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DESERT RIDGE BUILDERS IN HIGH GEAR

Michael Clancy, The Arizona Republic

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Construction has resumed at a high level in the Desert Ridge area, especially on parcels west of Desert Ridge Marketplace.

* Steel has been erected at CityNorth, where the first phase of the three-phase project is under way.

* Buildings also are going up rapidly at Toscana at Desert Ridge, on the other side of Deer Valley Drive from CityNorth.

* More buildings are on the rise at Bella Monte, along 56th Street just north of Deer Valley.

* And building is moving rapidly at **Fireside** at Desert Ridge.

"There was a period of time where builders were holding back, getting supply and demand evened out," said John Dingeman, a real estate appraiser who recently joined the Desert View Village Planning Committee. "From the appraisal side, I can tell you that we are seeing new construction. Builders are picking up steam and offering far fewer incentives."

CityNorth broke ground in November and the first phase is scheduled for completion next spring. So far, five restaurants and one department store, Nordstrom's, have been announced for the mixed use development.

State land sales driving force

According to Daniel Klutznick, head of the Desert Ridge Community Association and the master developer of the area, recent land sales by the Arizona State Land Department have been the driving force.

Two major parcels, one east of Tatum Boulevard and one west, were sold in April and May for record prices, ending a period of relative inactivity in land sales.

As for construction that is under way, passers-by can see:

* The beginnings of construction of High Street, the first phase of CityNorth, a 144-acre multiuse development just east of Desert Ridge Marketplace. The project is on schedule. Furthest along is a parking garage, spokeswoman Lisa Noble said, with foundations and structural steel beginning to go up along the north side of the project. High Street is expected to open in fall 2008, while the rest of the project is under construction. When finished, CityNorth will have about 1,500 residential units.

* Toscana, being built by Statesman Group on the north side of Deer Valley Drive across the way from CityNorth, "is on a steep incline again" in terms of sales and construction, said Karen Jernigan, vice president of sales and marketing. A huge development, its 1,568 condos could house as many people as live in Carefree. The units are priced from \$241,900 to \$650,000, a relative bargain for the neighborhood.

* Bella Monte, a Homes by Towne development, is about half built and half sold, according to Sue Larson, a sales associate at the site. When finished, it will have 345 homes, each part of a building that has five units.

Larson said the development "was only slightly affected" by the slump. Now, she said, "as fast as we are releasing units to sell, we're selling them." Prices range from \$323,900 to \$413,900.

* **Fireside** at Desert Ridge, a **Pulte/Del Webb** development, is moving along rapidly. Close to 200 of its 900 homes have been sold, she said, at prices ranging from \$359,900 to \$794,000.

* Site work is rolling ahead for Calasera at Desert Ridge. The Meritage Homes development will include 1,188 homes on 288 acres east of CityNorth. Prices are expected to range from \$300,000 to \$800,000.