



Project along I-10 has a European flair

Web Posted: 11/29/2007 08:34 PM CST

Creighton A. Welch
Express-News Business Writer

A new development along the Interstate 10 corridor will help fill in the area around Loop 1604. And it's going to be a cultural amalgam with an Italian-styled design, a French-derived name and a Dutch developer and owner.

The éilan is a mixed-use project of apartments, offices and retail next to La Cantera and across Interstate 10 from The Rim shopping center. The land is in the northwest corner of 1604 and I-10, just north of Six Flags Fiesta Texas.

"We are trying to develop a sustainable community with very elegant surroundings," said Carmen Taveras-Cruz, president of Wereldhave USA, the company developing éilan.

The name is derived from the French word élan, meaning vigor and liveliness. It will be designed with a Mediterranean style, and an "Old World meets New World" design.

The 120-acre development, which breaks ground today, is the company's first mixed-use project in the U.S.

Wereldhave has built and owns several properties in Dallas and Austin, but these are either solely office or residential complexes. This is also its first San Antonio project.

This is the latest mixed-use project to be announced in this booming part of San Antonio. One of those projects is Cresta Bella, north of éilan along Interstate 10. That plan calls for 400 total acres with 130 acres of retail and office space, 400 single-family homes and 750 multifamily units.

On the southeast corner of Interstate 10 and Loop 1604 there is a yet-to-be-named project planned on 99 acres with room for 1 million square feet of office, 300,000 square feet of retail and 1,500 multifamily units.

"We have been keeping an eye on San Antonio," Taveras-Cruz said. "The growth wasn't what we were looking for until the past two or three years."

Wereldhave bought the land in October 2005 for \$18.5 million and expects to eventually invest as much as \$300 million. The company picked this part of town because of continued successful development and business activity nearby.

"We like the development in La Cantera," Taveras-Cruz said. "Buying land in a quality location is critical because we are owners of the property."

The floor plans for the development still are being created, but the éilan will build about 1,400 upscale apartments.

"They are so high-end that you can't compare them to regular apartments in the area," Taveras-Cruz said.

The project also will offer two Class-A office buildings with 200,000 square feet of total space.

"There is a market today for office, but there's really not very much Class-A space available for smaller businesses," Taveras-Cruz said.

Wereldhave also plans to build a 150- to 200-room hotel and spa, as well as 30,000 square feet of boutique retail, underground parking, a nondenominational chapel, an amphitheater and a specialty grocery store. The company also plans to have an electric trolley running through the property.

"Certainly, the shift is toward a more interactive community, which is becoming even more marketable," Taveras-Cruz said.

The éilan does have residential neighbors, some of whom are concerned with all the surrounding development.

Taveras-Cruz said the company met several times with its closest residential neighbor, the Crownridge neighborhood.

"There are a lot of homeowners in the area who are not happy to see the area being developed," said Rudy Herrera, president of the Crownridge of Texas Owners Association. "However, development in the area seems to be inevitable."

He said although there is some concern, the residents aren't selling their homes and leaving.

"There's a difference between the best use of land and no use of land," said Herrera, a six-year resident. "I might rather have no use of land across my street because it's beautiful, but is that the best use?"

There will be a 75-foot easement separating the development and the neighborhood, and 25 acres will be kept as a nature preserve, according to Taveras-Cruz. Crownridge also owns an 8-acre greenbelt.

"There's some concern about what effect it's going to have on the natural habitat," Herrera said. "But it appears that they're trying to build somewhat to the natural land."

Wereldhave said it will seek Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification for some of the buildings in the development. These buildings would meet nationally set levels of sustainability and conservation of water, energy and materials.

Last year, Wereldhave built the first privately held platinum-certified office building in the U.S. near Dallas. Platinum is the highest level of LEED.

Wereldhave develops and finances its own properties, funding everything out of its own equity. It also does not do any pre-leasing, so the hotel and office spaces are all being built on speculation.

Next week, construction will start, first with the marketing center and then the office buildings.

Taveras-Cruz said the first building should open in spring 2009.

cwelch@express-news.net

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