

# Towns find new ways to sell homes

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Communities across Alberta grew with amazing speed during the province's latest economic boom, some even doubling in size in a matter of years.

With a constant influx of more people and money, housing became increasingly difficult to find, and increasingly expensive. It was definitely a seller's market.

In the midst of the recession, things have slowed down a bit. Sellers are looking for new ways to attract buyers to their developments and competition is growing.

The new housing development in the village of Stavely may have come at a bad time. Saddle Ranch Developers approached Stavely in March of last year with a proposal for a new subdivision. Since then, the company has built two show homes and opened 42 residential lots in Phase One of the Saddle Ranch Pines project. Eight lots have sold.

Saddle Ranch Developers president Curtis Fairclough remains confident in the plan, the recession notwithstanding. Stavely's is the outfit's first development in Alberta, in what it promotes as "Calgary's Golden Corridor."

"We're here because we believe Alberta's population is going to be growing by 40 per cent in around 20 years," says Fairclough.

He explains as baby boomers begin to work less and look to retirement, they are going to be attracted to moving to smaller communities relatively close to Calgary and medical facilities. Because of that belief, Saddle Ranch is focusing on developments anywhere between High River and Fort Macleod.

Yet the housing market has changed considerably from what it was when Stavely first agreed to a new subdivision. Fairclough's team, like all developers, have had to think seriously about what they can offer buyers that no one else can.

Fairclough said Saddle Ranch decided to promote the "affordable luxury" component of Stavely's new homes.

"In this market the only way to compete is price and quality, so we're trying to maximize quality and keeping the price low," said Fairclough.

"We wanted to amass a planned development with architectural controls...We decided to put in some landscaping, fencing, trees, and build homes to differentiate ourselves from the surrounding area."

Saddle Ranch is targeting the people who want to live in a luxury bungalow that still costs less than \$300,000.

That would be virtually impossible in larger centres like High River, but thanks to the village of Stavely's co-operation, Saddle Ranch Pines may be a success in the face of this tepid housing market.

"Different towns are taking different approaches. Like, for example, Stavely before was trying to do it itself and just wasn't able to enforce the controls. And you have Clareholm, that likes to use private developers but they've had so many landowners that don't know what they're doing that they haven't had a new development in like three

years. And Nanton is trying to take the approach where they want to do some of it themselves and bring on private developers, so three towns with three different approaches," Fairclough said.

"A lot of these towns aren't set up for managing developments," he continued.

"That's not their expertise, and they just don't have the infrastructure to handle it...It takes an experienced developer to deal with downturns."

Stavely is not alone in trying to market new housing projects in the face of an unexpected recession.

Cayley and Nanton both have developments of their own in the works. Both communities are seeing a drop in sales, with developers and town councils wondering if their towns are going to grow the way they expected them to when the developments were first proposed.

Nanton Town council decided on more advertising and lower lot prices, but whether that solution will work remains to be seen.

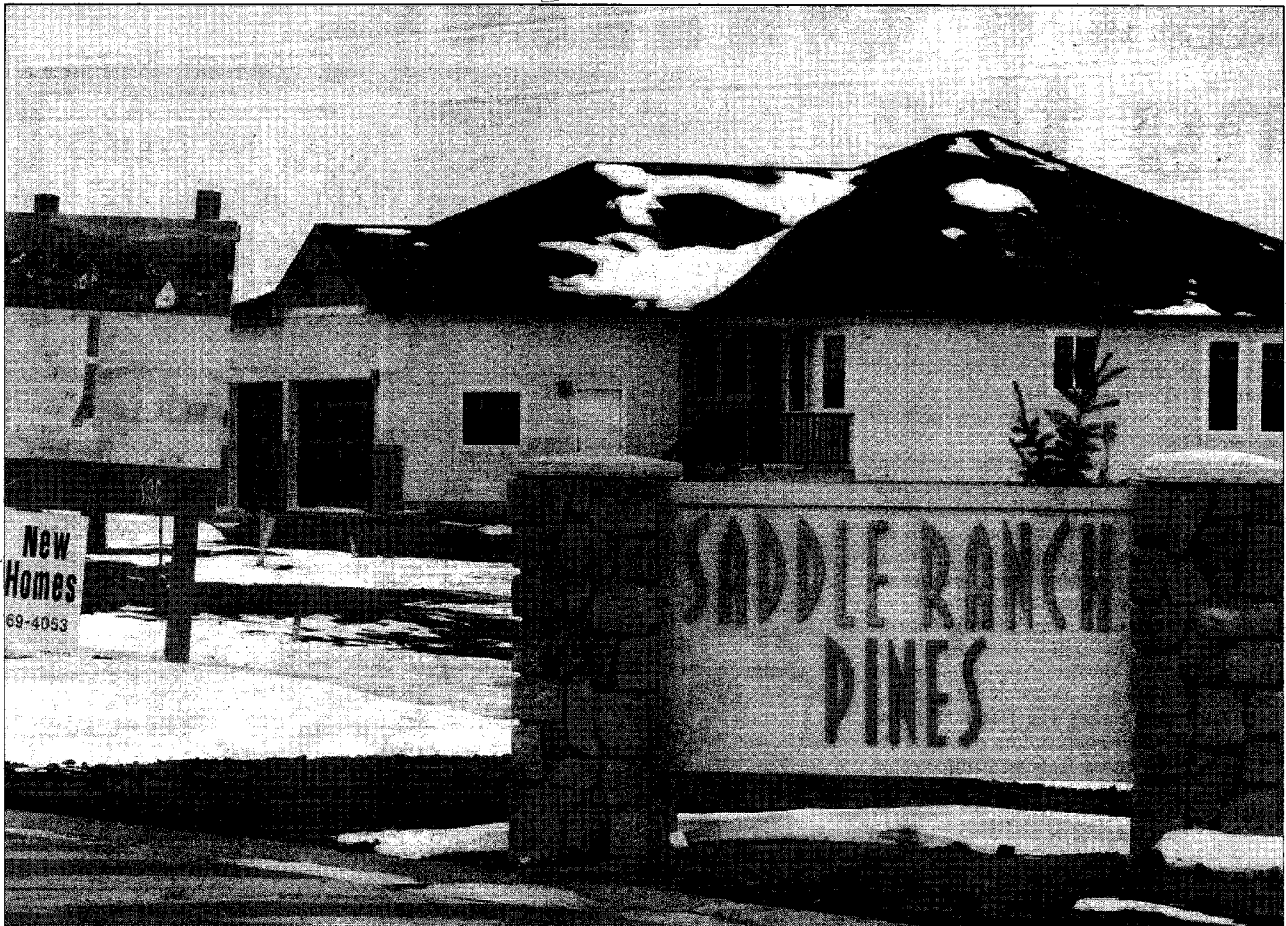
Representatives from all three communities have made it clear they expect home buyers to be attracted to the small town lifestyle on offer in Nanton, Cayley and Stavely.

Because of that, maintaining that atmosphere remains an important part of the architectural design process.

While Nanton is concerned with holding on to its well-known look, Stavely faces a challenge to upgrade the facilities it offers.



Fairclough says adding stores and improving mainstreet must be a priority.



Suzy Thompson photo

Realtors for Stavely's Saddle Ranch Pines housing development face a tough sell in the recession, but developer Curtis Fairclough is confident the town has a lot to offer.