

ESSEX PARK CELEBRATES THE FAMILY

Home Fest features five family-centered homes in growing Valpo neighborhood

by Julia Versau
Special to the Times

What keeps young families from buying their own homes? Although much depends on family finances, mortgage offerings, and other factors, it is also true that too few neighborhoods are able to provide the amenities families need at anywhere near the price levels they can afford. Essex Park wants to change that dynamic. The Coolman Communities, Inc. neighborhood is inviting visitors to see several Essex Park model homes during its "Home Fest" this weekend.

Home Fest, designed around the theme "Home for Your Family," is a family-focused event. The builder is hoping to see many children, and is even giving four free passes to Zao Island to families who tour the open models. There will also be a drawing for a grand prize.

Home Fest is set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday. To get to Essex Park, take State Road 2 south to the entrance on the west side of the street. More details are available at www.coolmanbuilt.com or by calling (219) 464-7510.

Five Models Open

Home Fest will feature five model homes at Essex Park: four different two-story residences and a one-level ranch home. One of the two-story homes on display is highlighted by a main level master suite, a design that is growing in popularity among local buyers. In various stages of construction, the tour lets visitors see how a home is built at Essex Park, from the foundation to the finishing details.

All of the homes at Essex Park are designed to provide the maximum amount of square footage at the most affordable price. A case in point is Coolman Communities' new model, "The Danvers," an 1,844 square foot two-story home priced at \$178,900 including the lot. The home has a basement and includes a 330 square foot unfinished bonus room.

"The Danvers" is typical of the Coolman strategy when it comes to building family-friendly and family-affordable housing. This brand new home is lovely, benefiting from the design expertise of the builder, and it is affordable because the company has streamlined much of its material buying to reduce overall construction expense. Costs are also reduced because the basement can be finished later (it is outfitted with rough-in for another bathroom and has sunlight-welcoming daylight windows), as can the bonus room. Families find price levels more attractive when they can move into a brand new home that saves some of the build-out projects for later. Usually, young families don't have much choice. A brand new home, including homesite, can be purchased at Essex Park for as little as \$154,300.

"Our aim is to address the needs of young families," said company president Bob Coolman. "They need lots of space, but are often dealing with a more limited budget because they're in their early years of child rearing. It's a critical time for young families, when they can use all the help they can get."

Family Amenities

Families also do not have much choice when it comes to neighborhood amenities. Essex Park is different. The sense of community that has been created here is organic, with neighbors helping

neighbors to organize rummage sales, plant flower beds, create neighborhood watch teams, and sponsor community parties and events.

Interestingly, one of the buyer groups attracted to Essex Park is the downsizer market - seniors who want to sell an older home, buy a new one, but not move to the sunbelt or ensconce themselves away from families with children. According to sales director Carol Carden, that has helped create a community with lots of interchange between neighbors.

"We have more than one honorary Grandpa at Essex Park," Carden said. "People watch over each other here and enjoy each other's families."

The setting and amenities help. Streets and sidewalks designed for walking and safe play encourage jaunts and jogs, and informal chats between neighbors. The houses are sited such that "play rambles" are enclosed by the homes where parents can keep an eye from the kitchen sink and ample shared play space is open to youngsters. The community has an active garden club, a neighborhood skating pond in winter, and recently hosted an everybody-come block party.

At Essex Park, the built environment encourages interaction. That includes front porches - what Coolman calls "outdoor rooms" - where families can sit and talk and visit with passers-by.

"We're building brand new homes in the best way we know how and working to make them more affordable," Coolman said. "In the process, we also strive to go beyond houses to community, so that the entire neighborhood works well for real people."

AMENITIES AT ESSEX PARK

- * Curving roadways to increase safety, slow traffic
- * "Ramble" play areas for children
- * Pond with summer fishing, winter skating
- * Greenbelt buffer between Essex Park and nearest neighbor
- * Garden Club
- * Social Clubs
- * Neighborhood Watch
- * Valparaiso Schools, city water, sewer, services
- * Wildlife preserve
- * Quality homes, affordable prices
- * Moments from downtown Valparaiso

IF YOU GO

Essex Park's Home Fest is scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Families will receive (4) passes to Zao Island (which has miniature golf, batting cages, go-carts, etc.) as a gift after touring open models. More information is available by calling (219) 464-7510 or visiting the Coolman Communities, Inc. web site at www.coolmanbuilt.com.

DETAILS

To get to Essex Park, follow State Road 2 south to the entrance on the west side of the street. Follow signs to tour site and model homes.

After Home Fest, the model home sales center will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday. The newly designed web site offers a wealth of information about Essex Park as well as other Coolman Communities, Inc. neighborhoods.