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Like what you see?

City hopes new houses like these will attract new residents

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People shopping for homes just got a few more options in Marion.

The city and Indianapolis-based Arbor Homes on Tuesday announced a new south side subdivision with room for 227 new homes ranging from \$90,000 to \$180,000.

Leaders say The Heritage at University Village, which will be located between 38th and 44th streets just west of the Bypass, will go a long way toward helping improve the housing market and convincing more Grant County workers who commute to move into the county.

"This fits a niche we don't have," said Jeff Southworth, president of the Grant County Economic Growth Council.

Although small subdivisions have popped up in recent years on the north side of town, University Village will be the first one of its size and price range since the 1960s, said Judy Fitzgerald, president of the Marion Area Board of Realtors.

"I think this is exactly the price we needed to target," Fitzgerald said.

It's also a move away from local contractors to a large company from Indianapolis.

Arbor Homes has built many subdivisions throughout the Indianapolis area and one in Anderson.

New jobs at places such as Dollar General - and the work by city and county governments to bring them here - convinced Arbor Homes that Marion would be a sound investment.

"We're as confident as you can be going into a new market," said Steve Hatchel, vice president of sales for Arbor.

He added that Arbor Homes chose the specific location, most of which is owned by Marion Development LLC, because of the nearness to Indiana Wesleyan University, whose staff is one of Arbor's target customer groups, and the accessibility to Ind. 37, which means people can easily get to and from Interstate 69.

IWU President Henry Smith, who met with Arbor Homes during the past several months, said the subdivision would be a boon for the university as it continues to grow because it has struggled to find adequate housing for new employees.

Houses in the subdivision will follow general designs used by Arbor for all its developments and will feature ranch and two-story styles. Arbor Homes Project Engineer Richard Henderson said the homes will use a mixture of brick and siding on the outside.

Homes will range anywhere from 1,200 to 3,200 square feet.

Along with several retention ponds, the subdivision will feature a swimming pool, basketball courts and a playground on its south end.

One entrance will link with 38th Street. The city plans to extend 44th Street to the south side of the development for the second entrance.

Henderson said he hopes to start construction on the homes as soon as June.

Hatchel said Arbor Homes would have a few of its own employees on site, but most of the work would be done by contractors - local ones when possible, he said.

The project will mean a change of scenery for the people who already live on West 38th Street, along with more traffic.

Bob Pettiford said his only concern was the traffic.

"If people can afford that type of a house, I'm all for it," Pettiford said.

He also said he would prefer to have a subdivision rather than a large store, with the parking lot and bright lights that come with it, that near his own home. (Meijer, the supermarket chain, currently owns a portion of the land the development will be on.)

Another area resident, Vicki Manley, said she doubted Arbor Homes would find people to buy the homes but said she wasn't upset the

houses were coming.

"Our city needs it, but I don't see who's going to buy them," she said. "But I'm glad it's a higher quality of homes rather than the low-income housing."

Manley already is working on protecting her privacy by having trees put in on the edge of her yard, she said.

Marion Mayor Wayne Seybold said the development would target two groups: people who work in Grant County but don't live here, and people who live in older, less expensive homes who want to move up.

The main two reasons commuters named for not living here, he said, was lack of new housing and retail options. The city does offer new homes on the north side, but they cost an average of \$250,000, which is harder for most people to afford.

Alan Miller, director of university relations at IWU, said he knew many of IWU's employees faced the same problem.

"We have so many people who already work here and who commute because there's nowhere for them to live," he said.

And IWU is continuing to hire, he added.

The new development will give those types of people choices beyond a new home they can't afford and an affordable one that's older, the mayor said.

"It gives them an opportunity to now look at Marion again to say, 'OK, do I want to stop putting \$400 a month into my gas tank and put it into a new mortgage?'" Seybold said.
