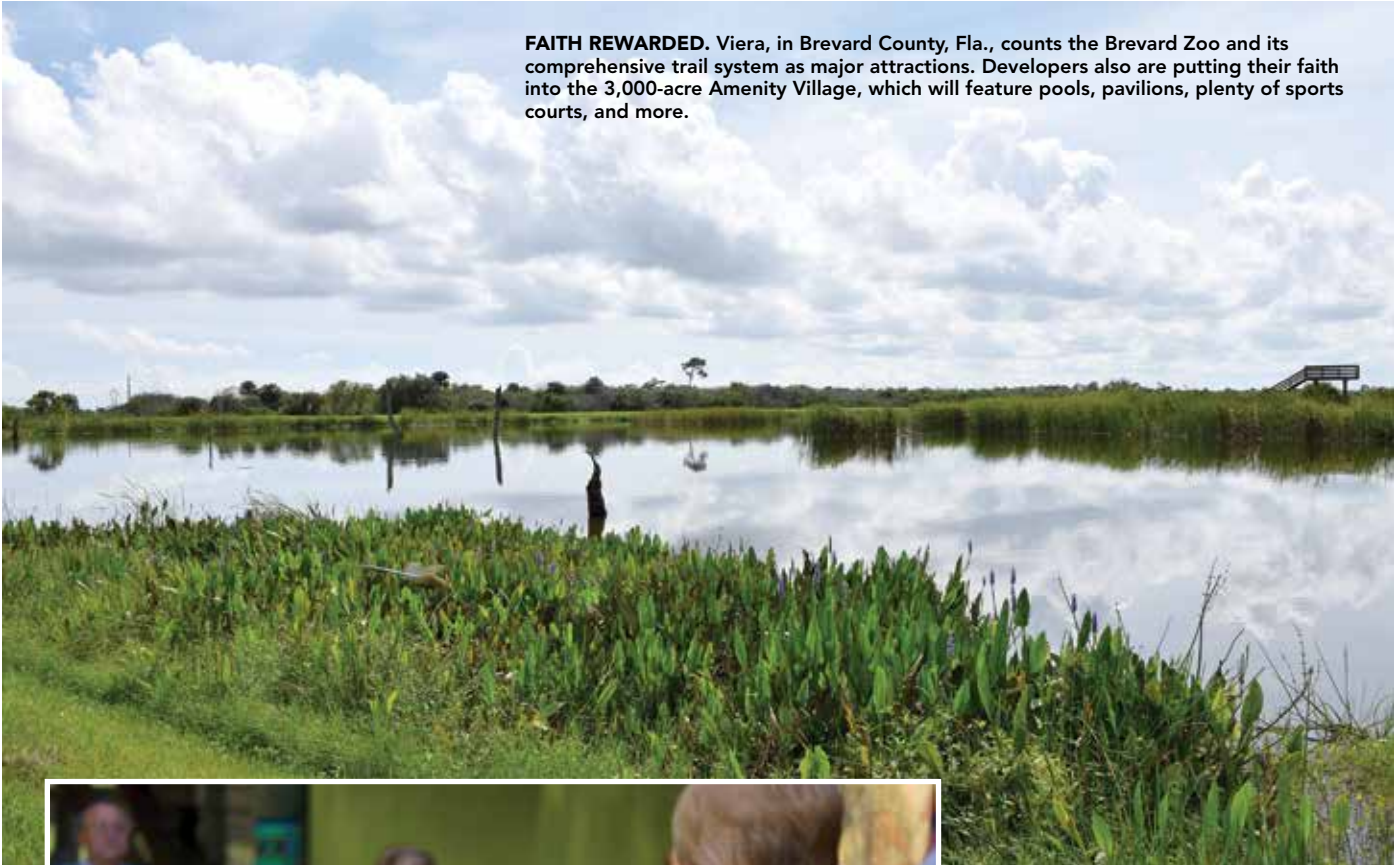
The Meadows Town Center—a mixed-use area with a "traditional neighborhood design"—was delayed by the recession but finally opened last year.

"The Town Center will provide the missing pieces, including apartment houses, walkable retail and other services, family homes with wrap-around front porches, and gathering spaces centered around food and drink," McCandless says.

The 320-acre Philip S. Miller Regional Park, run by the town of Castle Rock but located in The Meadows, also opened within the past few years. It includes a 7.4-mile trail and a 200-step "Challenge Hill."

The Meadows is home to a cultural arts facility that will host weddings, anni-

FAITH REWARDED. Viera, in Brevard County, Fla., counts the Brevard Zoo and its comprehensive trail system as major attractions. Developers also are putting their faith into the 3,000-acre Amenity Village, which will feature pools, pavilions, plenty of sports courts, and more.



Viera Company, and Scott Miller, vice president of sales and community management. “When developing our new communities, we continue to design the extra-wide, multiuse paths and trail systems, integrating parks and large areas of green space.”

Each neighborhood in Viera is built in a “coving” design, in which the subdivision lots are characterized by “non-uniform lot shapes and home placement” instead of conventional grids, Pokrywa and Miller say. The idea is to “enhance curb appeal, eliminate monotony, and provide the neighborhood with picturesque winding roadways that slow traffic and enhance street safety,” the developers say.

As for the zoo, it’s designed to be interactive. It has an academy and junior zookeeper program, and regularly hosts educational sessions for children in local schools. According to Viera Company spokesperson Nina G. Salvaggio, the zoo continues to expand and grow.

It’s a great draw for the community too. **CG**

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also is home to the Brevard Zoo, a major attraction in the area. Home to more than 500 animals representing over 165 species from Florida, South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia, the zoo is built on 56 acres donated by The Viera Company’s corporate parent, A. Duda & Sons.

Viera has over 10,000 homes and 23,000 residents, and is about one-third completed.

Reflecting efforts to deliver more amenities to the community, the aptly named Amenity Village is still in planning and development. Plans call for 4,000 residen-

tial units and 150,000 square feet of commercial space in an area of at least 3,000 acres. Amenity Village will have two swimming pools, entertainment pavilions, and a focus on sports: a multipurpose gym, bocce court, outdoor tennis, pickleball courts, a croquet field, and an open space area.

“Viera has seen an increased desire for more amenities and green space, and we’ve already shifted some of our development to meet those needs,” say Todd Pokrywa, senior vice president of land use planning and development for The