

Ontario home builder sets sights on Airdrie

3,000 homes eyed for 130-hectare community

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 18, 2009



Troy van Haastreht, president for Western Canada and Ottawa at Mattamy Homes, stands outside the company's showhomes in Airdrie at the Windsong development, the city's newest master-planned community.

Photograph by: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

CALGARY - A prominent Ontario-based home builder with a United States division is expanding its operations to Western Canada, choosing Airdrie to build a huge residential development.

Mattamy Homes, Canada's largest builder of new homes, will have its first Alberta development called Windsong in Airdrie — a master-planned community with diverse housing styles and architecturally controlled integrated streetscapes.

"We've been looking for an opportunity over the last number of years actually to find an entry point out west in terms of our overall corporate expansion," said Troy van Haastreht, regional president of Western Canada and Ottawa for the Oakville, Ont.-based company.

The private company was founded by Peter Gilgan in 1978. About seven years ago, it embarked on expansion. It looked at a few different land deals in Alberta but nothing materialized. Today it has five U.S. divisions and one in Ottawa. The company has built more than 42,000 homes in over 80 communities in Ontario.

The Windsong development is about 129.5 hectares, situated west of the Queen Elizabeth 2 Highway and bordering the south side of Big Hill Springs Road in Airdrie. The total number of residential homes planned for the development is 3,000.

The company is opening for sales on Feb. 28. The first phase of the development is serviced, said van Haastreht, with the hope of starting house construction, pending sales, in May, which would have first customers moving in by September of this year.

The completion of the project is market dependent, he said.

“The answer today would be very different than the answer 12 months ago. From our perspective we are just looking to open for sale and hopefully provide customers with some housing types that are unique to Calgary and Airdrie and sort of let the market dictate velocity of the build-out of the community,” he said.

The development will include townhouses ranging from 1,000 to 1,850 square feet as well as single-detached homes from 1,300 to 2,800 square feet. The community will be built in logical progression, street by street. The WideLot homes are configured on the lot by width, not depth, presenting a wider, more appealing profile to the street, said Mattamy Homes.

Instead of building a long home with a garage dominating the front of the structure, WideLot allows the home to open up, presenting a wider profile to the street. This allows for more interesting architectural design possibilities including front porches, more window space for natural light and less attention to the garage. In a WideLot community, homes are closer to the street, but with a variety of setbacks to allow for diverse streetscape. Homes are built wide, allowing for fewer homes in the community and less traffic, said Mattamy Homes.

The starting price for a freehold (no condo fees) townhouse is in the low \$210,000 range while the starting price for a single-detached home with a single car-garage is in the low \$270,000 range. A double-car garage, detached home will start from the \$320,000 range. The largest double-car, detached home is about \$360,000.

“Obviously the market today is not the same as it was before but there are certain glimmers of hope we see in the market. One being interest rates are fairly appealing,” said van Haastrecht. “We’ve been gearing up for a while actually to open this community up. Although it may not be considered the most ideal time frame in terms of current sales and absorption, there are still people that need homes and renters that believe as we do that it’s a good time to buy a new home.”

He said the company’s offering will be unique to Calgary and Airdrie but will also come in at a price point that is appealing.

“It’s always great to see a new developer come to the city and really complement the great products we already have. They certainly bring a new type of development and a new housing mix, which is really exciting,” said Kent Rupert, economic development team leader for the City of Airdrie.

He said the expansion of such a prominent company from Ontario to Airdrie reflects “the forward thinking” on the part of the city and its council.

“When a new company chooses Airdrie as their first location to enter either the western Canadian market or the Alberta marketplace, we’re pretty happy then. We have a few companies that have entered the Alberta market, if not Western Canada, through Airdrie,” added Rupert.

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