

Close to home

Community master plan

By Shermakaye Bass

SPECIAL TO THE AMERICAN-STATESMAN

Sunday, May 24, 2009

When you pull into Plum Creek in Kyle, you might at first think it's like other suburban developments: a picket-fence community with cookie-cutter "custom homes" and well-manicured public spaces, the requisite golf course, swimming pools and fitness center. But there's more to it — a lot more. Plum Creek is actually a town within a town.

From the soon-to-be-finished Seton Medical Center/Hays County nearby to the Rocking Horse Academy child development center to a swatch of major retail stores to, yes, even a funeral home, the development is a self-contained community.

In fact, while driving around the 2,200-acre mixed-used project with one of the developers recently, the joke was that you never have to go far from Plum Creek. Ever. You can be born at the hospital and, hopefully many moons later, be laid to rest by the town undertaker. In the meantime, you've got your family doctor and pediatrician in the neighborhood, as well as your own grocery store and bank, your (future) commuter rail line, a state-of-the-art performing-arts center, an elementary school, 150 acres of green space and trails and a stocked fishing pond. It's like an idyllic little Lake Wobegon within easy driving distance of Austin, San Marcos and San Antonio. (And don't forget Buda!)

Many of the streets are lined with fast-growing Mexican sycamores, and public spaces are clustered with live oak motts. "They contribute to that sense of closeness, and they provide nearly total shade on these sidewalks," explains developer Peter French, whose wife's family owned the land Plum Creek is on.

What's most striking about the community, though, is that it actually does feel like a small town in middle America. The residential streets are three feet narrower than average residential streets in, say, Austin, giving it that feeling of security and intimacy that some folks remember from growing up.

"Two traffic engineers published a study several years ago," says builder Terry Mitchell, "and at 25 miles per hour, there's about a 95 percent chance that there will not be a serious pedestrian accident. At 38 miles an hour, it's almost certain death. So we're designing the streets down to 20 miles an hour."

In this (literally) picket-fenced neighborhood, drivers drive slower, fewer accidents occur and more neighbors interact and chat from rolled-down car windows. Plum Creek is definitely not for those who want their own "space" — or for people who aren't into talking over the fence with the Joneses.

But it consciously pursues a "simpler-times" tone — that "new urbanism" principle, similar to the Mueller development in Austin, where people work, live and play in the same area. Everything's right there, especially for young families or empty nesters who want to be part of a community. The homeowners association fees — \$45 per month — include social events, such as school carnivals, weekend events, an Easter Egg Hunt, a wine tasting group, book and golf clubs and dances.

"We have a regular event called Front Porch Days, which we just hosted" this spring, says French.

He has been closely involved with Plum Creek, which has just entered Phase II of the overall development plan. The first phase called for about 1,400 homes, with about 5,000 people. The second phase has begun with the development of 150 lots and 40 homes built so far.

Ultimately, Plum Creek is expected to have about 8,700 housing units, including apartments, single-family, condos and townhomes, and a population of about 20,000.

Recent additions to the area around Plum Creek include H-E-B Plus, Kohl's and a planned Target and City Lights Movie Theater, plus Seton Medical Center Hays (opening in late 2009).

Phase II of Plum Creek includes Austin Regional Clinic, TrustTexas Bank and A+ Federal Credit Union.

Besides the amenities, many growing families will like the prices. Buyers can choose from 18 different floor plans (almost every one has a porch). The houses being built by KB Home start at about \$123,950; those by Meritage are larger and higher-priced, with a typical two-story Ashland model listed for \$209,990.

"What's really cool is if you have kids who go to after-school or before-school programs at the early childhood development center," says French, "they literally walk. They walk and ride their bikes. There's no bus service in Plum Creek. And at 3:30 in the afternoon, this place is just like a sea of wagons with parents coming to pick up their children. It's really very cool."

Vote for this story!

[Buzz up!](#)

Find this article at:

<http://www.statesman.com/search/content/business/stories/statesmanhomes/05/24/0524plum.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.