

Central Parke residents trim maintenance, costs

By Amy Rogers Nazarov
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It's been only about nine months, but Michael James, newly arrived from Phoenix to oversee the growth of Keller Williams Realty's Waldorf office, is sold on his new town, and Southern Maryland in general.

"I like the area a lot," Mr. James says, noting the mild climate, excellent school systems and lower cost of living found here. "It's not just that prices of the homes are lower, but that [related expenses] are also less. Compare this to parts of Northern Virginia or Prince George's County, where the taxes are significantly higher; Waldorf is still an awesome value."

Mr. James says that Waldorf is undergoing a period of rapid growth, with new stores and office buildings opening and new homes continuing to go up.

"The market in general has not been as active as it has been in recent years, but it is still very stable here," he says, due partly to the federal government's presence, such as nearby Andrews Air Force Base. "People can live and work in Waldorf, or even a little bit south, because it is affordable, and there are certainly enough jobs here."

One specialized local community, into which the very first residents have been moving in recent weeks, is Central Parke of Colonial Charles, designed for and marketed to active adults 55 and older. Many of them, though

past the age at which they are eligible for retirement, continue to work, says Bill Slenker, president of Slenker Communities in Springfield, Va., the Central Parke developer.

"Today, about 60 percent of our residents are working at least part-time," Mr. Slenker says. Back in 1994, when Slenker Communities began to invest significant resources in growing the 55-and-over housing market, only about 20 percent of the residents were still in the work force, he says.

Priced in the low \$300,000s to mid-\$400,000s, the housing units at Central Parke at Colonial Charles are selling well, Mr. Slenker says. The builders working in the community are the Airston Group and Woodside

see WALDORF, page F27

Homes.

"The entire metro region has a huge aging population who are age-qualified and income-qualified to buy [these] new homes," he says. Residents in this and other Central Parke communities "don't want to be isolated, but they do like the tranquility of a neighborhood designed just for them."

Among Central Parke at Colonial Charles' many attractions are the perks of having someone else mow the lawn and shovel snow; the comforts of a resort club with a pool and sauna; and a WiFi-enabled business center used by residents still working full or part

time, as well as those who just want to send the odd fax.

Mr. Slenker says that a condominium project is slated to begin here next year, possibly priced in the \$250,000 range. Buyers have a wide range of choices, especially in the current market.

"You get the good old heart of Waldorf, but if you like, you can live on the outskirts, like La Plata or Hughesville," says Cheryl Bare, a Realtor with Century 21 Comstock Earnest Inc., a 16-agent office in Waldorf.

Waldorf's historic sites — such as the house of Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, who treated the broken leg sustained by John Wilkes Booth as he fled Ford's Theatre after shooting President Lincoln in 1865 — form another part of its wide-ranging appeal. Mudd's former home is part of a Booth escape route, which the Charles County Office of Tourism markets with a free brochure available online (www.visitcharlescounty.com/brochures.htm).

Waldorf is also the home of the American Indian Cultural Center/Piscataway Museum (www.piscatawayindians.org); the Capital Clubhouse, a multi-use athletic facility and ice arena (www.capitalclubhouse.com); and the White Plains Golf Course, just south of Waldorf (www.charlescounty.org/pf/pg/wpgc/default.htm).

As for Mr. James, he's crossing his fingers for the arrival of one restaurant in particular.

"I heard there was a Cheesecake Factory coming in, and I happen to love their Godiva chocolate cheesecake," he says.

