

South Main project begins to pay off

The first signs of life sprout up along Buena Vista riverfront development

by Jason Starr
Mail Staff Writer

BUENA VISTA – Many of the expectations hovering over the South Main development in Buena Vista have been satisfied this winter with the first visible signs of construction.

Three years after professional kayaking siblings Jed and Katie Selby brought their vision of a new urbanist, riverfront community to the Buena Vista Board of Trustees, the neighborhood is showing its first signs of life.

Four houses in the first phase of the project are under construction, streets are paved and lined with saplings and utilities are installed. Groundbreaking came about

six months later than the Selby's had advertised; they now understand their expectations may have been unrealistic.

"This is the first time we can actually see visually the results of our actions, so that's really exciting," Jed Selby said Tuesday. "For the first several years it was just paperwork. Now we have trails, streets and the whitewater park and it's really exciting starting to see houses going up."

The neighborhood has garnered local and national publicity for its progressive mixture of residential and commercial spaces and walkable design. The attention stirred anticipation, which turned into rumors and doubts among
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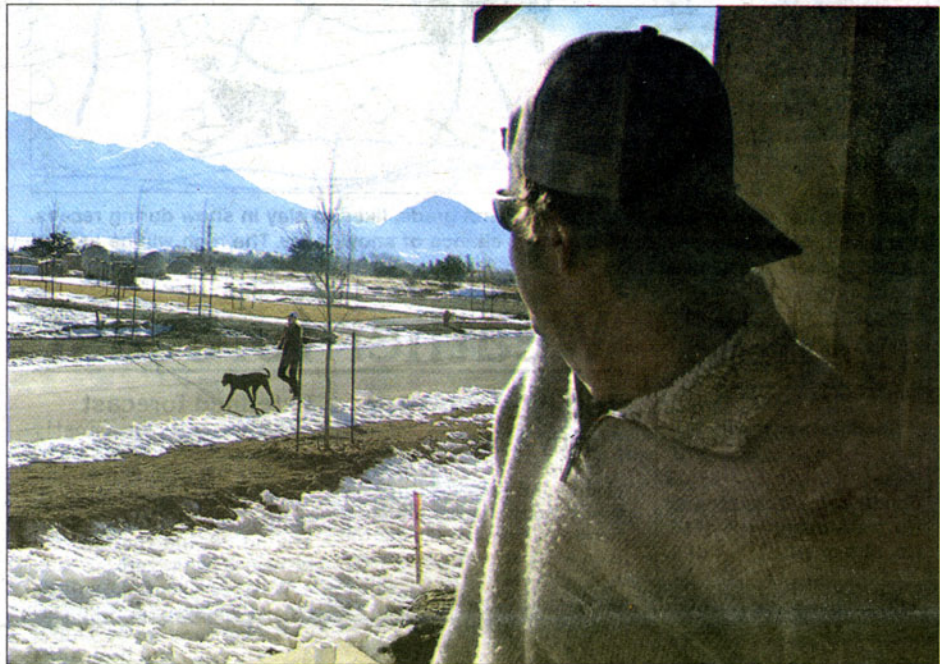


Photo by Jason Starr

Homeowner Mark Reed looks onto the street of his "dream home" Tuesday at the South Main development in Buena Vista. Construction of the first homes in the development began this winter.

New work answers old questions

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Buena Vista residents when construction seemed behind schedule.

Work on the ground this winter has quieted many of the lingering questions.

"People have been waiting and hearing about it for so long, so to finally see something tangible, it answers some of the questions the public had," Earl Richmond, owner of Colorado Kayak Supply on Main Street said. "People thought maybe the project had some challenges. It's always been talk and speculation but now it's finally happening. It's a really exciting time."

Expectations remain high along Main Street, where businesses struggle during the eight-month offseason. The infusion of families and professionals – many of the work-at-home variety – is expected to help stabilize businesses on a year-round basis.

"Main Street now in the shoulder season is pretty slow," Richmond said. "(South Main) will aid a lot of existing businesses and help with new businesses. With a community down there it will draw a lot more people down Main Street. We need it."

The first phase of South Main consists of 30 lots and is essentially sold out. At buildout, the development will have 370 homes. Currently about 70 percent of the owners plan to live in Buena Vista full time, and the developers are marketing the project as

a neighborhood in hopes of attracting young families.

That means more potential customers for Main Street business owner Dennis Adamek. He runs Sweet Shot, a kid-friendly candy and gaming business. Adamek remains skeptical but hopeful the development can infuse economic life to the downtown area.

"If it works out the way they think it will, I'm excited and I hope it does," Adamek said. "It's Bueny," he added, using the local slang for Buena Vista. "Something like that has never been tried here. I think as time goes on we'll see the full benefit of it. I deal with kids and families. If it's kids and families that move in, it's a big plus for us."

One of the first owners in South Main is former Arizona resident Mark Reed who is spending the winter constructing what he calls his "dream home."

In 2004 he paid about \$60,000 for a presale lot and is laying down roots on the development's first paved street.

Reed is an avid kayaker. Professionally, he is a general contractor and real estate appraiser. He expects an easy transition moving his career to Chaffee County, where construction is one of the leading industries.

As he gets to know his future neighbors, he's meeting engineers, attorneys, artists and computer experts. Some, he said, are planning to open

offices in Buena Vista. Others will work from home.

Most, like Reed, are coming from other areas of the country, although a handful are Chaffee County locals or transplants from the Front Range areas of Colorado.

"The world is changing and this development is a really good example of that," Reed said. "It's amazing how many people can work from home."

Most home-based businesses fetch white-collar fees, Reed added, which should be funneled into local businesses.

Currently, no lots or homes are for sale in the development. Most of the phase two and three sales will be of finished structures, not vacant lots. Phase two sales should begin in April, Financial Manager Andre Spino-Smith said. He declined to give pricing estimates.

The Selbys also recently purchased about 80 lots within the half-mile of intervening land between the existing downtown and the 40-acre parcel that South Main sits on. They hope to develop those parcels to create a seamless connection between South Main and the downtown area.

"They've made it over a big hump getting the first houses built and the streetscape in," South Main Marketing Director Laurie Benson said. "Now the energy is starting to build in the office, with the homeowners, in the community and with people interested in moving to South Main. They now see the vision coming to life."