



PHOTO BY KIM KURIAN

The beginning of La Entrada at Rancho Viejo

SunCor begins new phase, offers solar option

By Paul Weideman

“For the first time in New Mexico,” Ike Pino is quoted in a recent Rancho Viejo press release, “a major developer is making solar power an option that’s as easy to order as fixtures, flooring or a two-car garage.”

The idea doesn’t amount to much at this point — one solar house sold and no immediate interest in a second — but Pino, Rancho Viejo’s general manager, hopes that will change in the future.

It all began two years ago when Santa Fe County passed its affordable-housing ordinance. In 2006, County Commissioner Paul Campos wanted to take the idea one step further.

“He said it wasn’t enough to create affordable homes; we should figure out how to help people live affordably, including reducing energy costs,” Pino said. “He was prepared to introduce an ordinance that would have required such things as photovoltaics.

“I visited with him to talk about the real costs involved. I said I’d build an affordable solar model here and we’d track everything. We created a small working committee that included people from the Santa Fe community who are involved in sustainable building and energy conservation; also New Mexico Construction Industries Division and county staff.”

Ultimately, Cedar Mountain Solar LLC was chosen to design and build the solar

application. The bottom line was that the photovoltaic panels and necessary modifications to the house cost \$40,000.

“Commissioner Campos understood that it could be done and it would lower energy costs, but it would add a significant cost to construction,” Pino said. “We haven’t figured out how to work with that yet. At the same time, we made a decision here in Rancho Viejo that now that we had the engineering for photovoltaics we could make it an optional feature.”

The test house sold and is now occupied. There have been no orders yet for the solar package. “My sense is that at some point there will be a market for it,” Pino said.

He added that Rancho Viejo may next explore passive-solar home design — such as was pioneered on a large scale in Eldorado 30 years ago. “We will work toward that next. Now that we know the costs of photovoltaics, we know that as an option it may not sell as briskly as something that’s maybe half the cost but that can accomplish the same sort of thing.”

He added that Rancho Viejo pioneered mass use of cisterns in a production subdivision, and has worked to limit annual, per-home water use in the subdivision to 0.14 acre-feet (45,620 gallons) a year, which is only 56 percent of what they’re allowed to use by law.

“We’re also working on getting some sort of LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] certification for

our project,” he said. “Many elements of our houses already qualify for that, and our houses are all Energy Star-certified.”

Rancho Viejo de Santa Fe Inc. entered 2008 doing business under a new name: SunCor New Mexico Inc. The name change reflects a growing commitment that company leadership is making to doing business throughout New Mexico.

SunCor New Mexico Inc. is a business unit of Tempe, Arizona-based SunCor Development Company, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Pinnacle West Capital Corporation.

Construction of the first homes at Rancho Viejo began in 1997.

The first village at Rancho Viejo, with more than 550 homes, was built out in 2002. There are about 50 lots left in the second village, which was designed for another 761 residential units.

The company will build 1,250 homes in its third village, La Entrada at Rancho Viejo, for which sales open this month. The La Entrada master-plan area encompasses 406 acres, about the same as what’s been developed so far in the southside subdivision. Half of the land will be left as open space.

The real-estate market is depressed, and Pino admitted that building has slowed in Rancho Viejo. “We only have four spec homes available and we have new incentives for buyers,” he said. “Rancho Viejo offers a 2 percent incentive if you use our finance

company, SunCor Financial. So if you buy a \$300,000 house and get your mortgage with us, that’s \$6,000 right off the top.”

Rancho Viejo also is providing a \$36,000 purchase incentive; the credit may be applied toward a solar purchase or other amenity. Additionally, a federal tax credit ranging from \$9,000 to \$10,000 is available to those who build new homes with solar options.

While the residential market has diminished, Rancho Viejo is expanding on the commercial front. “Kaune’s is building right now,” Pino said. “I think they’ll open an 11,000-square-foot building in December. And BTI, Bicycle Technologies Inc., now has a 12,000-square-foot facility in the Richards Industrial Park and we’re negotiating with them on an 11-acre parcel so they can build, ultimately, a 150,000-square-foot facility here.”

Rancho Viejo donated land for Santo Niño Regional Catholic School (which opened in 2006); the Academy for Technology and the Classics (which opened last September); and 13 acres for the soon-to-be-developed Southside Elementary School, which Pino said amounts to a \$3 million gift.

At Rancho Viejo’s 12-lot industrial park by N.M. 14, El Paragua is now under construction on a restaurant and Sherpa Stone will build a new store called Santa Fe Sherpa.