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## Go west, way west

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Today the four-lane, 35-mile Sun Valley Parkway stretches along empty desert in the western shadow of the White Tank Mountains. Developers have plans for about 116,000 acres of the land, which include 286,000 homes and 9,500 acres of commercial space - meaning, about 900,000 people could call it home within 40 years, and some of them will come sooner than later.

While many in the Southwest Valley know about the plans, some of which date back to the early 1980s, there are those who heard the vision for the first time at a recent Valley Partnership breakfast.

About 300 people gathered at Phoenix Country Club to hear Greg Vogel, chief executive officer of the Land Advisors Organization, Buckeye Mayor Bobby Bryant, Douglas Ranch General Manager Tom Hennessy, with El Dorado Holdings, and Pulte Homes Vice President of Land Management Mike Brilz talk about development west of the White Tanks.

Essentially, the landowners of 38 master-planned communities proposed or approved for Buckeye do not want the area west of the White Tanks to remain empty. They plan to fill it with lots of houses, jobs and people. The 10 landowners responsible for the major planned developments, in Buckeye and Maricopa County, have worked together for years on ways to bring homes, employment, water and roads to Sun Valley.

Brilz touted strong planning from the landowners and commended Buckeye for fostering an alliance among the developers.

"We're putting our strengths together to build what is going to be a fabulous city," he said.

Pulte's Sun City Festival sits on 3,100 acres with plans for 7,100 units. About 700 homes have been sold to date.

"It's the most efficient startup we've ever seen," Brilz said. "We have amenities built; we have the golf course in; we have the infrastructure in. If you build it, they will come, and we're looking forward to them coming."

The entire Festival community, including Festival Foothills and Festival Ranch, has plans for 24,176 homes on more than 10,000 acres. Festival Foothills has sold 230 homes since April, Brilz said.

About 30 miles south of Festival, just a few miles north of Interstate 10, sits the palm-lined entrance to Tartesso, which has 540 completed homes. Stardust Development has permits for about 860 of the 48,000 homes planned for the 12,812-acre community. The developer also has plans for a 3.5 million square foot mini-city project complete with shopping, entertainment, hotels, auto sales and a hospital.

### **Planning a boomtown**

Buckeye's planning area has a population of about 38,000, town officials estimate. That number could double in five years if staff and developer projections hold true.

*Forbes* magazine recently listed the town among the top 10 fastest-growing suburbs in the nation, based on U.S. Census data from 2000 to 2006. Buckeye finished second overall behind Lincoln, Calif., with its population increase from 10,147 in 2000 to 29,615 in 2006, a 191.9 percent increase.

"Some said that Buckeye acted irresponsible by approving these mega projects," Vogel said. "I will stand here and tell you it's nothing but the entire opposite. There are tens of millions of dollars spent on planning this area that otherwise the town would not have had the resources to do."

Bryant said he's a "full-time mayor with part-time pay," citing he spends the bulk of his working hours in meetings.

"It's a rarity that it's not about planning," he said. "It's not like it's an afterthought."

Bryant, mayor since July 2006, said the partnerships between developers and the town help the town's staff keep up with the growth.

"We have 400,000 single units approved," Bryant said. "We have a lot of homes to build, but we need the commercial and employment to go along with it."

### **Work out west**

Developers have planned almost 10,000 acres along the Sun Valley Parkway for commercial, retail, office and light industrial use. Vogel added that the region within a commute to the area has another 15,000 to 20,000 acres dedicated to employment opportunity.

Hennessy said the team planning the mammoth Douglas Ranch development, roughly the size of Tempe with more than 35,000 acres, has a focus on economic development and sustainability.

"We want to create a self-supporting economy in Buckeye," Hennessy said. "High-paying jobs, diverse jobs - so people who live in this area work in this area."

The housing market slowdown has actually benefited El Dorado Holdings, Hennessy said. The company pushed back the date to break ground on Douglas Ranch to 2010 and in recent months has reconfigured some of its plans to increase the amount of commercial space in the project to allow for more employment and incorporate mass transit plans and alternative energy sources.

"We've had the time to step back and look at what we were doing and decided what was adequate," he said. "We needed to stretch ourselves further."