

Excitement surrounds east McKinney development

By **KRYSTAL DE LOS SANTOS**
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Most homebuyers in the market for a new \$200,000 to \$500,000 home in McKinney would never think to exit the freeway and head east.

While new home construction is a common sight in West McKinney, East McKinney has seen little of the residential boom that recently swelled the city to a population topping 100,000. However, Chapel Hill, a 47-acre development under construction near the city's historic district, is expected to bring 166 homes and much-needed investment into the east side. City officials and nearby businesses and churches are looking forward to providing services to the influx of residents.

"It already looks good, and all the houses aren't even up yet," said councilwoman Gilda Garza, who represents the district in which the development is located. "I'm just glad they're contributing to the revitalization of East McKinney. I like to see more

economic development there. Most of the growth goes west, so it's good to see rooftops going east of (U.S.) 75."

The development, being built by Wilbow Corp., offers 4,500-square-foot to one-acre lots with front yard maintenance provided by a homeowners association, historically-inspired European and American architecture, raised front porches, private courtyards, detached garages with guest quarters and outdoor and indoor fireplaces. The site includes two parks, one with an amphitheater, lush landscaping, a 14-acre greenbelt, ornamental gas streetlamps, and historic-style street signs. A meditative spot with benches in one of the parks is centered around an antique carved limestone angel, imported from France.

"Chapel Hill isn't just a poetic name we came up with," said Chas Fitzgerald, Wilbow president. "We really are on a hill and we are surrounded by churches."

Christ as Life Christian Center,

■ See **CHAPEL HILL**, Pg. 2

Hillcrest Christian Church, McKinney Bible Church and First Baptist Church of McKinney are blocks away from

the development.

Part of what inspired the company to locate in east McKinney, Fitzgerald said, was the site's

proximity to the downtown square.

"We like to do things out of the box and we knew there was not that much land available in east McKinney. We knew what was going on in downtown McKinney," he said. "It's fantastic what's happening at the square. The city leaders have been very visionary in making downtown a great place. We just thought it would be a great place to live."

Chapel Hill's planners estimate that their \$15 million investment will yield about \$1 million in property tax revenue for McKinney Independent School District, while adding few students. Most people attracted to the type of homes offered at Chapel Hill are "empty nesters," Fitzgerald said.

"It's a huge boom to Gilda Garza's district and a huge boom to MISD and I think the merchants on the square will be thrilled we're bringing that disposable income so close to downtown," he said.

The property is within walking distance from downtown and Towne Lake. Also, the company partnered with McKinney Parks Department and MISD to build a hike and bike trail that connects Chapel Hill, Towne Lake and the historic district.

"This is something I think is good for McKinney," said Mayor Bill Whitfield at a council meeting in December. "It brings a new dimension to the historic district."

Councilman Thad Helsley at the same meeting noted that Wilbow was "bringing an investment into an area that hasn't seen any."

Also pleased with Chapel Hill, are the churches that surround the property.

Christ as Life Christian Center secretary Dottie George added that the nearby residents provide a "good opportunity for us to talk to people and let them know about our church." The church is only a few car lengths away from the Chapel Hill entrance.

"It's good to bring new families in. This is a street of churches, so I think it will be good for all of us," said Bill Smith, pastor of Christ as Life Christian Center. "I like to see new homes on this side of the highway. The city's gone far enough west, it ought to go east for a while."

The first model homes in Chapel Hill are expected to open at the end of May.

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