

Community activity defines Forest Oaks, southeast Guilford

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Special Sections

Sunday, May 22

Great things are happening in southeast Guilford County, community organizers say.

The Urban Loop has delivered on promised results, providing residents a more direct route to destinations north and west of Greensboro.

A plan to guide development has been approved by county officials and includes input from residents interested in cultivating a controlled business environment.

Upgrades to Southeast Middle and Southeast High schools are under way, and a substantial renovation to Alamance Elementary School is expected to be completed in time for the 2011-12 school year.

Special events are growing. And Forest Oaks Country Club is making significant changes to build membership and cement its standing as a community anchor.

These reasons prompted Realtors who live and work in southeast Guilford's Forest Oaks community to join forces for an open house event today. Seven agents will be showing 11 properties with prices from \$175,000 to \$369,900 and sizes from 1,900 to 4,000-plus square feet. These homes offer a fair representation of the price range throughout the neighborhood, which Realtors say is from \$149,000 to \$450,000.

The community involvement in social and development issues is what sets Forest Oaks and surrounding neighborhoods apart, according to residents.

Tam Bagwell with Allen Tate Realtors is leading the open house event and representing her parents, who are selling their home on Oakcliffe Road. Bagwell has fond memories of her years growing up in Forest Oaks, from bicycling around the neighborhood to afternoons at the country club pool.

Though they relocated, Win and Lin Johnson found their way back to the community more than five years ago. The couple purchased a contemporary home that reminded them of Frank Lloyd Wright's work and has a modern California look, Win Johnson says. They've completely remodeled the home since purchasing it — "everything is brand-new," from the roof, floors and bathrooms, to the concrete driveway, he says.

Though it's time to downsize, the move is bittersweet. "We always had a soft spot in our hearts for Forest Oaks," he says.

Opportunities to get involved have made the neighborhood attractive to families.

One group that encourages residents to be active is the Forest Oaks Community Association. Established in 1968, the voluntary association has around 400 members. Linda Welborn, communications liaison, says the group's initiatives include social events for adults and families, community-improvement projects, a regular newsletter to members and a resident directory. All the efforts are designed to support the neighborhood, she says.

"You do have this sense of community," Bagwell says. "A lot of people have lived there a very long time."

Betty Gilmore, a Realtor with Allen Tate who is showing three properties on today's tour, has lived there since 1968. She's seen the community, started in the 1960s around the Forest Oaks Country Club and golf course, grow and develop.

Among the changes Gilmore has noted in Forest Oaks and surrounding neighborhoods: There are more alternatives in housing styles, with the addition of communities such as Stone Gables Villas at Forest Oaks. The portion of the Urban Loop finished in the mid-2000s has made all parts of the city more accessible. Water and sewer access has improved development prospects. And the business community has grown in the past few years, with the opening of a new Food Lion grocery store, as well as restaurants, dry cleaning and other service options that residents at one time had to drive into Greensboro to find.

"Since 2007, there've probably been 10 new businesses come into the area," says Bob Chamberlain, interim president of the Southeast Guilford Community Association, which was started in 2007. "We look for opportunities for other businesses to come in. The area is growing substantially."

Chamberlain and his family came to Forest Oaks from Chicago about 35 years ago. He and his wife recently moved to Stone Gables because of its one-floor design, but they wanted to stay in a community they love and in which they are deeply involved.

“One of our goals is to develop leadership and maximize community involvement on issues in the community and to provide a community voice for all southeast Guilford community residents,” he says.

Initiatives have included the development of the now-approved mixed-use plan for the area between Liberty Road and U.S. 421 at Woody Mill Road; improvements to the public schools that serve the area; and planning of community events such as the annual Fun Fest at nearby Hagan-Stone Park, which informal attendance counts show grew from 3,000 to 6,000 participants in its first three years. The group also formed a foundation in 2008 that funds initiatives at local schools and parks, including the 409-acre Hagan-Stone Park, which offers camping and outdoor recreation options and is frequented by area residents, community groups and church associations.

An anchor in the neighborhood has been Forest Oaks Country Club, established in 1965 and host of the PGA Tour’s Wyndham Championship from 1977-2007. Through changes in the economy, the 443-member club has been a mainstay for residents drawn to the swimming, tennis and golf facilities. The club’s current initiative is aimed at attracting a new generation of members. According to Justin Holton, director of membership, a paired membership program started May 1 offers reduced dues for members and member-sponsored prospects for a year.

The club also has worked to improve its facilities and services, Holton says. Changes in the past year include: an HVAC and roof replacement at the clubhouse; new surfaces for the tennis courts; improvements to the area around the Olympic-size swimming pool; and an affiliation with Precision Tennis Academy, which leads clinics and lessons. Additionally, Andy Furness, formerly of Ganache, is the club’s chef. The menu is updated quarterly, and nonmembers can try it out on Saturdays and Sundays when the club dining room is open to the public.

“We feel like it’s the core of the neighborhood,” Holton says. “It allows people to have a great golf course and great dining facility, instead of having to go into town.”

Chamberlain hopes the community initiatives and events like the Forest Oaks open house and the Greensboro Regional Realtor Association golf outing Monday will help people “rediscover southeast Guilford County” and “let people know all the great things happening down here.”