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## Village gets a new builder LADYSMITH LORE

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BY RICHARD AMRHINE

The developers of Ladysmith Village succeeded in creating a community with small-town charm, complete with an old-fashioned clock in Founder's Park. There's now a new residents' clubhouse, to go along with the elementary school, library and amphitheater.

But there's no surprise these days about what isn't happening at Ladysmith Village, or virtually any other developing subdivision, and that would be steady sales of new homes.

Developer Newland Communities bought the 550-acre Caroline County project in 2006 from Ladysmith Land LLC, a partnership that included Jay and Jim Jarrell, Ron Hicks and Ivan Cowger. Newland paid \$100 million.

Having taken over the development as a severe economic downturn has crippled the housing industry, Newland's vice president of operations Tracy Graves said the company is determined to shake things up.

In its five years of existence, the village has seen only 150 houses built out of the 2,800 approved. When the housing market was going strong in 2003, Caroline supervisors saw the need to limit the pace of growth. They settled on a 12-year build-out for the village, and a ceiling of 250 houses a year. Bumping up against that ceiling hasn't been an issue so far.

But today there are a couple of new homes being built there--model homes by the Christopher Cos., a Northern Virginia builder working primarily in Fairfax and Prince William counties.

"We are trying to reawaken Ladysmith," Graves said.

Both Newland and Christopher are committed to staying true to the Ladysmith Village concept, she said.

That's clearly the case with two of the three Christopher Cos.' single-family models offered at the village. The Cottage Series and the Village Series models are designed to fit on narrow village lots.

Deborah Rosenstein, a vice president with Christopher Cos., said the company was drawn to the project because of the opportunity to build houses in the under-\$200,000 price range.

Cottage Series homes have three bedrooms and start with about 1,500 square feet of finished living space on two stories. An unfinished basement adds another 750 square feet or so. It's being offered for a limited time at \$189,990.

The Village Series homes are somewhat larger, with four bedrooms and two stories totaling about 2,000 square feet not including the basement. They start at \$249,000.

Both models offer an optional detached garage that is accessed from a rear alley, part of the village concept that aims to keep automobiles off some streets and garage doors out of sight.

A third design is Christopher's Estate Series, two-story Colonials with up to 2,700 square feet and an attached, street-facing garage. Those models would go on the community's larger lots.

Rosenstein said Christopher homes are built to environmentally sound standards, with Energy Star certified appliances and extra heavy insulation.

Newland's Graves said the company is hoping that Christopher Cos. might sell as many as 25 houses this year, with another 10 to 15 sales in varying price ranges by the community's existing builders. She said the variety of homes and builders offers prospective buyers a range of choices.

From the beginning, Ladysmith Village had relied on local builders and several remain active, if not extremely busy, there. One of them, Dan Spear of Spear Builders of Virginia, said he still has several lots waiting to be built on.

"We've been there from the beginning, and we'll be there until the job is finished," he said.

Spear said he offers models at the village in the 1,600-square-foot range for \$199,000. He sold one house there last fall and closed on another earlier this month.

"It's not a lot, but two is better than none," he said.

Shortly before the sale of the community to Newland in the spring of 2006, the original developers gained county approval for an age-restricted component to the village. Graves said the company may choose to pursue that market segment in the future. She said the company is also seeking a builder for the row of apartments-over-shops at the village center that was part of the original plan.

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