

Innovative Community: The future of Albuquerque resides at Mesa del Sol

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Apr. 22—Albuquerque reimagined is what Mesa del Sol prides itself to be.

The innovative and sustainable community is Albuquerque's future realized with neighborhoods that will house and employ hundreds of thousands of people. The concept of the development began in 2002 with Forest City Enterprises Inc., a Cleveland-based development firm, which came to Albuquerque to build the 12,900-acre, mixed-use, master-planned community.

There are currently several thousand people who live or work in Mesa del Sol. However, there are rows of dozens of homes next to each other that are under construction and developers said more homes and apartment complexes are planned.

The vision began to come to fruition in 2018 with the help of local developer Steve Chavez, who acquired the former Schott Solar facility and the Aperture Center on Mesa del Sol. Chavez purchased the properties with his business partners Rudy Guzman, Eric Wieser, both of Dallas, and Dustin Ritchey, also Dallas, who personally invested in the development of Mesa del Sol.

Chavez, who has developed properties in New Mexico and other parts of the country, took note of what he liked and disliked about other developments he had seen, particularly the Stapleton development in Denver, and applied that insight to developing Mesa del Sol.

"When we acquired Mesa del Sol, we took the master plan that the city approved, the county, and the state, and we just added to it," Chavez said. "There was a layer of technology, sustainability, things that I felt were missing in the Stapleton development, and we applied it toward Mesa del Sol."

Chavez wanted to see plenty of parks sprinkled around Mesa del Sol that each point to a mountain range and connect to a Central Park in the heart of the community. Some of the parks will feature community swimming pools.

"I like the open space of New Mexico," Chavez said. "I was born and raised here. My family has been here for generations. So my intention was building Mesa del Sol so it could be something special for New Mexicans. You get out there and you see the clear blue skies. You feel what New Mexico is about."

Chavez and the Mesa del Sol team joined forces with Titan Development to handle the residential portion of the community. Titan works with six local and national homebuilders: Abrazo Homes, Westway Homes, Twilight Homes, Pulte Homes, D.R. Horton and Richmond American Homes. About 4,000 people currently reside at Mesa del Sol.

Titan is currently working on the last phase of Mesa del Sol's Montage subdivision, which is about 180 acres. The subdivision will include 872 residential lots.

"We're currently actively site planning the next subdivision," said Brian Patterson, partner in Titan Development. "We'll have about 200 lots, and the first subdivision is called Artiste. Our plan and our goal here is to deliver about 250 lots a year."

Mesa del Sol has agreements with the Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Utility Authority and power agreements with the Public Service Company of New Mexico and New Mexico Gas Co., Chavez said.



"We have an extensive water study that we just completed right now," he said. "So we know how much water we need on every acre, every house, every building that's coming out here, and we're planning it so we're not going to dig up the roads again to add to it. We're excited about that."

He said developers have been working with Mark Roper, New Mexico's acting economic development secretary, Environment Department Secretary James Kenney and the governor's office, along with leaders from the city of Albuquerque mayor's office, Bernalillo County and the water authority.

Mesa del Sol is on 12,000 acres of land at the southern edge of Albuquerque. Only 9,000 acres can be developed because there is a 3,000-acre open space buffer between Mesa del Sol and Kirtland Air Force Base.

"The city is in support of this master plan and it was approved in 2004," said Kurt Browning, a partner in Titan Development. "There have been tweaks along the way by Steve and his team. The city has been instrumental and at the table wanting this to happen, knowing you can't grow anywhere else for the most part. So (there has been) a lot of support for the full-blown masterplan."

Browning added that the city's support led to the infrastructure that is in place at Mesa del Sol and allows for the recruitment of companies and businesses to the area.

Netflix is based at Mesa del Sol and Maxeon Solar Technologies, a Singapore-based company, has selected a site on Mesa del Sol to build a solar cell and panel factory.

Other existing companies in Mesa del Sol include Fidelity, United Poly Systems and Kairos Power.

The International School at Mesa del Sol, a pre-kindergarten through 12th grade public charter school, is part of the Mesa del Sol community. There are currently about 8,000 to 10,000 people employed at businesses at Mesa del Sol.

Other manufacturers and companies have shown interest in Mesa del Sol. Chavez said they are currently working to recruit a hydrogen company from Australia to Mesa del Sol. Other large properties coming to Mesa del Sol include a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility, a General Services Administration building, a 480-unit storage complex and a 480-unit apartment complex — with retail space on the bottom level — which will be breaking ground in June. Big box stores and a hotel also are planned for Mesa del Sol, Chavez said.

He said the only thing that has slowed things down has been the development of an interchange off of Interstate 25 that leads into Mesa del Sol. There are currently only two roads to and from Mesa del Sol: Bobby Foster Road and University Blvd.

"The engineers who put the study together couldn't believe how much growth that we're going to have here," he said. "The federal government won't build a road to nowhere off the interchange, but we have Maxeon and all these jobs, we can have close to 6,000 permanent jobs, ... plus about 30,000 to 40,000 construction jobs. This can all happen in the next 48 months. So that's going to be a struggle to get down that road. We need help getting that interchange in because that's crucial. If we could get that interchange in, a timely fashion, we could start supporting the city of Albuquerque and taking some of that pressure off the housing crisis that we're having."

The New Mexico Department of Transportation said it is working with the Mesa del Sol team to get the interchange developed in the future.

"NMDOT is committed to supporting economic development across the state through infrastructure development," said Ricky Serna, cabinet secretary for NMDOT. "We have met with Mr. Chavez and have been provided with a comprehensive overview of his short- and long-range plans for Mesa del Sol. Developing interchanges is a prescriptive process that involves several stakeholders, including the Mid Region Council of Governments, the city of Albuquerque, Federal Highway Administration and certainly, NMDOT. A study is underway to determine the need for increased roadway capacity. We look forward to seeing what the study recommends as it relates to future growth and the need for roadway investments, including the need for an interchange."



