

The Successful Combination of Builder and Developer Marketing in PUDs

BY BRENDA L. DESJARDINS

It's a fact. Developers and builders think differently. It's not a bad thing and they are both usually right, but the difference must be considered in the planning of a successful master planned community.

Developers think in terms of "dirt," while builders think bricks and sticks. Developers think in a much longer term perspective and use bulldozers as a means to an end, often in more ways than one. Builders use hammers as their tool of choice and view their success in a shorter time frame, usually about the time it takes to design and build a small neighborhood.

It is a symbiotic, often love-hate relationship that affords the opportunity for a wide range of successes and pitfalls. So can these mindsets be melded so that everyone including the end user, the home buyer comes out a winner? With the right strategy and team, the opportunities are endless.

Case in point: The Residences at Bulle Rock in Havre de Grace, Maryland is an age-targeted community being developed around the five-star Bulle Rock Golf Course, home of the McDonald's LPGA Championship.

Upon completion, the gated community will comprise 2,200 homes all featuring first-floor owners' suites, open floor plans, vaulted ceiling, garages and additional amenities for luxury living. The social and recreational centerpiece of the resort-style community is a 37,000-square-foot Resident's Club, featuring a professionally-managed cardiovascular health and fitness



center, indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts, meeting rooms and more.

Developers Clark Turner, Manekin LLC and H&S Development envisioned a master planned community with a mix of condominium, attached and detached single family homes. The pre-development team comprised developer representatives, market research and marketing consultants and land planning experts. Creating a community where "Life Imitates Vacation" became the foundation for major decisions throughout the pre-development and development stages with the intention to build on the theme throughout the life of the community.

With an existing Zagat top-ranked golf course in place, name recognition was established and a commodity to build upon. A series of builders was interviewed for the community and a mix of local, regional and national builders – Clark Turner Signature Homes, D.R. Horton, NVHomes, Ryan Homes and Ryland Homes was selected. This builder mix would bring a sales and marketing expertise allowing for a breadth of product mix, market depth and staying power over a projected 10-year life span.

While it was the development team's job to sell the initial value of the community to the builders and establish an onsite environment for success, the builders took on an important role relaying this message to the consumer,

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both in onsite presentation and offsite advertising and marketing efforts.

The baseline strategy was to build on existing and regional amenities including the Bulle Rock Golf Course and its history rich neighborhood, as well as the restaurants and shopping of nearby Havre de Grace and the nearby lifestyle of the Chesapeake Bay.

An historic Georgian mansion onsite afforded spectacular views of the property and the Chesapeake Bay and provided immediate credibility and an impressive welcome center. Occupying an entire room was a 3-D, 108-inch x 108-inch octagonal topographic model illustrating the entire layout of the 1,000-acre community and the golf course. The welcome center also featured photos, a video shown on a large plasma television screen and 3-D models and fabric swatches of The Resident's Club.

Funded by the developers and builders, welcome center representatives demonstrated the community and planned amenities and turned over informed consumers to builder representatives. Additionally, builders centralized their pre-model sales operations from this historic mansion to avoid a "trailer park" pre-sale environment. Maps, signs and sequenced promotions directed traffic to builder models and the welcome center. (These efforts continue today from the resident's club, which now houses the topographic model, photos and plasma TV and former welcome center staff.)



Brighton
Ryan Homes

Integral to the initial and long term success of the project was the appropriate product mix and phasing to avoid direct competition of builders and product on site. While it is difficult to avoid all crossover, stringent architectural guidelines and required plan approvals were established to control product and price segmentation to achieve maximum absorption.

With changes in market conditions and ongoing pressure for continued performance, it took strong beliefs in the long term value of the project to maintain lot and home values. While the developer continued to invest substantial capital in common areas, amenities and onsite marketing, including the resident's club, the builder team increased advertising efforts and provided top sales support.

So how did this create a successful community and create a winning situation for the developer, the builders and ultimately the home buyer? Communication and trust enabled the sales teams to present the combined value of a great builder product and the faith in a development team that delivers on their promises. While buyers had to "believe" in the beginning of the community, they were rewarded with services and amenities that ultimately created an environment where "Life Imitates Vacation." ■

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