

# Remember the Ponies at Devonshire Downs? They're Coming Back—Or at least the Downs Are

► **Parking at New Housing Project Concerns Neighborhood**

**By THOM SENZEE**

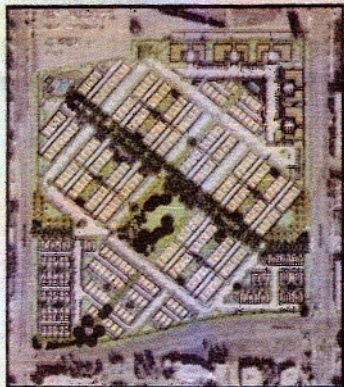
After decades of near desertion, what's left of the Northridge land that was once the Devonshire Downs horseracing track will be resurrected as...Devonshire Downs.

*Thirty of the approximately 60 remaining acres of what was once Devonshire Downs Race Track will begin to take shape as a new CSUN faculty-and-staff community of town homes next Fall.*

But before racing fans gets too excited about a new era of trifectas and soft turf in the North Valley, they should know the new Devonshire Downs will be a residential community which the land's owner, Cal State University, Northridge, plans to fill with professors, lecturers, administrators and campus staff.

"It's designed as a community to help us retain and recruit quality faculty and staff," said Tom McCarron Executive Director of CSUN's University Corporation. "We are trying to make this a quality community where they can buy in at least 20 to 25 percent less than market price."

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## Devonshire Downs

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With a mix of townhouses, and later some rental units, University Corporation representatives are billing the project as a university village. Those who think of a village as having a mix of residential and commercial elements will call the village designation a bit of a stretch, because no retail units will be a part of the 15-acre "Phase One" development.

Phase One, the largest (in terms of area) of three phases, is 15 acres with 160 two-story units that will be constructed in blocks of three or four attached homes. The subsequent phases will be denser with at least some rental units, bringing the total dwelling count to more than 400 units. Phase One will break ground in Fall, 2008. Phase Two and Three groundbreaking dates have not been set, but are scheduled for completion within 15 years.

"The primary reason for building the community is to make available affordable housing for faculty and staff," said Rick Evans, associate executive director of the University Corporation (TUC). "We're controlling the equity growth potential by using the Consumer Price Index, so we think even 40 years from now this will be even more affordable housing for university faculty and staff."

Evans and McCarron are eager to highlight the design elements and aesthetics of the project, beginning with the site's elevation:

"Instead of a wall, we have a landscaped divider in the form of elevation six to eight feet above the street," McCarron said. "It gives us more of a natural divider and it takes advantage of that hill we have."

That's a contrast to many new gated developments in the North Valley. There will be no gates controlling access to the community, according to Evans and McCarron.

"We're trying to create a synergistic community from a design perspective, of high-quality homes, well-designed homes and site plan, strong streetscapes with strong curb appeal of the houses, parkways and sidewalks," Evans said. "That's our vision for this community."

TUC says the architectural style of the project, designed by Steinberg Architects, emphasizes aesthetic diversity and "...is intended to celebrate the corners and the mid-block paseo portals." The landscape design includes leafy plants, a community park and several "pocket parks," two pools and other shared amenities. There is no final say about exactly how much open

space will ultimately be realized at Devonshire Downs.

Still, not everyone is thrilled about TUC's vision for Devonshire Downs.

"In some ways it sounded like an ideal proposition," said Thomas Baker, who sits on Northridge East Neighborhood Council's Land Use Committee. "They'll be able to draw better people with more affordable housing. But there are some drawbacks to the project."

Although Baker says CSUN did an admirable job of involving the community during the planning process, the biggest drawback is the loss of land for university expansion needs, and the loss of a large, flat, paved parcel that is regularly used by local residents, businesses and public service agencies for activities ranging from remote control racing to firefighter training.

"We use it for hazmat collection, parking-and-shuttle during the air show, car shows and of course the swap meet every other week," Baker said.

Then there's parking

"Then there's parking..." Baker said. "The loss of some of the student-parking capacity at the site will lead to more cars being parked in surrounding residential areas."

Parking within the community will be in the form of private, two-car garages for each unit, which will be accessible only from short (no longer than 150-feet) alleys. TUC says one of its primary goals for the community is to make it a "leave-the-car-behind" environment. But there are doubts about how painstaking planners of the community have been regarding that stated objective.

For instance, the master plan doesn't include any provisions for retention of the shuttle-tram service, which is advertised as a core component of Devonshire Downs' sustainability. In fact, TUC declined to have shuttles come into the community to pick up university employees, who will have to meet the shuttles along with students at existing pick-up points. Nor does the Devonshire Downs Community Plan suggest beefing up shuttle scheduling, or buying more shuttles to serve the hundreds of new households with at least one inhabitant employed by CSUN.

But, parking and car-related issues could have been worse.

"There was a consideration for mixed use," said Rick Evans. "Some liked the idea of a little coffee house. But we thought, 'how do you make accommodations for parking?'"