

# WHETSTONE RANCH BREAKS GROUND

## Housing boom now under way

**THELMA GRIMES**  
News-Sun

Ernie Graves purchased more than 15,000 acres on the east side of State Route 90 nearly 12 years ago, with the vision of building a housing development that has come to be known as Whetstone Ranch.

Over the years some have questioned if the 20,000-home development would become reality. Those doubts were erased Tuesday as a groundbreaking ceremony kicked off construction of the first home.

"It's taken a long time to get through all the regulatory issues," said Graves, a Tucson resident. "We haven't cut corners in any aspect. This is going to be top quality. I think all the paperwork and getting the legal aspects



Brendan FitzSimons/News-Sun

Marking the official start of growth in Benson last Tuesday, Mayor George Scott, at left, Bob Workman of R.L. Homes, Inc., Pat Lopez of the Whetstone Development Company, City Manager Boyd Kraemer and John Davis of Oak Canyon Realty are happy to get things started in the groundbreaking ceremony.

taken care of was 70 percent of the work. Now, the actual part people can see will be the final 30 percent. It's a great kickoff for Benson."

And what a kick it's going

to be, as Whetstone Ranch is expected to bring more than 20,000 homes to Benson over the next 20 years.

Whetstone Ranch is not the only projected growth, as

the City Council has approved plans over the last year calling for more than 15,000 homes in a variety of

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The Whetstone Ranch project was a vision that started with Ernie Graves, at right, more than 12 years ago. With planning and support from brother Lloyd, also pictured, that vision has become reality. Construction on the 20,000-home Whetstone Ranch development is now ongoing. The brothers were pictured at last Tuesday's groundbreaking ceremony.

housing developments throughout the community. Of that, Whetstone Ranch consists of 1,030 homes.

Pat Lopez, of the Whetstone Development Company, said a project of "this size and scope takes a lot of time to make happen."

"This is not about just building homes," he said. "This is about building a community through a vision we can all share."

The first home, which already has the plumbing installed, and is now just waiting for the cement and the walls to go up, is part of the Cottonwood Bluffs subdivision.

R.L. Workman Homes is building the 100-home subdivision. Company President Bob Workman said the first home should be complete in the next three months.

"This house is the first of Whetstone Ranch and that's why we are here today,"

Workman said. "But all the credit has to go to Ernie Graves. I am just a beneficiary of what Ernie has done for this area. He is responsible for putting all of this together."

By this time next year, Lopez estimated phase one, which consists of 45 homes in Cottonwood Bluffs, should be complete, and phase two, which is platted for 55 homes, should be well "under way."

Three other builders will be putting homes up in other planned subdivisions, Lopez said. Those developments are known as Cottonwood Highlands, which is platted at 270 homes and Canyons at Whetstone, which entails 76 homes in three phases.

Pulte Homes, a Tucson housing developer, is also making progress, Lopez said. Pulte, the biggest developer in the project, is planning a retirement community that will consist of 13,750 homes over 6,000 acres.

However, while Pulte is moving forward with plans, the land sale will not be final until March, Lopez said.

In the well-attended event on Tuesday, Whetstone representatives, along with Benson city officials, agreed this is a big step toward the future.

"It's an exciting day for Benson," said Mayor George Scott. "The City Council has worked really hard to put this thing together."

City Manager Boyd Kraemer, said this development will put Benson on the map for "being the best city in Cochise County."

"We are just getting started," he said. "There is a lot of work to get done here. The thing in Benson right now is the belief in our future."

Banking on the future is just what the city continues to do as final plans have been approved for the following developments besides Whetstone Ranch:

- Kartchner Vistas, a 201-home development on State Route 90
- San Pedro Estates, 224 homes on Madison and Darby streets
- Turquoise Hills, 32 homes on State Route 80
- Old Homestead, 24 homes on Pomerene Road
- San Pedro Vista, 121 homes on Ridge Drive
- Station Overlook, 33 homes on Pearl Street
- Water Crest, 53 homes on Ocotillo Road
- La Cholla Heights, 45 homes on Catarina Street.
- La Mesa San Pedro, a 13-home development proposed on La Mesa Drive.

In commercial development, the biggest prospect planned for 2006 is Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart is planning to build a 99,000-square-foot store on the corner of Prickly Pear Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street.