



ROSS BRIDGE TO GET 240 APARTMENTS

Daniel Corp. begins construction of a \$38 million apartment community in Ross Bridge

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By Lauren Cooper

Daniel Corp. will begin construction next month on a \$38 million apartment community in Hoover's Ross Bridge that could be occupied as early as October of this year.

The Birmingham-based developer said it will build 240 upscale apartments on nearly 20 acres near the front entrance off Ross Bridge Parkway, with units ranging in size from 1,200 square feet to 1,500 square feet and in price from \$900 to \$1,600 per month.

The apartments are part of the first phase of multifamily dwellings for the fast-growing community of Ross Bridge and executives at Daniel said there is capacity to build up to 360 more units on an adjacent property.

Daniel President Christopher A. Brown said the combination of few new multifamily construction in the area, particularly high-end, and Birmingham's job growth fueled the demand for the development.

"Birmingham is of the size now that high-end will do well, especially in Ross Bridge," he said. Since its opening in 2005, the Ross Bridge community has grown to exceed expectations in a short period of time. According to Daniel, roughly 1,000 of the 1,600 homesites have been sold, about 500 finished homes have been sold and 175 homes are in various stages of construction. Birchall at Ross Bridge, named to evoke the European arts and crafts era, will feature eight buildings with one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, as well as four, two-story carriage buildings with eight units.

Both Brown and Charles Carlisle, senior vice president of commercial development at Daniel, believe adding 240 more families to the community will accelerate nearby retail development. As of now, Ross Bridge's commercial Village Center has only office space, including Signature Homes' 15,000-square-foot headquarters. Signature is a home builder in the development. Developers also plan to build 30,000 square feet of professional office space nearby.

Carlisle said apartments have always been in the master plan for Ross Bridge, with three parcels of land originally zoned by the city of Hoover for multifamily. The city put a cap at 600 apartments back when the overall development was approved.



Last year, it was reported that Daniel attempted to move the site for the apartments within the development, but was halted by Hoover city officials. Some city council members even suggested building condominiums instead of apartments.

The city was eyeing one of the multifamily parcels for a school to accommodate the fast-growing area, but Carlisle said the city is now looking at other sites, none of which are zoned multifamily.

Hoover Mayor Tony Petelos said he is confident the high-end apartment community will do well. However, he acknowledged it goes against one of the main platforms he used during his race for mayor three years ago - no new apartments in Hoover.

"I felt we didn't need any more, but these had already been approved," he said. "But I'm confident it will be as upscale as all the other projects in Ross Bridge."

Petelos believes adding 240 families to the neighborhood will serve as a catalyst for retail development and possibly fulfill the need for rental housing in the wake of a slow real estate market and the subprime lending fiasco.

He referred questions regarding a school at Ross Bridge to Hoover City Schools officials. Superintendent Andy Craig did not return calls in time for press.

Daniel's Brown said despite the stigma apartment communities carry in most cities, the upscale dwellings should be well received by those who live in Ross Bridge, some of which paid up to \$1 million for their homes. The apartment dwellers will be in the same demographics as those in single-family homes and the amenities and the architecture will blend well with its surroundings, Brown said.

The clubhouse will feature a pool, with an arbor and outdoor kitchen, and a state-of-the-art gaming center, which was designed by a technical architect.

Birchall is the second high-end apartment community to be announced in the Birmingham area in less than a month.

Focus Development Inc. of Atlanta is planning River Ridge Apartments - 324 "class A" units behind Target on U.S. 280, also featuring a higher-than-average price point and nicer amenities in the units and the clubhouse. Rent will range from \$825 to \$1,250.

According to Rock Apartment Advisors' 2007 mid-year apartment survey, the average rental rate in Birmingham is \$688, with an average of 68 cents per square foot.



Daniel, which co-developed Ross Bridge with USS Real Estate, will manage and lease Birchall. A general contractor hasn't been named, but Walter Schoel Engineering Co. Inc. will serve as civil engineer.

Looney Ricks Kiss Architects Inc. of Memphis, Tenn., designed the development and Dix Lathrop and Associates Inc. of Longwood, Fla., provided landscape architecture.