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## Meadow Ranch breaks boundaries

Sustainable Urbanisum seen at new CDA neighborhood

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**Meadow Ranch, a new 55-and-over community in Coeur d'Alene, is designed not just with comfort and convenience in mind, but attention to energy efficiency.**

A 1940's landmark barn cheerfully greets visitors as you approach the entrance to Meadow Ranch in Coeur d'Alene—harkening back to a simpler way of life.

But this big, red icon of this new “55 & Better” active adult community isn't just recalling days gone by; it's the heart of a refreshingly simpler, sustainable way of life.

Not only are worries about lawnmowing and snowblowing off residents' radar in this “smart” little neighborhood—but numerous community conveniences are just beyond their doorstep, sometimes literally.

“This neighborhood is really efficient, and not just from an energy standpoint,” says Dennis Cunningham, president of Active West Builders, which is building the development.

His vision to combine green building with “smart growth”—the creation of a friendly, easily-accessible, diverse neighborhood, which cost-effectively utilizes land in an urban setting, while maintaining a strong sense of place—has made the neighborhood the first of its kind in Coeur d'Alene, a landmark in itself.

Local department store shopping and a bus stop are just a half-block away, highway and freeway access are within minutes, and within Meadow Ranch itself is a community library, small apple orchard, organic garden, greenhouse, walking and biking trails, and on certain days, “The Barnyard Market”—Meadow Ranch's own version of a farmers market. Other amenities down the road will include a spa and pool.

Meadow Ranch received the Idaho Smart Growth and Green Building Award in 2009, meeting all the Smart Growth principles. The organization also recognized ActiveWest for building on a site formerly zoned as light-industrial, ultimately protecting farmland and other “environmentally critical areas” from possible industrial pollution.

As residents prepare for a recent garage sale, some easily joke about what they like about living here (“it's close to the winery”). They also talk about the quiet, the excellent bird watching, the great sense of community (they're holding a bar-b-que tomorrow) and \$32 energy bills, according to Joy Sellers who moved here in December 2009, with her husband, Allan. A soon-to-be resident hears this and is even more eager to move in, adding that the lowest energy bill she's ever received was \$130.

When Cunningham and his family moved here nine years ago from Carlsbad, Calif., he brought not only his passion and vision, but an extensive background in landscape

architecture, facility planning, and growth and policy planning as well as maintaining diplomatic relations with state and federal land officials—experience which served him well when he began applying for zone changes, special use permits, and requests that city standards be revised to include Smart Growth principles.

In addition, Cunningham didn't just want to build traditional green homes; he's set his sights higher, and is building every Meadow Ranch home to obtain LEED (Leader in Environmental and Energy Design) certification.

In doing so, Meadow Ranch has become the first community in Coeur d'Alene to join other projects nationwide to participate in the LEED for Neighborhood Development Pilot Program, which integrates the principles of smart growth, urbanism and green building into one program—the first national program of its kind for neighborhood design.

All homes at Meadow Ranch are extremely energy- and water-efficient, only using ENERGYSTAR lights, appliances and windows. They also feature advanced heating and cooling equipment—including radiant in-floor “bone-warming heat”—compact plumbing design, low-flow plumbing features, drip irrigation and drought-tolerant landscaping.

All building materials are recycled, local and non-toxic. Paints, adhesives and sealants are low-VOC. And the wood floors are reclaimed as well as all the front doors, which were manufactured locally from wood reclaimed from Idaho barns.

The wall panels and trusses for the homes are built by Federal Construction of Post Falls at an offsite factory. After the home plans are entered into the computer's software, the pieces are assembled by computer automation, and aided by factory craftsmen, from cutting the lumber to pounding in the last nail. The pieces are then delivered on a flatbed and fit into place on site. Utilizing this type of automated process produces less than an impressive 5 percent waste factor.

Although meeting the stringent U.S. Green Building Council LEED Certification program is not an easy task, the standards at Meadow Ranch are above and beyond what is required from ActiveWest's commitment to build “green,” says Dennis.

“We don't do a lot of this because we have to; we do it because it's our choice,” he said. “What you're getting with one of these homes is a cleaner, more durable home for your money.”

A “blower door test” (rates the energy efficiency of a building) done on site by Anderson Consulting confirms this; the results come in at 60 percent better than required by LEED.

In December 2009, the first cottage of Meadow Ranch attained LEED Platinum (the top of four levels of LEED certification) status, by the USGBC, North Idaho's first and only home to do so.

With 12 of the planned 28 cottages and six of the planned 22 townhomes built, the neighborhood is a flurry of activity. Cunningham estimates that approximately 25% of the homes will aim for certified LEED Platinum status, with the other 75% aiming for bronze silver or gold, depending on the preference of the homeowner.

“If somebody does that, it's really adding value to the home, long term,” says Sharon

Cunningham, Meadow Ranch's director of sales and marketing. "It's hard to think right now of real estate as an investment just because of what we've been seeing, but Meadow Ranch is positioned so uniquely because it's a small community and because of its age target and the location. ...Once the community is built out, I think people will go to sell and they'll see the value in it."

The spacious and comfortable, yet modest homes range from 800 to 1,800 square feet and are all priced under \$375,000. A second phase will include roughly 40 more detached homes. The entire project should be completed by late 2011.

Committed to developing communities that foster healthy lifestyles, revitalizing existing neighborhoods, and respecting the environment, ActiveWest's other LEED Certified projects in the works include a three-story co-op housing project on the Gonzaga University campus, low-income housing within the Coeur d'Alene area and the "Cottages at Coeur d'Alene."

For more info, visit <http://meadowranchidaho.com>

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