



Sharon Stangenes
The house hunter

Diverse styles key for buyers in year ahead

As the old year ends and a new one begins, what message can buyers shopping for a new home in the Chicago area expect?

Westward Ho!

From my desk in Tribune Tower on Michigan Avenue, I sometimes joke that the Chicago metropolitan housing market has moved so far west it is almost to Iowa. Not true, of course, but each year builders march further west in search of land and the buyers keep coming.

One of the current hot spots is Sugar Grove, several miles west of Aurora, where Kimball Hill Homes, based in Rolling Meadows, is opening its largest project to date, the 3,000-home Settlers Ridge development.

Sugar Grove is only one of the communities stretching along or near Illinois Highway 47—Elburn, Pingree Grove, Huntley and Woodstock are among the others—where rapid residential development is creating construction hot spots.

The fast pace promises to make Highway 47 the new Randall Road. But the real frontier is even further west as builders such as Centex and Kennedy Homes plan developments from Belvidere to Janesville, Wis.

The announced addition of another shift for workers at the large Daimler-Chrysler assembly plant in Belvidere near Rockford, and the willingness of buyers from the Fox River Valley to drive further west for more affordable housing will soon stretch the metropolitan region from Lake Michigan to Rockford—which really is halfway to Iowa.

■ One trend for 2006 will be more housing diversity. While it is too early to declare the end of subdivisions and developments with nothing but look-alike homes, buyers shopping in the year ahead are likely to find a wider variety of housing than ever before, especially in mega developments of 1,000 or more homes.

While most big new developments now include townhouses as well as houses, some builders are mixing in duplexes and attached ranch-style homes as well.

Don't be surprised if some master-planned communities offer mid-rise buildings and, quite possibly, lofts in and around retail centers.

"There is a growing willingness to allow a diverse product," said John Carroll, president of Streamwood-based

Orland Park opens a



Leigh Nevers of Concord Homes says Orland Park Cro

FRESH



Tribune photo by John Smierciak
Sonya Hene of Kimball Hill at a Metra commuter station across the street from the Andrew Corp. headquarters, which her company plans to redevelop for high-end housing

By
Tri

we
ne
dn
co

to
a t
fri
pa
an