

Gatekeepers

Story by **COREY ROSS**
Photos by **WENDY LANIK**

Developers such as Charlie Sullivan and Alan Hans hold the keys to the future of gated communities in Omaha, which could double in the next five years



When developer Charlie Sullivan of Sullivan Homes started selling lots in Charleston Woods three years ago, it was one of only a few gated communities in Omaha.

In the next five years or 10 years, Sullivan says, it could be one of many.

The success of Charleston Woods, a cozy 10-home enclave tucked away north of 97th and West Center Road and nestled next to the Happy Hollow Country Club's golf course, has given Sullivan the motivation to develop another gated community, this is one bordering Pacific Springs golf course.

Developer Alan Hans, president of Advantage Development, shares Sullivan's gated vision of Omaha's housing future. Hans is developing a gated project in Ponca Hills called The Mill at Timber Creek.

Though similar in concept and price range, the projects are quite different in terms of setting, size and home style.

Sullivan's project, Residences on the Green at Pacific Springs, on 168th Street between Dodge and Pacific Streets, consists of 28 lots, which will be a mix of 10 villas and 18 single-family homes. All the homes will border the golf course and range in price from \$350,000 to \$800,000.

The Mill at Timber Creek consists of 14 lots that are acreages ranging from two to four acres in size. The custom homes to be built will be in



Caption



Caption

the \$400,000-\$750,000 range. The development includes a prairie grass preserve and is the first project in Douglas County to be building in an environmental overlay district, accord-

grasses as well as its seclusion.

However, privacy isn't necessarily the first thing members of a gated community are looking for, Sullivan

ing to Hans.

Homeowners in the area, which is near I-680 and Highway 75, will enjoy the preserved natural beauty of the area with its towering trees and native

says.

"It's a sense of security, but it's also a sense of community and a sense of identification. And that comes from a smaller community," Sullivan says. "There's a lot of security in knowing your neighbors."

Based on the success of Charleston Woods and the early response to Residences on the Green, Cindy Cawley of CBS Home Real Estate, says gated communities are clearly a concept Omahans are ready for.

"The community has embraced this," says Cawley, who has sold a number of homes in Charleston Woods and is selling Residences on the Green, where she says two villas and eight residential lots have already been sold.

When Sullivan moved to Omaha from Dallas 11 years ago, he was coming from a community where gated communities are common to one where they were a novelty.

Sullivan kept his eye open from opportunity to develop such a project

Cindy Cawley



Caption

and found it five years ago when a relative showed him an ad for a three-acre parcel of land for sale near Happy Hollow Country Club.

"It was exactly what I'd been looking for," Sullivan says. "The views were amazing, the ground was amazing, the only question was if (a gated community) was something Omaha was ready for."

"The answer was a resounding, 'Yes.'"

Besides being near a golf course, the parcel also backed up to a wooded area on the east. The lots near the woods, though smaller, sold first, Sullivan says, illustrating the value of aesthetics in selecting areas for gated development.

The people who moved into the area, Sullivan says, were empty nesters looking to downsize after living in bigger homes within District 66.

"It was a rearrangement of space to fit their current lifestyle," Sullivan says.

They were also looking to simply their lives, Sullivan says, and the development suited that need by providing maintenance-free living in terms of providing snow removal and lawn care services.

The security of having the gates closed at night to ensure safety and eliminate through traffic also added to the appeal, Sullivan says.

Sullivan is now looking to replicate the success of Charleston Woods at Pacific Springs in a development of a different size and setting.

"Pacific Springs has a different feel to it in that it's not wooded, but the vistas are incredible," Sullivan says, adding that the close proximity to Village Pointe

Shopping Center is another lure to the area.

Developing a gated community in Omaha carries with it certain restrictions and specifications to comply with city code, but Hans had additional obstacles to overcome when he decided to develop The Mill. Since it was being developed in an environmental overlay district, there were strict criteria that had to be met.

"The stringent regulations coupled with the area's topography created greater challenges than other areas of town," Hans says. "The Omaha master plan is very strict about preserving the natural characteristics of the area."

Some of the limitations include no severe grading of the land and there has to be minimal disturbance to the trees in the wildlife corridor.

There's also a Natural Prairie Grass Preserve that will never be built on that adds to the "ambiance" of the development.

"Given the beauty of the land and its location, the extra effort has definitely been worth it," says Hans.

"I've heard a lot of builders say they really wish they could get into Ponca Hills, because they love the area," says Hans, for whom The Mill will be his first development.

The development is also unique in that it's an acreage within city limits, meaning homeowners will have access to city water services and thus won't have to dig wells, which is common with acreages, Hans says.

Another boon is the development on

north 72nd Street, which will soon place a movie theater, Target, Marshalls, Linens and Things, Office Max and others all within five miles of the Mill.

"You have the privacy and exclusivity of living on an acreage with accessibility to the city and its amenities," says Otis, who's representing The Mill. "It's the ideal situation."

Two lots have already sold in The Mill, and Hans says he expects interest to increase when roadwork is completed in early spring.

Hans has great ambitions for his first project and has plans for other gated communities.

"There's definitely more to come as we find projects that make as much sense as this one does," he says. "We're trying to create a different lifestyle."

Sullivan, too, sees opportunity in gated communities and says the future success will hinge upon broadening the appeal, accessibility and affordability of such developments.

He's taken a step in that direction with Residences on the Green, which he says will partly cater to families as well as empty nesters.

"You can grow the market by price point and pull in some families and other audiences," Sullivan says.

As far as growth, Sullivan says the number of gated communities in Omaha "could easily double in the next five years."

One of the obstacles such growth may encounter is a stigma gated communities are elitist, but Sullivan doesn't see it that way.

"Some people will look at the gate as a statement," he says, "but mostly behind the gate are some really understated people."



Marie Otis