

# BEST RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT: JT BRACKENRIDGE



BY ALISON BESHUR

"It's the right thing to do."

That's how Rod Radle answered a question about why the nonprofit he heads would want to get "level one green" certifications for every one of the 59 homes built in the JT Brackenridge Affordable Subdivision near Brackenridge Elementary on the city's West Side.

"For affordable housing, it's even more important to build green, because it saves on utilities," says Radle, executive director of the San Antonio Alternative Housing Corporation. "If you're trying to help a family that has limited income to begin with, one major cost, other than the construction of the house, is the upkeep of the house. It's going to be upkeep and utilities operations, so anything you can do to save money in those areas, you're saving the family long-term."

The JT Brackenridge Affordable Subdivision, which is about half-way built out, is the first all green residential development in San Antonio. So far, SAAHC has built 19 homes and partnered with Avenida Guadalupe to build two homes and Neighborhood Housing Services to build four houses.

## Foundations

In late 2003, the San Antonio Housing Authority board approved the \$75,000 sale to SAAHC of the 9.3-acre area, according to SAHA. Three years later, SAAHC began developing the land, which had been left

**Summary:** The 59-home affordable subdivision is located on 9.3 acres of the former Alazan-Apache Courts public housing project. The single-family home development is the first level-one green subdivision in San Antonio.

**Award Winners:** The three partner developers in the project: San Antonio Affordable Housing Corporation (SAAHC), Avenida Guadalupe, Neighborhood Housing Services of San Antonio (NHS); Hardy & Associates, architect; SAAHC No. 25 Rene Balderas, general contractor; KFW Engineers, primary engineer; Mission Title and First American Title, title companies; For Avenida Guadalupe homes: Marcello Martinez, architect; EC Ventures and GIO Custom Homes, general contractors. For NHS Homes: John Wright, architect; Jaigon Construction, general contractor; Stewart Title, title company.

**Size of Deal:** JT Brackenridge is a 9.3-acre project with 59 homes valued each between \$83,000 and \$110,000.

**Timeline:** San Antonio Housing Authority approved in November 2003 the sale of the land for \$75,000. Ground was broken in 2006 and building began in 2007. Residents started moving in during 2008.

tion then began in 2007.

SAAHC homes range in size from 787-square-foot, cottage-style houses with two-bedrooms and one-bath up to 1,171-square-foot homes with three-bedrooms and two-baths. Sale prices go from \$83,000 to \$110,000, Radle says.

To help defray some of the costs, JT Brackenridge homebuyers receive \$35,000 in down-payment assistance from federal HOME funds distributed by the City of San Antonio to the three partnering organizations. The down payment is divided into two parts – a \$20,000 loan at 3 percent interest and a \$15,000 grant forgiven completely after 20 years.

## Sustainable housing

Level one-certified green homes must meet 33 minimum standards, says Stephen Colley, technical coordinator for Build San Antonio Green, a nonprofit organization funded mainly by the city of San Antonio, Bexar County, CPS Energy and the San Antonio Water System and tasked with educating residential construction workers and certifying area green builds.

Requirements for this "introductory" level include construction methods that ensure air quality, better insulation, double-pane windows, energy star-rated appliances, water-saver faucets and low-flow toilets. An average home scores a 100 on the Home Energy Rating System or HERS, but a level one green-certified house of the same size must be 15 percent more efficient and score an 85, Colley explains.

"It is a departure from conventional construction," Colley says. "It isn't just 'green-washing.'"

Avenida Guadalupe, NHS and SAAHC – each assembled their own design and construction teams to build homes in the JT



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Steven Ritchie, Jose Gonzalez, and Rod Radle are a team from San Antonio Alternative Housing Corp., a partner in the J.T. Brackenridge Affordable Subdivision.

Brackenridge Affordable Subdivision.

Special features of SAAHC's homes include usable front porches, coffered ceilings, Monterey-textured walls, closet organizers in the master bedrooms and a wide array of colors and materials for flooring, counters and cabinets, says Steve Ritchie, director of construction for SAAHC. Not so evident highlights include soils tests and engineered foundations for each home and perimeter beams larger than the minimal standard.

## Community input

During a series of public meetings, area neighbors said they'd rather have smaller yards if it meant space to accommodate more homes. So, one part of the subdivision will include a semi-circle of cottage-style homes facing a common area with a gazebo and community parking lot. The cottage design is used in fairly affluent areas of the West Coast, says Jose Gonzalez, a financial consultant for SAAHC.

"This is the first area (in San Antonio) to embrace this new type of land use," Gonzalez says, while pointing out the xeroscaped yards. "The residents see the value and buy into the sense of community."

NHS built four 1,050 square-foot homes with three bedrooms each. Their home designs include a 1 1/2 bath "Jack and Jill" set up, says NHS Executive Director Robert Jodon. "We were very limited on the footprint. That was a way of maximizing living space," Jodon says. "It's very water and energy efficient and space conscious."

Avenida Guadalupe's two houses are each 1,058 square feet. Unique touches include crown molding and ceramic tile throughout

the houses, says Marta Alaquez, home ownership program manager for the neighborhood association tasked with revitalization of a 3.5-mile surrounding area.

Both organizations have faced challenges, including finding qualified candidates interested in living in the neighborhood. Hiring contractors willing to work for rates slightly below market compensation also was difficult for Avenida Guadalupe, Alaquez says. "Nobody made any profit," she adds. "It was more of a contribution to the community."

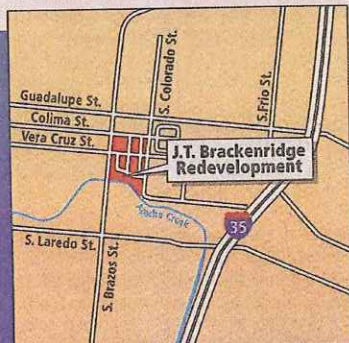
It also hasn't been easy to meet the level one green standards, says Erik Wyatt, operations financial manager for Avenida Guadalupe. In the group's first house, 8-foot-tall windows had to be replaced with 6-foot-tall ones when it became apparent they weren't going to get the energy rating needed for certification.

"They were just too big. ... We took a couple away in the second home," Wyatt says. "That was a little bit of a learning curve there."

Meeting Build San Antonio Green's level one requirements adds about \$5,000 to a home's sticker price, Ritchie says.

But it's worth the effort to build high quality, environmentally-friendly affordable homes in an area with one of the lowest per capita income census tracts, Radle says. "A lot of the housing stock is old and substandard," Radle says. "A lot of the families in this neighborhood have had kids who moved out of the area, because they couldn't find housing. As soon as a house is available, they'll come back."

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vacant after decades-old buildings in the Alazan-Apache Courts public housing project were demolished and funding ran out before a re-building effort could be completed, Radle adds.

A \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant helped fund infrastructure – water lines, sewer, streets and sidewalks – for the new single-family housing project for low- to moderate-income families. Construc-