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— Attorney Nick Shelton

Builder almost ready to let go of downtown Franklin Brownstones

Buyers finally are starting to move into landmark property

By CATHI AYCOCK
For Williamson A.M.

FRANKLIN — It took time to build one of the wonders of the world, the pyramids of Egypt. Developer Bernie Butler laughs when he likens his latest residential project to the same pace.

"I told somebody the other day, I think they built the pyramids faster than we've built the Brownstones. But then again, we are taking a long time to build something that is going to be around, in a his-

toric area, for a very long time."

The development, 26 townhomes that begin pricing at \$1.5 million, was started in December 2004.

"We have homebuyers moving in slowly now. We should have two residents moving in about every two to three months over the next 12 months. So everyone will be moved in by next summer."

Butler says only one completed condo and four unbuilt units remain for sale.

"We own the land on First Avenue. It looks like a gravel parking lot right now, but in the next 30 to 60 days we will start on the final four units. After that, no more Brownstones."

Buyers excite builder

Butler says when he started the project, the buildings were the most exciting thing he could think of.

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JEANNE REASONOVER / FILE / THE TENNESSEAN

Residents are slowly moving into the Brownstones in downtown Franklin. The builder will start on the final four units in the next two months.

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Buyers: It is 'everything you would expect from something with this price tag'

FROM PAGE 19W

"These were unlike anything built in historic Franklin. And I still am in awe of the way they turned out. But I am even more excited about the people who are moving in them."

Butler says the price tag on each townhome, at \$325 a square foot, brought in homebuyers who "could choose to live anywhere."

"These are all dynamic, bright people. Many have homes in other parts of the country. And yet, they choose to live in downtown Franklin. It is a big compliment to our community. And our community is going to benefit from having these folks move here. They are the kind of people who will make a difference, contribute."

Butler says he feels a little like the *Hello, Dolly!* matchmaker Dolly Levi.

"I know everybody that is going to call the Brownstones home. They don't know each other yet, but they are going to be the first to live in a community like this in downtown Franklin. They are going to be neighbors, have relationships."

Planning was lengthy

The finished Brownstone condominium is "everything you would expect for something with this price tag," according to Butler.

"We literally spent hundreds of hours planning. We asked, if you lived here, how would you bring in groceries, get the mail, how would this function in the best manner? In fact, we fought all the way to Washington with the U.S. Postal Service. They wanted us to put apartment-style mail boxes in the back of the Brownstones. We wanted the mail delivered to the door of every home. This is an historic area. We finally won," says Butler.

The Brownstones also feature an elevator in every unit and features that allow the homeowner to virtually flip a switch for almost anything.

"You have a camera in the master suite that shows who is knocking at the front door. Panels are placed in key locations throughout the units so that lights can be turned on and off, doors locked. And every single upgrade you can imagine is in these homes."

Butler says he feels like a

painter who is almost finished with a work of art.

"I know they look great, but we still have four units and the courtyard to complete. I wish I could put a white sheet over it and when it is done, whip it off. The finished product will be even better."

Construction on the courtyard will begin in about 60 days, says Butler.

"If you are standing on Church, you are going to see a bronze, three-tiered fountain. When we were preparing the site, we found a hand-dug well. So we hand dug every stone out of the well and saved them. They are going to be the base for the fountain. Cranes are bringing in 35-foot-tall red oaks to surround it," Butler says.

With the project winding down, is Butler sad to see it end?

"No, I am excited. About everybody moving in. About it looking the way it is supposed to look. Building the Brownstones was like the biggest, hardest puzzle you ever laid out on your dining room table. It is so cool when it is finished."

Contact Cathi Aycock at cathiaycock@bellsouth.net.

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