STATE OF THE VILLAGES: DEVELOPER MARK MORSE TOUTS USF HEALTH PARTNERSHIP, HOME VALUES AND EXCITING RETAIL OPPORTUNITIES IN ANNUAL VHA ADDRESS

BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD

Above: Villages developer Mark Morse told Villages Homeowners Association members of how a bright future exists for them in areas such as health care, home values and other community benefits. The remarks came during his annual State of The Villages address. Below: Dr. Stephen Klasko, dean of the University of South Florida College of Medicine, said USF Health experts are already listening to and learning from Villages residents on how they might be able to help create ‘America’s Healthiest Hometown.’

USF Health professionals say Villagers can leave lasting legacy

By CURT HILLS
DAILY SUN

THE VILLAGES — Villagers are being asked to recognize and visualize the possibilities before them.

That was the theme of the night from developer Mark Morse at Wednesday evening’s annual State of The Villages address during the Villages Homeowners Association meeting at the Savannah Center.

However, Morse certainly wasn’t alone in forecasting a bright future ahead for Villages residents in areas such as health care, home values, increased retail opportunities and a new string of amenities.

He was joined by his sister, Tracy Mathews, who told of new attractions ahead for the community, as well as a team of professionals from USF Health that infused the notion that Villages residents could create a legacy in health care that could attract worldly attention.

And VHA President Don Hahnfeldt said it all adds up “to create a retirement community where dreams can come true.”

Morse kicked off his annual address by reminding residents of the steady growth that’s already resulted in The Villages – such as 90 miles of paths to connect 67 Villages. There’s also a recreation department that boasts 57 centers and swimming pools, with 213 softball teams, more than 100 tennis and pickleball courts, and 1,800 clubs and organizations, he said.

See VILLAGES, A12
Cana", you say only in The Villages for that?" Morse asked.

He also pointed to The Villages Charter Schools as "a wonderful recruiting and retention tool" in attracting a workforce that provides Villages residents with "world-class service and world-class goods." Morse said the school system is producing a future workforce as well as a success rate of sending students to college that is unprecedented.

"In the last two years - 93 percent (of VHS graduates went on to college), there's not a school anywhere that does that," Morse said.

Morse also touted the community's "micro-economy" that is bucking national trends of a declining business climate. In the last two years, The Villages has signed 107 leases for new businesses, illustrating that area consumers are buying and new ventures want to take advantage of that buying power.

The numbers are also strong in home sales, Morse said. In the first quarter of this year alone, 543 new homes were sold - a 7 percent increase compared to a year ago. The gains are even better in pre-owned home sales, up 10 percent compared to the same time last year.

And for future residents wanting to stake their claim to property in The Villages? Morse said the number of buyers reserving homesites has jumped a whopping 45 percent compared to the first quarter of 2010.

"If all of these numbers I told you still pan out for the rest of the year, 3,500 to 4,000 people are still going to be wanting to move to The Villages," Morse said of the remainder of the year.

Morse said there's only 1,300 home opportunities north of County Road 466A remaining and the buying frenzy south of there took off instantly, with 55 homes south of County Road 466A sold in the first eight days of availability.

"The thought occurred to me - imagine what the value of your home was going to be after we stop supplying 2,500 new homes a year," Morse said.

"Think about that for a minute. Four thousand people wanting to come here every year, and we're providing about 2,500 of those homes. That demand is not going to go away."

Mathews, The Villages' vice president of design, said there's several new things ahead that will continue to fuel the demand to live in 'The Villages. Sterling Heights will be the final recreation center north of County Road 466A to be completed, followed by Captiva Recreation Center, which will be the first facility to debut south of County Road 466A.

That area south of Colony Cottage Recreation Center is also being developed to feature the Sarasota Golf training facility, the District Public Safety Department's new fire station and Bonifay Country Club.

But perhaps the biggest attraction is Brownwood, which will be 'The Villages' third downtown district.

"We hope to break ground on the first buildings soon," Mathews said.

Early plans call for a sales and information center, as well support services for that operation, along with a Citizens First Bank branch and The Villages' third movie theater.

Morse then turned his attention to health care and The Villages' new partnership with USF Health of Tampa.

"They really believe in what's happening here; that's why they're here," Morse said. "It's a wonderful opportunity for us to leave a legacy."

USF Health's CEO and Dean of the University of South Florida College of Medicine, Dr. Stephen Klasko, said the partnership is a perfect match between two unique entities.

Dr. Les Miller, USF's chair of the cardiovascular department, agreed.

"We were so excited to meet the Morse family and senior leadership of 'The Villages because it was an immediate fit," Miller said. "We saw a true commitment to excellence and innovation. They've set the standard where they are and we're trying to create that same transformative change in health care. And so that union was perfect, but we want to partner with you (residents)."

Klasko said USF Health will conduct a major health study that examines the current health of Villages residents. USF Health will also conduct a "concert series" in which various medical experts at the school will visit The Villages to share the latest medical tips with residents, spend time at The Villages High School with students in the health academy and meet with small groups to "listen and learn" from residents.

Klasko said another goal of the partnership will be to work with those in the current health care system to ensure that patients here have the latest and best treatments available for enhanced care.

Jay Wolfson, a USF distinguished professor in public health, law and medicine, told VHA members that the emphasis will be on personalized care for each resident.

"The health is not 'our' health," he said of the overall community. "It's your health, and your health," he added, pointing from one resident to another.

"Wolfson said there's evidence and proof that The Villages lifestyle is helping to improve lives and longevity - the goal will be to figure out in great detail how that occurs for each person - and then use that information to help others."

"We think that information can be valuable for everyone else as well," Wolfson said.

Miller said he believes the study and developing personalized care will enable USF Health to "expand the horizons of what can be done today in many areas."

The goal of The Villages will be to go beyond the Framingham Study, which was completed decades ago in Massachusetts.

"That study taught us that LDL cholesterol is a big risk, HDL cholesterol is protective, high blood pressure is associated with stroke. They are the cornerstone, the fundamentals of how we practice cardiovascular health today," Miller said.

"We can triple the size of that study. You're poised, hopefully, in what could be one of the most fundamentally important observations in health care."

One of the first steps to kick off the partnership is to get residents connected, Klasko said. He unveiled a website, villages.health.usf.edu, that will allow residents to get connected and take advantage of many options that USF Health offers.

"It will be a way for you to interact with us," Klasko said.
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