

Paramount Homes works for "blooming dale" in Bucktown

For some builders, development means constructing houses. For Bruce Fogelson, of Paramount Homes, it encompasses everything from art to the Internet to neighborhood improvement. The company's philosophy is not surprising given its motto: "Building neighborhoods and turning buyers into neighbors."

"We do a community-based project in every neighborhood where we work, whether we initiate it or it's someone else's effort we're supporting," Fogelson says. It's that neighborhood-centered approach, Fogelson says, that has earned Paramount a Good Neighbor Award from the Chicago Association of Realtors every year since 1993.

The company regularly pays the first year of association fees for buyers in its new projects and it has exceeded neighborhood parking requirements — after a deal was done — more than once. Paramount also has sponsored improvements such as the community bulletin kiosk on Lincoln Avenue near the company's offices.

Fogelson's latest community effort, however, brings a whole new meaning to the idea of builders leaving their mark on neighborhoods. Paramount is spearheading a campaign to turn the concrete wall lining the railroad tracks that run along Bloomingdale into a giant canvas sporting murals that will stretch for well over a mile.

"I got to looking at this long concrete wall, which has sort of frames built into it," Fogelson says. "If it had holes at the top and bottom it would look like a strip of film. It's an ideal place for artwork."

Fogelson has gained the support of the Bucktown Community Organization and

has found a sponsor in Duron Paints & Wallcoverings to donate the necessary paint and supplies — a tall order for a canvas more than a mile long. He is now working to get permission from the Canadian Pacific Railroad, which owns the line, to begin the project.

Fogelson's interest in the community project came from his work on the 2300 block of West Bloomingdale, where he is now finishing Stampworks Lofts, two new eight-flat condo buildings, and is just getting started on Bucktown View, 33-unit condo project.

Bucktown View, as the name implies, will capitalize on the relatively low surrounding building heights and the open space of the railroad tracks, to offer sweeping skyline and city views from the four-story structure. The traditional design calls for a variety of floor plans, all with two bedrooms and two or 2.5 baths. The units will include private balconies or decks, oak floors, fireplaces, granite counters and GE appliances.

Sales and marketing of Bucktown View is being handled by Property Consultants Realty. Prices range from the \$230s to the \$290s and parking costs \$12,500 for an indoor space, or \$5,000 for an outdoor one.

Unlike Stampworks Lofts, condos with contemporary, loft-like touches, Bucktown View is more traditional, with a red brick and limestone facade.

"When we first did Stampworks, we were the west end of the neighborhood, and Bucktown stopped at Western," Fogelson says. "Now we're more in the middle because the market there has matured. Buyers in that location now want a more traditional, almost Lincoln Park-type product."

The reason for that maturation, according to Fogelson, is the rapid pace of development around the project, including



One E. 14th Place

both new private housing and public improvements, including the planned new multi-million-dollar el station at Western and Armitage.

The "Blooming Dale / Bucktown Wall Mural Project" is one more step in the neighborhood's development, according to Fogelson, who says several current murals look too much like graffiti. His concept is to replace them and blank sections of the railroad embankment wall with scenes of a "blooming dale," an idea inspired by, you guessed it, the street name. Sample drawings on the campaign letterhead feature Monet-like haystacks and horse-drawn wagons against a backdrop of rolling country hills.

Apparently Fogelson wasn't busy enough launching the art campaign and developing Paramount's single-family houses, condos and townhouses. He is also starting an Internet company called Home Builder Showroom. As the name implies, the company will be an on-line showroom linking home buyers with their builders' showroom choices through the Internet.

The company's Web address is www.homebuildershowroom.com, but most home buyers will only see it represented as a button on their builder's Web site that says "Click here to design your dream

home." Buyers will then be linked to a customized virtual showroom that presents all of the individual builder's standards and upgrades for a given project. Buyers will have the convenience of deciding on colors, fixtures, appliances and other choices online, Fogelson says, and they'll be organized logically, by room or style instead of by construction trade.

"We will be creating showrooms for builders on-line to feature their standards and upgrades to augment their current showrooms and to make it easier for consumers," Fogelson says. "We help the builder and buyer come together and communicate to make final choices."

Development, however, continues to be Fogelson's main focus. In addition to Bucktown View and other projects, he is working on Wrightwood Park Place, 16 single-family houses at Wrightwood and Paulina, and on two highrises planned for a site at Dearborn and Polk, in the South Loop.

As diverse as Paramount's housing continues to be, all of its developments share one thing.

"We have been winning Good Neighbor Awards forever because all of our developments are designed to win it," Fogelson says. "They're judged on the combination of quality, value and contribution to the community."