



Private developer breaks ground on \$49M housing project at Luke

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Built on Luke Air Force Base around 1960, the stucco-and-tile house that 1st Lt. Imie Mark and his family rent is clearly showing its age.

To start, there's pink tile in the bathroom. Only one cooking sheet can be squeezed in the oven. And there's no garage - just a sagging carport.

"It wasn't built with today's military family in mind," said Mark, 29, an aircraft mechanic who lives with his wife, Amy, and 2-year-old daughter, Mary Kate.

As early as March, however, the Marks will be one of the first families to move into new rental homes that are being built at the Glendale base by a private developer.

GMH Military Housing and other private-sector partners broke ground on the \$49 million residential project today in a ceremony that saw Brig. Gen. Tom Jones, commander of the 56th Fighter Wing at Luke, drive the claw of an excavator through the roof of one of the older homes being demolished.

"For a few years, it will be dusty and noisy," said Jones, his words muffled by the roar of F-16 fighter jets. "But it is a beautiful noise, just like these planes flying overhead."

A contract calls for GMH Military Housing to develop and oversee all existing and new family housing Luke during the next 50 years. The contract includes:

- The demolition of 365 existing homes.
- The renovation of 114 existing homes.
- The construction of 101 new homes.
- The development of a community center, playgrounds, sports courts and other amenities.

Richard Taylor, senior vice president of Pennsylvania-based GMH Military Housing, said the project signifies the military's commitment to providing new or renovated housing to its airmen at an affordable price.

"When a service member gets stationed at Luke, they have options," Taylor said. "We're motivated to provide the highest quality of housing and level of service, because we're in a competitive market."

Construction of new homes is expected to wrap up by August 2009, while renovations are set for completion by April 2010.

The privatization of family housing at Luke is part of a Defense Department plan to cut its housing inventory worldwide as it seeks to reduce spending. By the end of 2009, nearly three-fourths of homes on military bases in the United States will be turned over to private developers and managers, Luke officials said.

It's understandable why airmen like Lt. Mark are looking forward to move-in day.

Growing up in a military family, Mark has known his share of on-base housing. He was born on a base in Ohio and lived on U.S. bases in Spain and Germany.

"This will be the first new house I will have lived in," he said as his daughter played at his feet. "It will be nice for all the airmen."

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