

Blandford villas in East Mesa priced to sell

Tuscany Villas at Painted Mountain sold 35 homes

by **Art Thomason** - Apr. 6, 2009 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Less than a year after scores of potential buyers camped out at his east Mesa community for a chance to buy a home, developer Jeff Blandford has nailed another lucrative niche.

Early retirees, Baby Boomers and Millennials are the demographic of most of the 35 new-home sales' contracts written in the past three weeks at his Tuscany Villas at Painted Mountain.

It's a home-buying spurt that outpaces February's 30 new-home sales recorded for all of Mesa and sweeps most of the Valley's home-buying leaps under the bulldozer.

Blandford on March 6 finalized purchase of the partially built and financially troubled gated community situated among golf-course fairways, greens and mountain views.

The development's original owner and builder, Ray Mehan, failed to negotiate a deal with a bank to keep him afloat and Blandford stepped in.

It was a no-brainer, Blandford said, considering the location near freeways and shopping and the development's curb appeal of wrought-iron gates and liberal applications of stone, an old, but widely popular, European theme.

Not overlooked was Blandford's defiance of the economic recession's gravity with 106 home sales last May as his master-planned community, Mountain Bridge, opened about 5 miles east of Tuscany Villas.

"As soon as the sign went up with our name on it at Tuscany, people started stopping in," he said. "That's also what happened to us at Mountain Bridge."

Blandford has been widely known for his revival of Las Sendas, Mesa's largest upscale community, which climbs along some of the southeast Valley's most beautiful foothills and washes and a championship golf course in northeast Mesa until it backs up against the Tonto National Forest.

The project was unveiled as Falcon Ridge in the mid-1980s by Albuquerque-based Bellamah Community Development. Bellamah stopped construction when the Valley's real-estate market bottomed out.



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Last May, Rosemary Ruiz (left) was among those camping out to buy a lot at Mountain Bridge, a Blandford Homes master-planned community in Mesa. Developer Jeff Blandford is experiencing the same demand with his Tuscany Villas.

Impressed with the community's terrain overlooking Usery Mountain Park, Blandford purchased the bulk of the development's home sites in 1995 and submitted his plans for construction.

At Tuscany, Blandford scaled back the number of home sites to create more mountain and golf-course views, completed the fashionable and spacious clubhouse and lowered prices, which expanded the market.

Yet many prospective buyers are already pre-qualified for loans and equipped for higher-end purchases when they start talking to Realtors.

Ted and Cheryl Pichor looked at the villas as a possible seasonal home for their annual five-month pilgrimage from a tiny town in Manitoba.

They've been coming to Mesa since 2005 on visits to Cheryl's mother and to escape Canada's frigid temperatures.

"I always look for quality, location and the amenities," said Ted, adding that the couple had checked out at least 20 new-home developments in the Valley.

"We almost bought earlier, when the Canadian currency was higher than the American dollar," he said.

But since the Canadian loonie's value dropped slightly below the dollar, home prices have plummeted, more than making up for the difference, he said.

The Pichors may get the best of both worlds, however, if the American dollar continues to fall because of fears that recent moves by the Federal Reserve could lead to inflation.

Cheryl said she picked the villas because of their proximity to her mother's home, an abundance of shopping and dining outlets and the "small community" feel of 291 home sites.

Within a block of the development are a dozen restaurants, retail shops, a Fry's Food Store and a Home Depot.

Three other supermarkets and scores of other shops are within a mile of the development.

Blandford's acquisition of the development also pleased Shelby Futch, owner of Painted Mountain Golf Course, which provides a backdrop for Tuscany Villas and a nearby clubhouse, restaurant and lounge for residents.

"I knew of Blandford's product and reputation," he said. "I'm impressed with his sense of urgency to get things done and get them done in a quality manner. He's done a good job with the curb appeal and the entry way. I think it's going to be a spectacular project."

Like Ted Pichor, who is 57, and his wife, a year younger, many buyers at Tuscany Villas are downsizing.

"We're hearing a lot about the size of the homes," Blandford said of the villas, which range from 1,260 to 1,819 square feet of living space. "Everyone is downsizing, and if it's going to be a permanent home, it's a major downsize."

And despite the development's upscale ambience, prices start at \$139,900 and top out at \$226,900, below the \$300,000 median sales price of new homes in Mesa.

Some of Blandford's success appears to be tied to Mesa's attraction for Canadians, said Jay Butler, director of Realty Studies in the Morrison School of Management and Agribusiness at Arizona State University's Polytechnic campus.

"Canadians are popular buyers of homes in the Mesa area, and Blandford knows how to market property," he said. "It's a great deal for them."