NEWS RELEASE

OC Metro $40 million in new homes sold on first day in Irvine By BY STEVE CHURM - 01/30/2010

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Eager buyers snap up 70 properties in Woodbury and Woodbury East.

In the most dramatic sign that the region's ailing homebuilding industry may be turning a corner, the Irvine Co. reported that 70 homes worth more than $40 million were sold before today's long-awaited grand opening of seven new projects in the city of Irvine.

As hundreds of buyers wandered through the model homes, a beaming Irvine Co. executive Dan Young called the level of pre-grand opening sales "unprecedented" in the firm's long history as one of the nation's top residential developers.

"It's amazing. This is good for Irvine, it's good for our industry, and it's a really encouraging sign for our economy," said Young, adding that the interest in these new projects has been building for more than a year. In fact, by early December, more than 700 people on "interest lists" for the new developments had prequalified for financing to buy properties that range in starting price from the high $200,000s to $900,000s. Last week, 71 of the homes were offered to buyers and all but one were sold before today's public grand opening in the villages of Woodbury and Woodbury East. Another 50-plus homes will be offered to buyers next week, and similar results are expected.

"We had a sense nearly a year ago that the market had turned and demand was returning, particularly in the more modest price ranges," said Young, standing outside at the TRI Pointe Homes project. He credited the Internet and other forms of "new media" for helping spread the "buzz" about the new projects long before the first shovel of dirt was turned on construction of the models.

“Traditionally, you had to build the models and generate traffic and interest before you could reach this level of sales activity,” explained Young, president of Irvine Co. Community Development. “With the Internet we were able to supply buyers with enough information, including the look and feel of the homes, for them to commit. It’s a significant change in how we will market our products going forward.

”Today’s grand opening not only attracted scores of buyers, but industry leaders as well. Kristine Thalman, CEO of the Orange County chapter of the Building Industry Association, hailed the news of the pre-grand opening sales as “golden” for an industry that has “struggled for three very long years. It couldn’t have come at a better time for plumbers, framers and everyone who depends on new construction to make a living.”

A 25-year homebuilding executive, TRI Pointe Principal Tom Mitchell said the Irvine Co.’s decision to resume residential building is a big win for the industry.

Every time I’m on the job site I have all sorts of people coming up and thanking me for this project,” said Mitchell of his 95-home Sonoma project in Woodbury. “People are just thrilled to be working.”

Mitchell said 17 of the 18 homes in TRI Pointe’s first phase were sold before today’s event. Most surprising about the rush of early activity is the quality of buyers, in terms of their credit.

“The buyers we have are remarkably qualified to buy,” he said. “It’s the biggest change from four or five years ago. The buyers we have seen are really solid, and that is very encouraging.”

Buyers are also optimistic. Tom Williams of Huntington Beach said he hadn’t planned to tour the models, but a neighbor convinced him to tag along.

“I really was pleasantly surprised at the quality of the homes and, more importantly, the price points,” said Williams. “This has to be good for buyers, builders and the economy in general.”

For more information about the Irvine Co.'s 2010 New Home Collection go to **villagesofirvine.com** or call 866.450.9710.