

Development surge heads for south, southeast

Fountain-area quality of life, affordable land touted

By RICH LADEN THE GAZETTE

The Pikes Peak region's housing market, which for decades pointed north and northeast, is headed in a new direction.

A housing boom is under way in Fountain and nearby unincorporated areas south and southeast of Colorado Springs, where an estimated 40,000 single-family homes, townhomes, apartments and condominiums are approved, under construction, being planned or on the drawing board.

The boom mirrors one that took place beginning in the late 1980s and early '90s, when thousands of transplants from California and elsewhere and new employers with well-paying jobs contributed to the region's growth.

New homeowners settled in areas such as Briargate, Nor'wood and Stetson Hills on the Springs' north and northeast sides. Meanwhile, a demand for housing heated up in scenic Monument north of town, as well as unincorporated Falcon northeast of the Springs.

Now, increased numbers of Fort Carson soldiers, an appealing quality of life and the availability of affordable land are among the features luring developers and builders to Fountain and the surrounding area.

"The building boom was up north 10, 15, 25 years ago," said Springs developer Jim Morley, who will ask Fountain officials next year to annex his 2,400-acre Kane Ranch, which could supply 7,000 to 9,000 single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums and apartments. "Now, what we're seeing is Nor'wood and Briargate south."

Fort Carson, the military installation south of the Springs, is expected to gain 10,000 to 12,000 soldiers in the next two years.

In a study of demographic trends for Fountain, economist Fred Crowley estimates those troops and their families could add 37,000 to 40,000 people to El Paso County's population.

Based on past trends, a lion's share of those troops and their families will live in Fountain or the nearby Fountain Valley, which includes unincorporated Widefield and Security, said Crowley.

Developers and builders "are anxious to be a part of that," said Roger DeKloe, executive vice president of longtime Fountain home builder New Generation Homes.

Beyond Fort Carson's effect, Fountain city officials believe their community's quality of life has caught on.

Fountain is smaller, with less traffic and good views. The city's population was about 21,000 this year, although that figure has more than doubled since 1990.

"We still have a small-town atmosphere," said Lisa Cochrun, Fountain's economic development director. "Commutes are easy and fast. They're not lined up behind a bunch of cars in multiple lanes of traffic."

Although Fountain officials likely will grapple with growth issues the next several years, they feel they're prepared with a recent update to their comprehensive plan, said Planning Director Dave Smedsrud.

The city also has enough water to serve a population of 37,000 by 2020; it has plans in place to serve 65,000 people by 2046, said Larry Patterson, city utilities director.

But for builders and developers, Fountain's biggest draw has been an availability of land at affordable prices.

Land and lots still exist in north-side developments such as Flying Horse and Wolf Ranch, but several other existing neighborhoods are filling up fast or are nearly built out.

Denver home builder Oakwood Homes recently bought 1,400 acres for what would become the Rolling Hills Ranch development southeast of Drennan and Marksheffel roads in unincorporated El Paso County, northeast of Fountain. An arm of New Generation Homes will develop an additional 600 acres that's part of the project.

Preliminary plans estimate Rolling Hills could have nearly 8,600 single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums and apartments. Development would be spread out over 25 years.

Dan Poremba, Oakwood's director of land acquisition and development, said the availability of such a large parcel at a reasonable price appealed to Oakwood, along with good access to the site.

DeKloe, of New Generation, said land has been in high demand on the Springs' north side and in northern El Paso County for years, leaving developers and builders to look to cheaper property to the south.

Even though land prices in the Fountain Valley are rising, DeKloe said, they've been cheap enough up to now so that many developers and builders can offer Fountainarea homes at lower prices than up north.

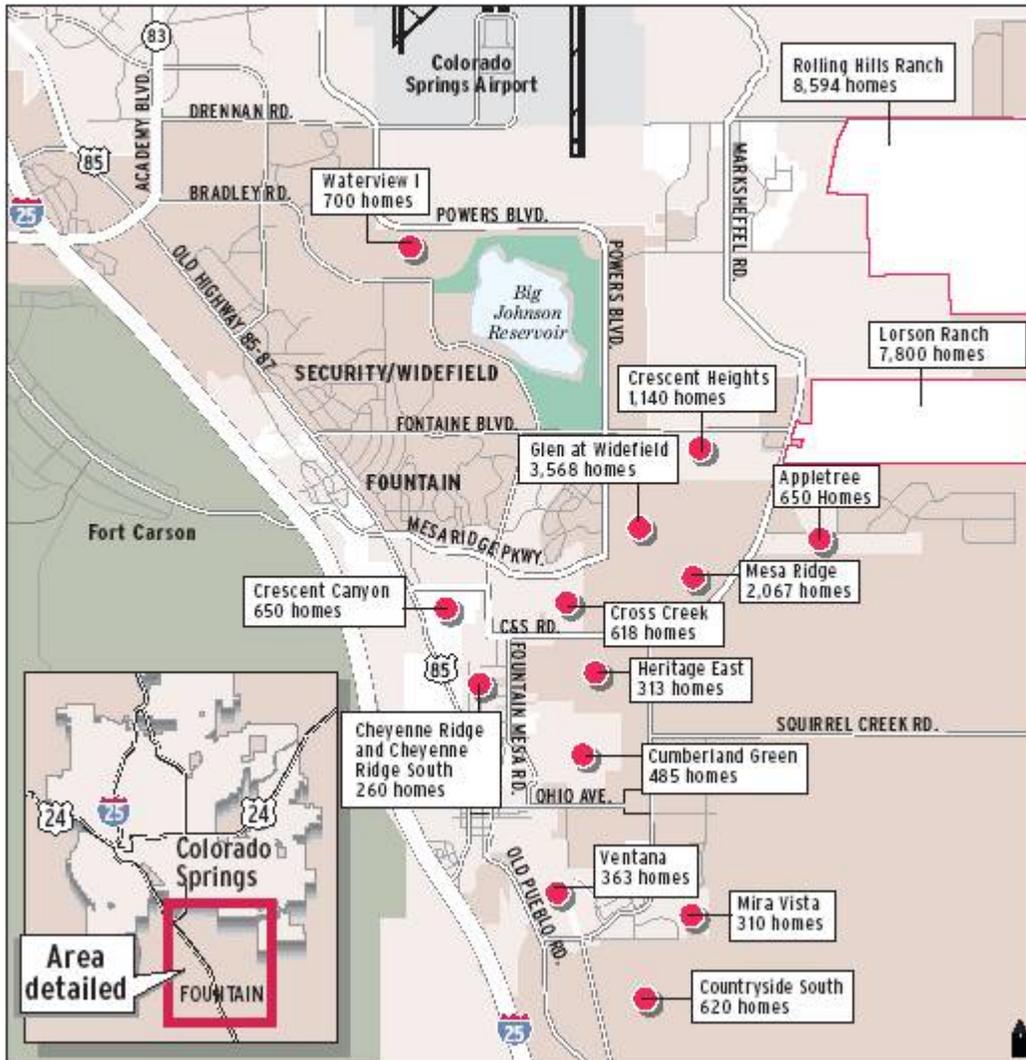
Poremba said Oakwood's homes in Rolling Hills Ranch will sell for \$150,000 to \$225,000, which would put its prices far below those of other builders.

"It (Fountain area) truly is the only affordable place left," said Morley, developer of the Kane Ranch. "There is no such thing as a \$200,000 or \$175,000 house in northeast Colorado Springs. It doesn't exist as a new house."



DAVID BITTON, THE GAZETTE - Ed Baxter of Baxter Bros. Construction was building a home in the Glen at Widefield housing development near Fountain this week. About 40,000 residential structures are being built or are in the planning stages.

Some of the larger housing projects that have been approved, proposed or are on the drawing board for the Fountain and the Fountain Valley area are shown below. Along with two larger developments not shown - the 2,400-acre Kane Ranch and the 400- to 500-acre Venezia property - that are in the offering, and several smaller projects also not shown, the number of single-family homes, townhomes, condominiums and apartments potentially coming to Fountain and the Fountain Valley could total about 40,000 over the next 20 to 30 years.



THE GAZETTE - SOURCES : City of Fountain, El Paso County Development Services office A housing boom