

The Mother Lode

Land sale kicks off massive Superstition Vistas master plan

By Debra Gelbart

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It's not a place where you would expect nearly a million people to eventually reside, but Apache Junction in Pinal County is now officially on its way to that potential milestone. In early December, the first parcel of land in Lost Dutchman Heights, which sits in the shadow of the Superstition Mountains and adjacent to U.S. Route 60 within Apache Junction's city limits, was sold at auction. Slightly more than 1,000 acres of land there were sold to the winning bidder, Desert Communities, Inc., which is headquartered in Las Vegas. Desert Communities is an affiliate of Rhodes Homes, owned by master planned community developer Jim Rhodes.

Rhodes paid \$58.6 million for the acreage. He also was required to put \$6.25 million in escrow to be used to conduct land-use planning for that property and the remaining 6,700 acres that will be auctioned off over several years.

"Lost Dutchman Heights is an exciting property and we look forward to working with the Arizona Land Department to develop a beautiful, high-quality master planned community," says Rhodes. "As the winning bidder, Desert Communities is required to master plan all of the infrastructure and transportation for Lost Dutchman's 7,700 acres."

Rhodes Homes is the largest privately held home building company in southern Nevada and has built more than 30 communities and nearly 10,000 homes, including condominiums, townhouses, single-family residences and custom-built homes. Rhodes Homes currently is developing Pravada, a 5,750-acre community in Golden Valley, Ariz., just west of Kingman in Mohave County.

The 7,700-acre Lost Dutchman Heights tract is the most high-profile section of a 275-square-mile chunk of state trust land known as Superstition Vistas. According to the **Morrison Institute** for Public Policy at ASU, "Superstition Vistas is approximately the size of California's San Fernando Valley and half again as large as Irvine Ranch in southern California's Orange County. Closer to home, if the Superstition Vistas site were imposed over the East Valley, it would cover nearly all of the cities of Mesa, Gilbert, Tempe and Chandler. If it were overlaid on the City of Phoenix, it would cover the entire city below Dunlap Avenue (up to South Mountain)."

Community leaders and land planners agree that Superstition Vistas could become home to about 900,000 Arizona residents by the year 2030. Superstition Vistas got onto planners' radar screens largely because of the efforts of the East Valley Partnership, a coalition of civic, business, educational and political leaders from the East Valley dedicated to that part of the Valley's economic development and promotion.

The EVP has long recognized and promoted the need for planning in next-door Pinal County, because it is already part of the East Valley. "We started the Superstition Vistas project four years ago," says Roc Arnett, president of EVP. "We like to think that East Valley Partnership was a catalyst for getting part of Superstition Vistas ready for auction."

The planning process for the 7,700 acres of Lost Dutchman Heights will take between 18 and 24 months, says State Land Commissioner Mark Winkleman. Some time after that, the

remaining parcels of Lost Dutchman Heights will be auctioned off.

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