

"I love the community. Everyone here is super friendly. Most of the people who live on my street I've met because they've either stopped by or I've seen them on my walks."

— Cyndi O'Brion, Ave Maria resident



New residents Faith James and Jim Schmitz felt a higher power nudging them to move to Ave Maria.

MILA BRIDGER / AVE MARIA SUN

Living *the* life

Buyers flock to Ave Maria as new home sales break the record

BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

AS THEIR CAR PASSED AGRICULTURAL LAND on the way to Ave Maria to look for a new home, Faith James and Jim Schmitz, both age 52, wondered if this town would be disconnected from the urban lifestyle to which they were accustomed. As it turned out, they discovered a vibrant community with a robust menu of amenities that was for them a perfect fit.

It even seemed that nearly from the time they arrived. When they got out of the car at the model home center, Ms. James recalls, her hand accidentally activated a song on iTunes in her phone; Beyoncé's "Ave Maria" began to play.

Later in May, with face masks and behind

SEE LIFE, A16 ►



AVE MARIA SUN

Ave Maria posted record new-home sales in June.

Meet the new president of Ave Maria University

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Some of life's biggest challenges are the loss of a loved one, moving and starting a new job. Add in a pandemic and that describes the last six months for new Ave Maria University President Chris Ice.

After moving from Kansas to start as the university's third president on Jan. 1, Mr. Ice lost Mary, his wife of 31 years and mother of his 10 children, in April.

"I firmly believe if it weren't for my deep faith, I'm not sure how I would have persevered,"

Mr. Ice says. "When you're in the midst of challenges, if you don't have a vision of the future and faith in God and pray every day for the intercession of our Blessed Mother, it's easy to think you're in control. These are the times you realize you're not."

Mr. Ice also credits the university's board of trustees and executive team, as well as the local community, for supporting him and his family. "They have been absolutely fantastic and a true blessing," he says.

His faith goes back to his childhood, when he accompanied his grandmother to daily Mass. Around age 7, he started serving Mass and helping during funerals and weddings.

Mr. Ice heard the call of the priesthood and went to high school at St. Henry's Preparatory Seminary in Illinois, but he says he "determined that God was calling me somewhere else."

He played college baseball and graduated from St. Mary of the Plains College in Dodge City, Kan. He set numerous baseball records there, including the NAIA baseball career batting average at .480, and was inducted into the

SEE PRESIDENT, A17 ►

"When you're in the midst of challenges, if you don't have a vision of the future and faith in God and pray every day for the intercession of our Blessed Mother, it's easy to think you're in control. These are the times you realize you're not."

— Chris Ice, president
Ave Maria University

The grads

Why graduation day was most memorable, and different, this year.

A6-7 ►



Labor of love

Grand Hall opens at Del Webb Naples.

A4 ►



Drink up

Relax, enjoy the food and feel like family at the Pub.

A14 ►



Ave Maria Sun

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Donahue Academy graduates going across the country for college

BY **ROBIN F. DEMATTIA**
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

High school graduation is a milestone that marks significant achievements and notes the next phase of a young adult's life.

Despite the pandemic's impact on the end of the 2019-2020 school year, students in Ave Maria were able to celebrate with family, friends and neighbors.

"Something I'm super proud of is what we did for our 2020 seniors," says Community Manager Kim Twiss. "When we first heard that graduation ceremonies were canceled or going virtual, it broke my heart. These kids didn't get prom or graduation."

So her team pulled together to create a ceremony where the graduates got to don their caps and gowns at South Park. "We were on hands and knees writing 'Best Wishes' in chalk," she says. "The parents were so grateful. We had to do something for the kids because they lost so much."

Founded in 2007, Donahue Academy serves approximately 275 students from Pre-K through 12th grade, with an average class size of 19.

The average SAT score for students in the Class of 2020 was 1232, in the 80th percentile and more than 200 points above average.

Significantly, the college attendance rate for the class is 100 percent. Here are their plans:

Arturo Artiles is going to Florida International University to study accounting.



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: Donahue Academy of Ave Maria Senior Class Catholic Days at the Florida State Capitol building.

Dante Cruz is going to Florida Southwestern State College to study business.

Quentin Fairchild, class valedictorian, will study history at the University of Notre Dame.

Caitlin Kadlec is going to Belmont University to study interior design.

Abbey Lawe, the class salutatorian, is going to Providence College to study finance.

Dominic Schneider will study aerospace engineering at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Mark Shapic is enrolled in the music program at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Peter Williams is going to Christendom



The Donahue Academy was founded in 2007.

College to study humanities and business.

And several students are going to Ave Maria University to study business administration:

John Byrne, Faith Giovine, Juan Gomez, Nicholas Guernsey and Ismael Prieto. 🌟

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Grand Hall opens at Del Webb Naples

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

Residents at Del Webb Naples can now enjoy the newly opened, 14,000-square-foot Grand Hall clubhouse with expanded amenities and activities.

“This was a labor of love for us,” says Janet Meyer, amenity project manager with Pulte Homes. “We’ve been planning and designing this building for years. It makes us happy to bring this vision to fruition, and we are excited for homeowners to get to use it and enjoy it.”



MEYER

The Grand Hall has an expansive social hall and catering kitchen that will elevate community events, card and game rooms and a veranda designed for year-round alfresco enjoyment.

The new building complements the adjacent 15,000-square-foot Oasis Club campus complete with a state-of-the-art fitness center; rooms for clubs and classes; indoor and outdoor gathering spaces; a resort-style pool/spa and a three-lane lap pool; 18 sports courts for pickleball, bocce ball and tennis; an amphitheater and community garden. Del Webb Naples residents and their guests can also enjoy the community’s exclusive bar and grill, The Rusty Putter, and an optional 18 holes of championship golf at Panther Run.

The design firm of Fieldstone A&E created the Grand Hall’s transitional/modern aesthetic with a clean and fresh look that mixes metals and emphasizes gold and black. The fabrics are neutral upholstery



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: The entrance to the Grand Hall clubhouse at Del Webb Naples.



The Grand Hall has an expansive social hall, far left, and catering kitchen as well as card and game rooms and a veranda, left, for alfresco activities.

with accent colors.

A fun feature of the new hall is a sports simulator that can have up to eight players enjoying games such as bowling and golf on several courses. That room has seating for spectators and fans. There are also billiards and table tennis tables in the new building. Most importantly, the hall can accommo-

date 350 people, which makes it a great venue for community activities.

“Having a larger event space will be wonderful because many times we sell out of events,” says Del Webb Naples Lifestyle Director Mark Irish. “We can hold more concerts,

such as tribute bands, and don’t need to worry about rain for outdoor events.” Mr. Irish also plans to offer cooking classes and other fun activities.

Residents at Del Webb Naples can rent all or a portion of the hall and also bring in an outside caterer. 🌻



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AROUND AVE MARIA

Ave Maria high school graduation ceremony



The community came together to celebrate Ave Maria high school graduates with friends, family, refreshments and the distribution of gift cards to recognize this exciting time in their lives.

The day included a car parade, bagpipe rendition of Pomp and Circumstance by Dan Guernsey, blessing by local deacon Gary Ingold, and address to the graduates by Lifestyle Director Carol DiFlorio.



Abbey Lawe and Quentin Fairchild— this year's Valedictorians for Donahue Academy.



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Ave Maria high school graduation ceremony



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Enjoy the great outdoors in myriad ways in Ave Maria

BY ROBIN F. DEMATTIA

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

From walking trails to swimming to golf, Ave Maria was planned to provide multiple ways for residents and their guests to enjoy outdoor recreation and the town’s beautiful setting. And with more people staying close to home the past few months due to the pandemic, these amenities have become even more utilized and enjoyed.

Recreational parks

North Park and South Park are the largest outdoor recreation areas and offer a variety of activities.

North Park has soccer fields, baseball fields, tennis courts, basketball courts, a tot lot playground, picnic pavilions, restrooms, and a concession stand.

South Park has softball field, eight bocce ball courts, a walking/running trail, an amphitheater, picnic pavilions, a dog park, restrooms and a concession stand.

The newest amenity is a 9-hole disc golf course in North Park, which Community Manager Kim Twiss reports is already very popular. In fact, she recently met people from outside Ave Maria who had traveled to play the new course. DGCourseReview.com calls it a “wide open course with a few doglegs” and notes that “hole #8 is technical with quite a few trees.”

Water park

A great place to cool off this summer is the Ave Maria Water Park, located in the north central part of town near North Park. Exclusive to Ave Maria residents and their guests, it features resort and fitness pools, interactive fountains and a wading pool for kids.

“People like the environment in the park,” says Operations Manager Mary Katherine Gates. “People come here trying to escape everyday life and they want to relax. Our mission is to keep them as safe as possible and make sure they’re having fun.”

The fitness pool has more depth and lap lanes.

The gated wading pool, with a depth of about 2 feet, is best for small children. The splash area has 40 interactive aqua play components such as tumble rain buckets that kids of all ages love.

The spa, which is closed right now due to the pandemic, holds up to 15 people.

The water park is fully staffed with certified lifeguards on duty at all times.

Two pavilions offer shade.

Current hours, reduced because of the pandemic, are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday (closing from 1-1:30 p.m. for cleaning) and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. The concession stand is currently closed, but guests can bring their own food beverages. No glass or alcohol is allowed.

Overall capacity has been reduced from 500 to 250, and people not from the same house-



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above: Dog walking in South Park

Right: Panther Run Golf Club.

hold are reminded to stay 6 feet apart. Masks are not required at the water park.

Monthly and quarterly memberships are available for singles and households, with prices ranging from \$27 to \$67 and include guest day passes. The daily rate for residents age 4 and older is \$2 while the park operates at reduced capacity.

The Water Park will celebrate the “Dog Days of Summer” on July 18. The café will serve hot dogs as BOGO for members and \$2.50 for daily-rate guests.

Panther Run Golf Course

Designed by famed golf architect Gordon Lewis and opened in 2007, Panther Run is a picturesque place to enjoy the sport and the scenery.

“This is a very wide open, golfer-friendly course,” Ben Duffy, head golf professional, says about the 18-hole championship golf course. “The greens are big, there are six different sets of tees, and holes 14 through 18 are set in wilderness.”

He notes that Golf Digest in 2013 rated it a Top 50 course for women.

Tifway 419 Bermuda grass is used on fair-



ways, while TifEagle Bermuda is found on the greens. There is a golf shop, practice range, and The Rusty Putter restaurant for a bite before or after a round.

Mr. Duffy and three golf assistants offer lessons for people looking to begin the sport or fine-tune their game. Calloway clubs are available as rentals.

Membership is open to Del Webb owners and includes perks all over the country at other properties managed by Hampton Golf. The general public can purchase the Panther Pass for discounts, a free round of golf on their birthday and other benefits.

Since the pandemic, Panther Run has established additional safety guidelines. Carts

are sanitized after each use and are offered one person to a cart unless the two players are from the same household. Players can use their own carts when feasible. Staff wear masks, and a guard screen has been installed at the pro shop counter.

Mr. Duffy says most players are members, though the course attracts golfers from Naples, Estero, Fort Myers, Cape Coral and even Miami.

He credits General Manager Damian Rose, who came to Panther Run in 2016, as “a great leader for the staff and community” who is very involved with golf and social events.

The course and café are closed on Mondays through Sept. 30. 🌻





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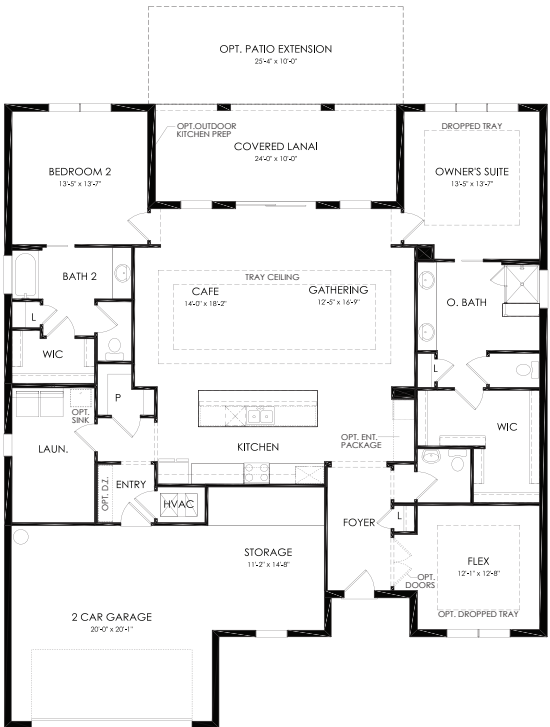
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About the Community

Maple Ridge at Ave Maria is a thoughtfully designed community with a myriad of home designs, all of which combine beautiful curb appeal with impressive interior layouts built for modern lifestyles. CC Homes is the builder behind this community and they are among the many reasons Ave Maria has become such a rapidly growing neighborhood attracting new residents from the Gulf Coast, Southeast Florida and beyond. With more than 65 years of combined experience in South Florida real estate, Mr. Armando Codina and Mr. Jim Carr have set a new standard for quality new construction homes in desirable communities, with a wide range of pricing from entry-level to prestigious exclusivity. CC Homes communities throughout the State of

Florida have been recognized for their incredible market appeal, outstanding quality, and resident satisfaction time and time again, having built thousands of homes and residences. Homes built by CC Homes are designed to improve people's lives. Modern features, smart floor plans and upscale amenities combine for the ultimate South Florida lifestyle. Homeowners at Maple Ridge are pampered with high-end designer features included in the base price. Maple Ridge neighborhoods include a brand-new clubhouse for residents with resort-style pool and cabanas, fitness center, billiard room, exercise park, concierge, coffee bar, exhibition kitchen and kids' room.



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CC Homes is ranked as one of the top five new home builders in South Florida and Southwest Florida, offering affordable single-family luxury in Ave Maria's Maple Ridge neighborhoods. Homeowners are pampered with high-end designer features included in

the base price. Maple Ridge neighborhoods include a brand-new clubhouse for residents with resort-style pool and cabanas, fitness center, billiard room, exercise park, concierge, coffee bar, exhibition kitchen and kids' room.



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About the Community

As part of the highly sought after new home community, Maple Ridge at Ave Maria-Silverwood offers exciting residential choices to buyers. Silverwood provides homeowners the perfect home at a great value. All of these single-family homes are beautifully designed with Mediterranean-inspired architecture and an inviting array of designer features included as well as some custom options available. Both Silverwood and Maple Ridge have a superb location within Ave Maria, so residents benefit from a great school district and sense of community.

Floor Plan Spotlight: The Encinitas is a new

construction, two-story home with 4 bedrooms, 3-and-one-half baths, great room, eat-in kitchen, upstairs laundry room, loft, storage closet, downstairs master suite with walk-in closet and attached garage. 5th bedroom or a wet bar in the loft are available options. Premium features included standard, such as designer brand faucets & fixtures and tile flooring. Gourmet kitchens have stainless steel appliances, European-style wood cabinetry and granite countertops. A spa-like master bathroom features double sinks with marble vanity tops, a spacious shower. Best of all, this master suite is conveniently located on the ground floor.



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the base price. Maple Ridge neighborhoods include a brand-new clubhouse for residents with resort-style pool and cabanas, fitness center, billiard room, exercise park, concierge, coffee bar, exhibition kitchen and kids' room.



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AT AVE MARIA, FLORIDA

About the Community

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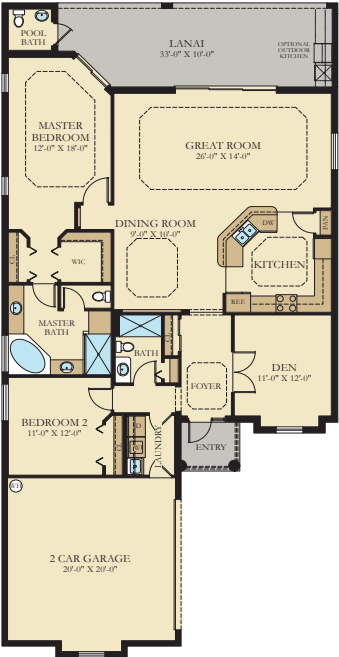


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Relax, enjoy the food and feel like family at the Pub

BY **RUSTY PRAY**

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

It is just a good place to relax and have a bite. The Pub & Grill at Ave Maria offers diners so much more than delicious hamburgers and scrumptious pizza. It offers great service by a friendly and knowledgeable staff, an extensive menu prepared by the all-stars in the kitchen, happy hour, live music on weekends and a welcoming, family atmosphere.

“The pub is always a great hangout,” says Krista Joyce, who co-owns the eatery with her husband, Kevin.

The Joyces moved from the Chicago area and established themselves with a partner in the restaurant business here in 2014. They split with the partner in January, and now the Pub is all theirs. They also operate the adjacent Bean, a breakfast stop.

The Pub’s menu features an array of appetizers such as nachos, mozzarella sticks, spinach and artichoke dip, pretzel bites and crispy calamari, among other tasty starters. There are also mouthwatering chicken, fish and beef entrees, soups, salads, sides such as sweet potato fries and roasted vegetables, and even fresh raw vegetables. Beer and soft drinks help wash it all down.

Yes, there is a kids’ menu, too. And yes, it offers mac ‘n’ cheese and grilled cheese.

But the Pub is perhaps best known for its hall-of-fame pizza and hamburgers. A Pub pizza is made with hand-tossed fresh dough, original or thin crust, topped by savory sauce and toppings that run from sausage, bacon and pepperoni to garden-fresh mushrooms, roasted veggies, red onions, jalapenos, garlic and four cheeses.

The burgers are big and juicy, with offerings ranging from the basic Pub burger, which comes with choice of cheese, to a mushroom-and-swiss combination and a jaw-dropping Southwest burger that comes with pepper jack

cheese, bacon, avocado and chipotle ranch. “Our daughter’s favorite by far is the Southwest burger,” Krista says.

There are also decadent hand-dipped milkshakes (strawberry, chocolate or vanilla, \$5) featuring Edy’s ice cream. Specialty shakes (\$6) include one with Cap’n Crunch cereal, another with peppermint patties, another with Oreos and another with Reese’s Pieces and chocolate sauce blended in.

The Pub is very much a family affair. For instance, son Michael, 18, sings and plays guitar for patrons on Friday evenings. He is just one of many local musicians who appear on the outdoor patio and play their music.

COVID-19 has not been kind to the restaurant business, and Krista says the Joyces are grateful for their customers’ loyalty during the pandemic. The Pub adheres to all COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines. One change brought about by the pandemic: The Pub now delivers.

The family investment in the business and the Joyces’ commitment to the community are two of the elements that make the Pub such a special place.


Not to mention the food. 🌻

The Pub & Grill at Ave Maria

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MEET A TOWNMAKER

Ave Maria Executive Director Kim Twiss

BY **ROBIN F. DEMATTIA**
Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

You might often find Ave Maria Executive Director Kim Twiss and her lovable mutt, Spirit, in the dog park.

In fact, it was Spirit who inspired a fun activity when the pandemic started this spring.

“COVID-19 made us think outside the box,” Ms. Twiss explains. “We wondered how to keep residents entertained while they were stuck at home. So I took a plastic toy that Spirit didn’t play with and hid it around Ave Maria each day, so people would search for it. People were in the parks every day looking for it.”

This is just one example of how Ms. Twiss enriches the lives of Ave Maria residents. An executive director at FirstService Residential since August 2015, she has worked in Ave Maria since November 2018. Originally from Glencoe, Ala., she was enjoying an assignment in South Carolina when FirstService asked her to consider the move to Florida.

“I came to Ave Maria and the town amazed me,” she says.

She oversees the master association and its \$1.3 million budget, five sub-associations and an office staff of 14 plus 40 people working at the water park.

Being flexible and creative is part of what Ms. Twiss likes best about her job.

“I’m not a ‘put a square peg in a square box’ person,” she says. “I like diversity and things that change every day.”

She spends a lot of time working on finances and routine maintenance issues. “It’s a lifestyle community and people want it to be beautiful.”

She praises all of her team, including Parks

and Recreation Manager John Croce, Lifestyle Manager Carol DiFlorio and Water Park Manager Mary Katherine Gates. They oversee these amenities:

- South Park, with a softball field, eight bocce ball courts, a walking/running trail, amphitheater, picnic pavilions, dog park, restrooms and concession stand.
- North Park, with soccer and baseball fields, tennis and basketball courts, a tot playground, picnic pavilions, restrooms and concession stand.
- Water Park, with a fitness and resort-style pool, cascading spa, water volleyball and water aerobics areas, four 25-meter lap lanes, interactive play features, an open tube water slide and an enclosed tube water slide, beach volleyball court, picnic pavilions, restrooms and concession stand.

Ms. DiFlorio credits the Social Activities Committee for helping plan events that meet everyone’s needs.

“We’re a multi-generational community, so people like festivals and other activities that families can come out for. Anything for kids to do is popular.”

Some of the most anticipated events are Hometown Christmas, OctoberFest and community yard sales days that often include a shredding truck, food trucks, petting zoo and other activities.

“The whole town comes out for Hometown Christmas,” Ms. Twiss says. “There is a parade, rides for kids, food vendors, arts and crafts vendors and a stage with live entertainment.” Hometown Christmas is held on the first Friday in December.

Ms. DiFlorio says many events and activities are



MILA BRIDGER / AVE MARIA SUN
Kim Twiss has worked in Ave Maria since November 2018.

being adjusted in response to the pandemic. For example, occupancy at the water park was reduced to help people practice social distancing. More virtual and outdoor events are being planned, and hand-sanitizing stations are placed around outdoor activities.

“We are taking safety precautions and at the

“I’m not a ‘put a square peg in a square box’ person. I like diversity and things that change every day.”

same time trying to let homeowners feel as normal in the new norm as possible,” Ms. DiFlorio explains.

Ms. Twiss credits Ms. DiFlorio for making Easter fun after the town’s annual big celebration was canceled. “She dressed as the Easter Bunny and her husband, Tom, drove her all over Ave Maria waving at residents.”

She also notes that Mr. Croce, a licensed personal trainer, offered online classes when people couldn’t access the town’s gym. “He showed exercises you could do at home with laundry detergent bottles or cans of vegetables as weights.”

And, of course, everyone can be outside and enjoy Ave Maria’s “miles and miles of side-walks and trails” along with abundant wildlife, she adds. The 4.8 miles from Oil Well Road to the Water Park makes a great stretch for walking, jogging and bike riding.

Services such as the Publix grocery store, physician offices, gas station, good restaurants and other businesses also attract new residents to Ave Maria. Ms. Twiss is excited about recent and upcoming developments, including the nine-hole disc golf course that just opened in North Park, the golf course that Lennar is building and the planned new fire station and Braden Hospital.

“Ave Maria is amazing now and will be even better in the future,” she says. 🌸



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LIFE

From page 1

a plexiglass partition, they signed the paperwork to close on their new home. They weren't the only ones to purchase a new home in Ave Maria that month.

Ave remained the top selling master-planned community in Southwest Florida last year with 266 home sales closed, a Metrostudy report shows, and it's on pace to beat that number in 2020. With builders reporting 40 new-home sales in June, the town scored its top-selling month on record since opening in 2007. The previous record for monthly sales was May 2020, with 38 closings. The newest numbers are up 45 percent from June 2019 — even amid the pandemic.

Year to date the town's four residential builders — CC Homes, Del Webb Naples, Lennar and Pulte Homes — report 174 new-home contracts.

A combination of historically low interest rates, Ave's many amenities, relatively low home prices and — perhaps especially during this season of the virus — its self-sustaining community, have made the town an attractive spot for homebuyers.

"Ave Maria is a true hometown with all the daily conveniences and amenities right outside your front door," says Blake Gable, CEO of Barron Collier Companies, the town's developer. "I believe now more than ever we will be spending more time at home, and our emphasis on a community-minded lifestyle along with an optimized home design at an attractive price is resonating with everyone."

Home prices in Ave Maria range from the high \$100,000s to \$500,000-plus, with more than 75 floor plans to choose from for terrace homes, condominium, coach homes, attached villas and single-family homes.

The community offers opportunities for socializing and recreation whether in person or virtually. That includes open spaces for its homeowners such as a water park, soccer and baseball fields, fitness center, amphitheater, dog park, trails, bocce and tennis courts, a town center with a Publix grocery store, a commercial center with Mobil gas station, private schools from preschool through university, and on-site free events throughout the year.

The Ave Maria Master Association organizes ongoing events for residents including virtual trivia, happy hour, fitness classes and club meetings while also providing access to outdoor recreation with proper social distancing guidelines ensuring everyone can enjoy having fun safely.

Although many homebuyers continue to visit and purchase homes at Ave Maria in person, the process can be handled entirely online as well.

"We can accommodate any customer and give them the ability to shop, buy, build and close virtually if they wanted to, meaning they would never have to set foot in one of our sales centers," says Justin K. Wood, director of sales in Southwest Florida for Pulte Group.

Although each salesperson might have a



New resident Cyndi O'Brion, a cybersecurity expert and single mom, moved to Ave Maria from Tampa with her dog Giianna.

slightly different virtual home-buying process, the basic steps are the same as they would be in person. Buyers can shop online before sales agents give them virtual tours of the home. And all legal documents can be signed electronically using DocuSign.

Diana Ibarria, senior vice president at CC Homes, describes how their virtual tours work: "Customers go online and they can click on a button that says 'Request a virtual tour or virtual appointment.' They meet through either FaceTime or Zoom with a sales associate. Then the associate walks through the home with a phone, giving the customer a tour like they were walking through it and at the same time asking questions."

For Ms. James and Mr. Schmitz, they ended up purchasing CC Homes's Almaden model in Ave Maria's Maple Ridge neighborhood. Because they bought the model home itself, the purchase conveniently included furniture and fine details such as high ceilings, chiseled marble and crown moldings.

There's plenty of room for both the couple and their 10-year-old Italian greyhound, Fanci, as well as space for family to visit or for Ms. James, who runs her own branding agency, to hold Zoom meetings with clients.

"We're just really looking forward to having happy memories and moments," Ms. James says.

A dream come true

Ave Maria's Del Webb Naples neighborhood, a 55-and up restricted community,

also welcomed new residents recently. Cyndi O'Brion, a cybersecurity expert and single mom with three grown children, was looking to downsize from the overwhelmingly large Tampa house where she had lived.

A search for a new spot for herself and her 18-month-old goldendoodle named Giianna — meaning "gift from God" — began in January. Ave Maria, as it turns out, is central to her siblings and godchildren in South Florida.

Pulte Group's two-bedroom Hallmark floor plan was also a perfect fit — not too big for her but enough space to comfortably work from home and accommodate friends or family as well. She also appreciated the fact that Ave Maria is outside hurricane evacuation zones and that the Del Webb Naples HOA takes care of the house and lawn, making it relatively maintenance free.

But maybe she already knew this was the place, with its central cathedral and surrounded by nature, before she even arrived.

"When I saw on the map the center of Ave Maria was the church and everything fanned out from there I got this chill, Holy Spirit energy, throughout my being," Ms. O'Brion says.

She knew for sure when she went to view the home.

"When he (the sales agent) opened the front door, I knew that my prayers had been answered," she says. "And Giianna started wagging her tail, telling me she was happy..."

"I love the community. Everyone here is

Sales increase

A look at sales at Ave Maria the first six months of each year from 2018-2020.

	2018	2019	2020
Jan	22	13	25
Feb	23	19	25
March	25	19	31
April	17	23	15
May	15	23	38
June	25	22	40

super friendly. Most of the people who live on my street I've met because they've either stopped by or I've seen them on my walks with Giianna.

"The common theme is that everyone I've met says they love living here. It's a dream come true for them, and that's what it is for me as well."

More to come

Ave Maria now has a total population of about 10,500 people, with more than 2,400 homes sold since opening in 2007. The community is a nearly even mix of active adult retirees and families with children or young couples starting families, says Cee Cee Marinelli, vice president of commercial real estate for Barron Collier Companies.

"Ave Maria continues its trajectory of strong new home sales for 2020," she says. "We continue to see buyers of all ages and from several areas including Collier County, South Florida and the Northeast."

The desire to live in a self-sustaining hometown with a full spectrum of amenities and conveniences has never been more appealing."

The self-sustaining town offers shopping and dining, employment opportunities, parks and recreation, and is zoned for all A-rated Collier County public schools. At build out, the town can have up to 11,000 residences and 1.7 million square feet of retail, office and business park uses in its 4,000 acres.

Looking forward, Ave's developer plans to expand retail and commercial opportunities as the town grows. The town will likely welcome a new hotel and other retail and commercial buildings in the next five years. The developer is also working with a group interested in building an independent/assisted living facility.

"As more residents move to Ave Maria, we want to make sure everyone has the opportunity to bring their business with them whether it's working from home, opening a satellite office or starting a business," Barron Collier CEO Mr. Gable says. "I expect to see our commercial development grow along with the home sales."

Ave Maria is at the intersection of Oil Well and Camp Keais Roads in Eastern Collier County. The main entrance, on Oil Well just west of Camp Keais, leads to the town center. Take I-75, exit 111, follow the signs east to Ave Maria, approximately 30 minutes.

For more information, call 239-352-3903 or visit www.avemaria.com.

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PRESIDENT

From page 1

college’s inaugural athletics hall of fame. He earned his MBA at Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Mr. Ice worked as an assistant college baseball coach and admissions counselor at St. Mary of the Plains before establishing a successful 23-year commercial insurance career. For the past two years before joining AMU, he worked as CEO for Catholic Charities of Kansas City-St. Joseph, even serving on the executive committee for Catholic Charities USA.

Throughout his career, his faith was always a part of his life and something he says he “never shied away from.” Mr. Ice attends Mass daily, finding the closest Catholic Church when he travels. And he keeps a statue of St. Joseph on his desk, which spurs conversations. “He’s my hero. He was a wonderful man that married a perfect woman and raised a perfect child. That’s hard to do. He had to be great.”

Although he loved his career, he says he saw an opportunity to blend his business skills and faith when multiple friends and acquaintances encouraged him to apply for the Ave Maria University presidency.

“The students are fantastic. To be around the young vibrancy of our future is exciting,” he says. “And the strong Catholic faith element of the university was very attractive.”

He voices concern that members of the younger generation are losing their faith. “We need more great universities like Ave Maria to give them the truth while they’re in their formative years so they can take that into their jobs and families and spread it further.”

He has several goals for the university. He would like to bring back a stronger Marian element, to distinguish Ave Maria University from other Catholic universities. He thinks the Mother Theresa Project is a great resource that can be expanded. He would also like to see



SPIRIT JUICE STUDIOS / SPECIAL TO AVE MARIA SUN

Ave Maria University President Chris Ice, right, played baseball for and graduated from St. Mary of the Plains College in Dodge City, Kan. He set numerous baseball records there, including the NAIA baseball career batting average at .480.

more missions. He wants to increase the academic offerings, such as a nonprofit leadership degree or certificate and social work in both undergraduate and master’s degree programs. And, he believes the school needs a new fitness center and fieldhouse.

All of this will take money and connecting with more supporters. To that end, he has hired a new vice president of advancement, Tim Dockery, and created a new vice president of marketing position filled by Kevin Murphy.

He has also connected with the local Catholic diocese and schools such as St. John Neumann Catholic High School and Bishop Verot Catholic High School. And he wants to work

with university alumni to engage them. Mr. Ice welcomes speaking engagements where he can talk about the future of the university as well as the town of Ave Maria, which already feels like home for his family.

“My kids and I spend a lot of time outdoors,” he says, “It’s still a novel treat for them to look for alligators in the pond.” His children range in age from 30 to 11, with four living with him. His oldest daughter, her husband and his first grandchild also live in Ave Maria.

Mr. Ice likes to get up early and walk one of his two dogs. He is an avid reader, enjoying spiritual, factual and historical books.

A lifelong sports fan, he cheers for the Kansas

City Chiefs, the Kansas City Royals and Kansas Jayhawks at the University of Kansas. As far as his favorite movie, he says “being from Kansas, ‘The Wizard of Oz.’”

Last October, he and his wife helped lead a pilgrimage of 35 people to Rome that included an audience with Pope Francis. “It was very spiritually rewarding,” he says.

For now, as he helps his children cope with the loss of their mother and guides the university’s future through and beyond the coronavirus, his faith keeps him centered.

“In the midst of all this turmoil,” he says. “Ave Maria University is a place of peace and solace.” 🌻



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Commercial/office/flex space coming to the Park of Commerce

BY **ROBIN F. DEMATTIA**

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

As a result of the exciting growth the community has experienced and inquiries from new residents about where they can locate their businesses, pre-leasing opportunities are now available for commercial/flex/office space in the Park of Commerce at Ave Maria Boulevard and Anthem Parkway. Completion is estimated for the third quarter of 2021.

A total of 14 units — 10 spaces of 730 square feet each and four end units of 1,890 square feet each — are available.

The building will be able to accommodate a variety of uses, from traditional retail and office to air-conditioned warehouse space with roll-up doors. Tenants will enjoy ample parking and easy truck access.

The park of commerce encompasses 17 acres in the middle of the town and near the entrances to the Ave Maria neighborhoods of Del Webb Naples and Maple Ridge.

For more information about units, call Cee Cee Marinelli at Baron Collier Companies, 239-262-2600. 🌞



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Ave General Store and The Spice Café

*A place to slow down
and enjoy small town life*

BY **ROBIN F. DEMATTIA**

Ave Maria Sun Correspondent

The Dollar Corner and More has a new name, new owner, new inventory and new café. Jenner Cuff, an Ave Maria resident for three years, purchased the business in January after serendipitously walking in the door as the real estate broker was putting the “For Sale” sign in the window.

“I got on the phone with family and friends to figure out if this was a good fit, and everybody said yes,” she says. “I talked to the Ave Association and proposed the café, and everybody seemed on board with the vision.”

Ms. Cuff co-owns the newly named Ave General Store and The Spice Café with Jerome Bronson. Both knew they wanted to create the feeling of an old-fashioned general store with a soda fountain in the 2,300-square-foot space behind Publix. “Ave has such an Old World feel and charm,” she says. “It needed a space that embodied the same vibe as the town.”

She reviewed the inventory and sales records and kept about 55 percent of what the previous owner carried while introducing many new products. Stationery and health and beauty items had been selling well before. Because of the pandemic, she emphasized cleaning products and added masks, puzzles and activity books for children.

The Spice Café offers wholesome, healthy foods for breakfast, lunch and dinner, all for curbside pickup, delivery or inside service. “We are surrounded by agriculture,” Ms. Cuff says, “so why should we eat processed food?”

The menu includes daily soups such as



Jennifer Cuff, above, and friendly staff at Ave General Store and Spice Café, top right.



Ave General Store and The Spice Café

Where: 5052 Pope John Paul II Blvd. (just outside the circle and behind Publix)

Hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Info: 239-658-5237 or follow Ave General Store on Facebook and/or Instagram

uncles ran vegan cafes and barbecue joints, where Ms. Cuff learned all about the restaurant industry. “I did every job from chopping vegetables to cleaning pots and creating recipes,” she says. “I understand food.”

The café has seating for 35 as well as curbside pick-up, delivery throughout Ave Maria and catering.

She’s happy to report positive response to the changes.

“When you go into business, you never know how it will go,” she allows. “But the support from this community has been most gratifying and the best shot in the arm.” 🌻

chili and Thai pumpkin, fresh-pressed juices, sandwiches, pastries and cookies (gluten-free, low-sugar and regular). Specials change daily, with recent offerings including a free Dutch pancake with choice of topping (marshmallows, Oreos, blueberries, strawberries, mango

or banana) with the purchase of every fresh juice.

Ms. Cuff plans to provide pre-packaged dinners, including keto-friendly, paleo-friendly, vegetarian and vegan offerings. Her grandparents, parents, aunts and

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New Construction • Re-Sale • Rental Information



NEW



Del Webb – Taft Model

5792 Mayflower Way \$342,900
MLS# 220038761

NEW



Del Webb – Serenity Villa

5769 Mayflower Way \$253,700
MLS# 220041558

NEW



Hampton Village

4968 Hemingway Terrace \$341,900
MLS# 220035809

NEW



Maple Ridge – Almanor Model

5343 Ferrari Avenue \$304,700
MLS# 220042336

NEW



Del Webb – Spoonbill

5702 Mayflower Way Unit 301

NEW



Del Webb – Gray Myst Model

5780 Declaration Court \$251,900
MLS# 220039158

NEW



Hampton Village – Sandpiper Model

4966 Iron Horse Way



Maple Ridge Reserve – Keswick Model

5344 Allen Place \$563,900
MLS# 220014394



Del Webb – Dunwoody Trail Model

6173 Victory Drive \$407,900
MLS# 220017389



Del Webb – Oakmont Model

5476 Italia Court \$334,700
MLS# 220020402



Del Webb – Gray Myst

5821 Declaration Court \$271,900
MLS# 220022390



Del Webb – Taft Model

5725 Mayflower Way \$267,800
MLS# 220012137

PENDING



Del Webb – Abbeyville Model

6345 Liberty Street \$337,000
MLS# 220007376

PENDING



Del Webb – Surrey Crest Model

5865 Constitution Street \$277,900
MLS# 219050508

SOLD



Del Webb – Serenity Villa

5245 Juliet Court \$294,900
MLS# 220007061

SOLD



Maple Ridge – Danby Model

5186 Roma Street \$411,000
MLS# 220004853

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