



West Villages, Lakewood Ranch rank among fastest-growing

Thursday

Posted Jan 5, 2017 at 5:30 PM

Updated Jan 5, 2017 at 5:30 PM

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In another sign of the strength of the area's real estate market, two master-planned communities in Southwest Florida finished among the top five in a ranking of the fastest sellers in the country.

The West Villages in south Sarasota County ranked fourth and Lakewood Ranch came in fifth in the 2016 "Top 20" master-planned communities list compiled by John Burns Real Estate Consulting.

West Villages, a 10,000-acre project between Venice and North Port, posted 848 new home sales last year, which was actually down by three homes from 2015 when the community did not land on the John Burns list.

"The West Villages makes its debut on our list this year as four communities in the master-planned community recently combined marketing efforts," said Kristine Smale, manager of Florida for John Burns.

The community primarily targets retirees and second-home buyers but also is attracting families who are drawn to the local school system. National builders operating there include Lennar, DiVosta and WCI Communities.

"We're proud to make this list and to start by placing in the top five," West Villages' general manager Martin Black said in a news release. "This is a thoughtfully planned new town close to all the services, entertainment, education and arts that south Sarasota County offers."

Its four existing neighborhoods - Sarasota National, Gran Paradiso, Grand Palm and Island Walk - will be joined by three new neighborhoods in 2017.

Mattamy Homes is starting to build in Renaissance, and D.R. Horton intends to build in The Preserve, Black said. An additional builder will operate in the Oasis. The first phase of a retail, restaurant and entertainment project will begin in the first quarter.

"We anticipate that will fuel even greater activity here as people see their new town taking shape," he said.

To the north, Lakewood Ranch sold 775 new homes last year, up 45 percent from the 535 reported in 2015.

The Schroeder-Manatee Ranch community, which straddles Manatee and Sarasota counties, moved up from ninth place last year. It ranked 11th in 2014 and ninth in 2013.

The 20 top-selling master-planned communities sold 14,217 new homes in 2016, up 6 percent from the previous year.

The Irvine Ranch in Orange County, California, came in first with 1,989 sales.

The Villages in central Florida was a close second with 1,966 sales.

Nocatee in Jacksonville was third with 973 sales, and Lake Nona in Orlando was 12th at 495.

"Florida developers continue to plan and open new communities to compete for the 55-plus market share," said Burns, a California-based housing analyst.