

A New Neighborhood in North Peoria

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As they let their children sleep an extra hour on the last Saturday in August before classes begin at the nearby school, a young couple plans their day's activities. Their car would never move.

Yet by bedtime, Dad would work out at his health club, shepherd the kids at the neighborhood pool and later meet his buddies at their favorite place for a few beers, some bowling and the ballgame on the big screen. Mom and her next-door friend would visit several shops and cap off their morning with lattes at a sidewalk café. The family would give the evening to a 3-D movie in comfy stadium seating and scoops of gourmet ice cream on their walk home.

Their home, like no other location in central Illinois, makes that day possible. They live at the Apartments at Grand Prairie.

Actually, they're a fictional family. The gym, pool, stores, café, sports/recreation tavern, movie theater and ice cream shop, however, are just a few of the amenities at the Shoppes at Grand Prairie and the new Apartments, which will welcome its first residents within a few weeks. Imagine that fictional day a very real one this August.

It's fair to imagine as well that Mom and Dad could walk from the Apartments' complex of 160 upscale units just off Orange Prairie Road to work at the OSF Saint Francis Data Center, the Bob Michel VA Outpatient Clinic, or any of the four new hotels surrounding the Shoppes, including the Holiday Inn and attached conference center. The drive to Dunlap's highly regarded and growing schools is necessary, but short.

The VA clinic and Holiday Inn require about a year more of construction, and the Apartments at Grand Prairie's six total buildings, each of three stories, will be ready at a rate of one per month after the first opens this summer. But with that first opening, the Shoppes and the adjacent retail, office and services network that make up the complex called Grand Prairie Developments can now be called something else—a neighborhood.

Developers hang the term "New Urbanism" on multi-dimensional projects that enable people to work and play within a walk of where they live. Whatever it's called, the teaming of the Apartments and its upscale amenities with the Shoppes and adjacent developments creates a lifestyle community found nowhere else in central Illinois.

Modern apartments, rather than rental homes scattered throughout older neighborhoods, are in growing demand among young, single professionals and couples not yet ready or willing to purchase homes in today's credit-tight economy. Several other apartment complexes in the North Peoria area are considered upscale; they're also a drive of at least several miles to the nearest shopping, dining and entertainment sites—most likely at the Shoppes.

The Apartments at Grand Prairie, a development of TNB Financial Inc. and Cullinan Companies LLC, will grow on eight acres along the extended Orange Prairie Road, just north of Rave Motion Pictures Grand Prairie 18. They will range from one-bedroom to two-bed, two-bath with dining and living rooms, walk-in closets and fully-equipped kitchens. Third-floor units will feature nine-foot ceilings. Every apartment will offer ceiling fans; 18.2-cubic-foot refrigerators; washers and dryers; self-cleaning gas ranges with built-in vented microwave ovens, and gas furnaces and water heaters. Spacious balconies and patios will open to a central complex featuring an outdoor pool and fitness room next door to an indoor commons "party room" with a pool table and electronic games.

Since its opening seven years ago, the Shoppes has matured into the premiere retail destination for the 30 Illinois counties surrounding it, but it's never been considered a mall. That concept of an indoor shopping complex—enclosed and separate from its customers' neighborhoods—no longer drives development. In its place now is New Urbanism, an open-air Main Street collage of offerings just a block or two from customers' front doors.