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## Fix in on Congested Crossing

# Work to start in Poinciana at Marigold Avenue and Cypress Parkway, Avatar says.

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POINCIANA -- Anyone who navigates the roadways daily in Poinciana, a community nearing 60,000 residents, knows that morning and afternoon rush-hour traffic can make roads seem more like parking lots than highways. That's particularly true for main thoroughfares like Poinciana Boulevard and Marigold Avenue.

Tony Iorio, project manager for Avatar Properties Inc., the primary builder in Poinciana, says change is on the way -- and fast. The busy intersection of Marigold Avenue and Cypress Parkway, he said, symbolizes a frustrating spot for motorists -- and a sign of where the community is headed.

"In the next six months, you will

PLEASE SEE POINCIANA, PAGE R13

not recognize that intersection," he said, noting that the roads are being expanded to four lanes, a new traffic light is being installed, and larger mast arms will be put up there as well.

"The first phase is the intersection improvement," Iorio said. "Things are progressing well."

Iorio spoke last week during the monthly luncheon meeting of the Poinciana Area Council held at Solivita. Iorio used the luncheon to outline the long list of projects Avatar now has in the works for Poinciana -- projects that clearly indicate the growth in this community of 57,000 people isn't likely to slow down anytime soon. Is it any wonder residents are concerned about a host of quality of life issues.

"The growth in the last 10 years has been exponential," said Allan R. Collins, a PAC member. "In the last few years, it's been a steep curb."

Iorio said 2005 was another strong growth year in Poinciana.

"We had over 3,000 homes constructed," he said. "It will put us among the top planned communities in the nation with this growth."

Poinciana cuts across both Polk and Osceola counties, and Iorio said both sides of the community boomed heartily in 2005.

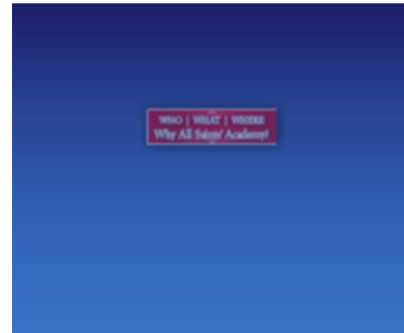
"We've had tremendous growth in both sectors last year," he said. "This was one of our greatest years in land sale."

But will it continue? Iorio said it's difficult to predict how much growth will happen in future years.



MIKE GROGAN/The Reporter

MIKE GROGAN/The Reporter Tony Iorio, project manager for Avatar Properties Inc., speaks at the February luncheon meeting of the Poinciana Area Council held at Solivita.



"I would say it's a crystal ball type of thing," he said. "There's so many different roads that development can take. But if everyone thinks development is easy, who doesn't everyone do it? A lot of people have failed at it."

Still, Iorio said a host of quality of life issues -- the lack of available businesses and restaurants, the need for recreational opportunities and the bad traffic -- are being worked on.

"We've got some great things planned for the future," he said.

Economic development is a top priority in a community where most of the growth has been residential, Iorio said, adding that Poinciana's industrial park is experiencing its own growth spurt.

"You'll see some buildings under construction in the southwest quadrant of the industrial park," he said. "We're working with some large industrial users in the north. You're going to see some tremendous things happen in the next year at the industrial park."

Avatar also hopes to lure a wider variety of dining options to Poinciana.

"We need restaurants," he said. "We've been talking to a few national chains about locating where the town center is, as well as some big box users, similar to what you have at The Loop" near Kissimmee.

The industrial park isn't alone in expanding. On the Polk County side, Poinciana residents will also have some future shopping options.

"Right across the street from Solivita, the long anticipated Solivita Marketplace has started," Iorio said. The list of clientele so far includes a Walgreens drug store, a Wachovia Bank, restaurants, several insurance carriers and an 18,000-square-foot plaza that will have an outdoor seating area.

"We're going to have some nice landscaped areas in the front and areas for seating and recreation," Iorio said, adding that right behind the plaza there would be room for parks, a large lake surrounded by 75 to 90 acres and trails behind the lake.

"We also have hopes for a future hospital at that location," Iorio said.

Of course, having more shopping and recreational opportunities means getting more people out on the roads to get there. Anticipating the increased traffic, Iorio noted that Avatar is making progress on a project called the Poinciana Parkway, a new highway being built that will enable Poinciana residents to make a faster connection to County Road 54 in Polk County, which is close to two Interstate 4 exits.

That project includes the intersection improvements at Marigold and Cypress Parkway, Iorio said.

"That is kicking off in mid-2006," he said. "The current existing two lanes there now are almost going to be replaced. It's going to look like a new roadway."

Some residents wanted to know about government services, as well as shopping and transportation options.

Fernando Valverde, a resident of Solivita, said the Polk County side of Poinciana could benefit from a stronger police presence.

"Can you please tell us more regarding a police substation on the Polk side?" Valverde asked.

Iorio said Avatar is working with Polk County Commissioner Paul Senft on that.

In addition, Avatar is finalizing negotiations with the U.S. Postal Service about getting a larger post office built in the community.

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"We've been working with the Post Office on a couple of locations, including an area right behind the Publix (in Town Center)," he said. "The Post Office is going to need seven to eight acres for a 25,000-square-foot facility."

Iorio also gave credit to the members of PAC, a group of business leaders who meet once a month, work on community projects, hold fundraisers and operate under the Kissimmee/Osceola County Chamber of Commerce.

Iorio said PAC members bombarded the U.S. Postal Service with e-mails for a new post office, and their voices were heard.

"We went from the bottom of the list to the top of the list by voicing our opinion that we need a post office here," Iorio said.

Another much anticipated project, he said, is getting a YMCA in the community. He said that project is also being negotiated.

Jeff Pashley, who represents Avatar on the PAC board, noted that on the same day as the luncheon, the Polk County Commissioners were learning more about this project from Jeannette Coughenour, manager of the Association of Poinciana Villages, the town's governing board.

"She's in Bartow right now, making a presentation to the commissioners," Pashley said.

There's also more residential development in the works, including an expansion of Avatar's Bellalago subdivision on the Kissimmee/Poinciana line called Isle of Bellalago.

"It's a tremendous project," Iorio said. "It won the Community of the Year award. We're very proud of it."

Bellalago won the 2004 Excel Award as Florida's Best Master-Planned Community, and earned national recognition in a recent issue of Builder magazine.

Despite all the growth, Iorio said there is still room in Poinciana for new churches, and meeting space for civic organizations.

"We have within our development a number of smaller parcels for those types of services," he said.