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Sun Valley Parkway no longer 'Road to Nowhere'

Kelly Carr

The Arizona Republic

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At first, it's hard to notice anything has changed in the last 20 years on Buckeye's Sun Valley Parkway.

A sign tells motorists exiting Interstate 10 there are no services for 35 miles. There is so little traffic on the parkway, new drivers use it as a practice area. And two men can stand in the middle of the road eyeing a piece of debris.

But after driving just a few miles north, you begin to see how the 30-mile-long Sun Valley Parkway, once dubbed the "Road to Nowhere," is transforming.

Off to the left is a massive entryway for a community named Tartesso. Inside, past the main entrance, developers are building a mini-city. Streetlights extend for miles. A school, one of at least 20 planned for the area, is under construction. The main sounds come from the tools assembling the first homes.

The master-planned community, Buckeye's third largest, marks the beginning of what's to come along Sun Valley Parkway, west of the White Tank Mountains. And the vision of what will be built is anything but small.

Chris Heeter, the president of Stardust Development Co., Tartesso's builder, is part of the change. He coasts his car through the new community, pointing to finished homes in Tartesso where people already live and empty lots with endless possibilities.

"We knew this site was in the path of progress," Heeter said. "It has taken on a life of its own. We didn't have a grand scheme in mind when we started."

The first signs of Sun Valley Parkway's coming of age already are under way.

About 900 of the planned 50,000 homes in Tartesso's nearly 13,000 acres have been completed. The development may take 15 years to finish, but at build-out, it could have 100,000 to 150,000 residents.

"That area up there, that will be huge," said Bob Bushfield, Buckeye's community development director. "It will happen very rapidly. It's a tremendous planning opportunity for those working on this to really create a community that takes advantage of the extraordinary natural terrain and environment there."

Joining Tartesso in the development of the parkway hub are two other master-planned communities in the works. Douglass Ranch will span almost 40,000 acres and Sun Valley Communities, 13,000 acres.

Stardust's first brush with the project, eventually known as Tartesso, was almost 20 years ago.

In 1986, the company began purchasing the 126 parcels of privately owned land in the community's planning area.

The next year, investors spent \$82 million to build Sun Valley Parkway and had plans for it to become a major area for development. The growth never came.

Stardust's land sat empty for nearly 18 years.

Then the climate in Buckeye began to change. Stardust started planning Tartesso in 2000 and construction on the 21-square-mile community jumpstarted in 2004.

Now builders are focusing on Phase 1 of Tartesso, which will include more than 3,000 homes, commercial areas and parks. The entire project includes five phases on the west side of Sun Valley Parkway and seven on the east.

The first section of Tartesso is filled with community parks, baseball fields and a section of land that planners hope will become home to a grocery store.

Once there are enough rooftops, developers will move forward with the proposed Tartesso Town Center on Interstate 10 and Sun Valley Parkway.

The 500-acre retail center could include two shopping centers, an auto mall, hotels, housing and medical facilities.

"Its fun to start from scratch and build something all the way through to this size," Heeter said. "To see the vision now come into reality."

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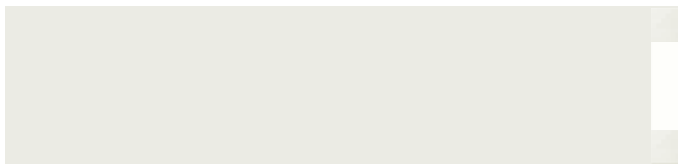
It's too bad ADOT isn't keeping up with the growth! You couldn't pay me enough to drive all that distance on the I-10 to Phoenix everyday! 2 lanes one way? No way!!!

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What do you mean the "Road to Nowhere", I looked up the street on Google Maps and take you around the White Tank Mountains to Surprise and to the very busy Bell Road!

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