

“ULTIMATE BABY BOOMER HOME” OPENS TO PUBLIC

The Prairie at Aberdeen features homes reflecting latest research, appreciation for nature

by Julia Versau

There's a new neighborhood in town that everyone is going to want to see. The Prairie at Aberdeen, a groundbreaking new development in Valparaiso, reflects sensitivity to nature and a concern for home buyers that is rare in this region.

The Prairie, conceived by Capstone Development, is a distinctive neighborhood of 54 brand new homes in an environmentally thoughtful, prairie enhanced village. Designed to satisfy the needs of “baby boomers” and others who want to experience more beauty and convenience and less home maintenance and hassle, The Prairie is the result of a great deal of innovative thought, conversation, research, and design.

The first two homes at The Prairie will be open to the public beginning Saturday. Visitors are welcome to tour brand new homes built by Charlson Custom Homes and Coolman Communities, Inc. from noon to 8 p.m. daily. A \$5 admission charge will benefit Spring Valley Homeless Shelter.

What's so new about The Prairie? For starters, Capstone Development – headed by innovative developer Bob Coolman – has treated the land like the precious asset it is. About half of the site at The Prairie is preserved as open space, where the developer has not only saved existing prairie, but will work to restore it.

Homes are clustered in a charming village configuration that allows each house views of the natural scene just outside its windows. In fact, large windows in the homes act as frames to outdoor vistas that read like exquisite paintings.

A decade ago, Bob Coolman forged new territory with his “Working Woman's Cottage,” a design for homes resulting from conversations with real home buyers. That process was revisited with The Prairie. Coolman Communities and Charlson Custom Homes, the two exclusive builders at The Prairie, hosted a series of focus groups with baby boomer age volunteers. The idea was to find out exactly what kind of home design, features, materials, technologies, landscaping, and ambience prospective buyers desire.

The volunteer focus group participants were hardworking and extremely thoughtful, says Coolman. “We were the beneficiaries of some terrific ideas,” Coolman said. “Our volunteers spent hours thinking about every aspect of home design and function, and their ideas inform everything we're doing at The Prairie.”

The baby boomer consultants, given a blank piece of paper and total freedom, were able to design their dream homes. The result – as described in a brochure the builders produced for The Prairie – is a neighborhood that is serene, sensible, and smart. Growing out of this unique collaboration, The Prairie features homes that are rich in traditional materials and low in maintenance requirements. Large windows, multi-use

spaces, and places to enjoy the outdoors are top priorities. The consultants also let the builders know that his and her rooms – for working at the computer, reading, or hobbies – are a must, as are large, separate closets.

Outside, the consultants wanted to see less lawn to mow, and more natural spaces and garden areas. The trend definitely pointed away from large expanses of grass requiring chemicals and cutting, and toward easier-care landscaping that leaving time free for other pursuits.

The consultants enjoyed the process and were amazed at the openness of the builders. “It was wonderful to be asked to participate,” said Mary Lou Strassheim, one of the focus group volunteers. “We couldn’t believe how much the builders listened. To see the features we recommended actually built into the homes gives us a warm sense of authorship and contribution.”

Joyce Knauff, a master gardener, enjoyed helping with landscaping ideas. “We were totally interested in finding the balance between beautiful gardens and low maintenance,” Knauff said. “We came up with some very promising ideas.”

Beautiful new homes incorporating the latest ideas, nestled in an idyllic prairie setting – The Prairie has changed the face of housing already, and could be the vanguard of new magic in the marketplace.

DETAILS

Visit www.prairieataberdeen.com for directions and additional information. The Grand Opening is set for noon to 8 p.m. from October 8 through 16. A \$5 admission charge per adult will support Spring Valley Homeless Shelter in Valparaiso. For more information, call Bill McClure (Coolman Communities, Inc.) at 405-8973 or Lindsay Charlson (Charlson Custom Homes) at 464-2745.