

Homewise busy in Tierra Contenta

By Paul Weideman

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The Old Las Vegas Place project is complete — 50 houses built and sold during the recession-fueled construction slowdown — and its developer is busy on three other fronts. The Santa Fe nonprofit Homewise, Inc., has another hot success with the northside project called Piñon Ridge.

“As of July 15, after just over a year, we have 100 percent of our 39 homes at Piñon Ridge under contract,” said Rob Gibbs, the organization’s real estate development manager. The homes there are priced from \$265,000 to \$350,000.

The newest project for Homewise is Las Palomas, which has a grand opening this month in the southside Tierra Contenta subdivision. “This will be 46 homes,” Gibbs said. “We have four floor plans, both 2- and 3-bedroom models, with some pitched-roof elements that include some vaulted living-room ceilings.”

Prices at Las Palomas run between \$212,000 and \$224,000, with square footage ranging from 1,300 to 1,700.

The third project, also in Tierra Contenta, is ongoing. Rincon del Sol is a 38-home development and 22 had been sold as of mid-July.

“We should be built out there in another year,” Gibbs said. “Las Palomas will be built out in 18 months.”

Built out and sold.

“That’s right. Most everything we do is pre-sold.

“One thing that’s unique about Homewise is that we have this steady pipeline of people who are working with our home advisors and that’s generating about 21 ‘buyer-ready’ families per month who then meet with our sales team to find what they want and what they can afford.”

Some Homewise clients choose a pre-existing home.

“The reason why we started building houses ourselves is that there was not enough inventory,” said Sonja Kalyani, Homewise marketing associate.

The advantages of a new Homewise house are simply freshness and significant green qualities. For a few years now, every one of its new homes has been built to the BuildGreen New Mexico “Gold” standard. A wall chart at the nonprofit’s Siler Road office shows that a new Homewise-built house can save the owner more than \$4,000 a year compared to what Gibbs calls a typical “used” house. This is achieved both through lower monthly payments with the Homewise financing and through savings on utilities bills and maintenance costs.

“One couple previously lived in a mobile home and she was really excited about the energy efficiency

after they bought a new house in Rincon del Sol,” Kalyani said. “I asked her what the best thing was and I thought she would say having the space or having a yard, but she said it was the energy savings, for both water and heat.”

Homewise is a member organization of Washington, D.C.-based NeighborWorks America, which creates opportunities for people to live in affordable homes, improve their lives and strengthen their communities, according to the mission statement.

In line with its annual NeighborWorks Week in early June, Homewise held a “Happy Trails” event in Tierra Contenta. “We had an event at the Zona Del Sol community center and we invited all of Tierra Contenta as well as Homewise customers for a walk on their nice trail system, then we had dinner and just got to know each other,” Kalyani said.

“There are more than 7,000 residents in Tierra Contenta, including about 60 percent of Santa Fe’s young people. A lot of Tierra Contenta homeowners went through the Homewise program, where they meet with our home-purchase advisors and take our classes and use our brokers, and take advantage of our lending.”

Homewise offers free financial fitness classes every other month. These are useful for people who are thinking about buying a house, but also for anyone interested in improving her or his budgeting. The next one is Saturday, Aug. 10, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call 983-9473.

Kalyani said another example of the Homewise emphasis on the local community is its Artisan Project. It recruits local artists to produce hardware, lighting, and other fixtures for Homewise homes. The three model homes at Las Palomas also will feature local artists’ work as part of its decor, she said.

“Our Las Palomas grand opening is 5-7 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 21, and we’ll have another event for customers and neighbors to tour the three model homes and have dinner.”