

# WEEKEND WAVE

09-16-16



## Friday Economic Roundup

### Babcock takes shape Homes underway at Babcock Ranch

By ANNE EASKER Charlotte Sun Staff Writer

When the first residents move into Babcock Ranch early next year, they may be drawn from around the country - local Floridians as well as transplants from as far as Oregon, attracted to the eco-friendly, Old Florida lifestyle on which Babcock has staked its identity.

They will be young and old, families and retirees, bound together by a desire to live slower, sustainable lives, know their neighbors and be a part of a pioneering community.

Four builders gathered at Babcock on Monday to mark construction getting underway for the first neighborhood, Lake Timber, and to unveil their new floor plans and environmental innovations for a city of the future that developers have said could some day have up to 50,000 residents.

All houses must have a minimum bronze rating under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. Fox Premier Builders is boasting houses nearing a platinum standard, using many locally sourced materials to create homes with low energy costs that address environmental concerns such as hurricanes, tropical moisture, termites, etc.

Company representatives said they already have a huge amount of interest from people across the board and are in negotiation with their first potential buyer, who has been

following Babcock since 2006.

Stock Development said potential buyers range from people in their 20s all the way up to their 70s. Families are excited about the recently approved charter school. The environmentally friendly crowd is excited about the solar power. Seasonal residents plan to buy second homes at Babcock.

Homes by Towne is the first to begin construction at Babcock and said their four-floor plans, named after breeds of Heirloom tomatoes, are designed to appeal to different sorts of people - smaller homes for empty nesters, larger ones for families, and themes for each, including coastal, farmhouse, craftsman and West Indies. Your tomato choices are Brandywine, Jade, Sungold and Sterling, according to the Towne website.

As a founding builder at Lakewood Ranch as well, Vice President of Sales and Marketing Kitt Kearney said there is lots of pent-up demand for Babcock, and she's sure the development will pan out.

"We know what it's like to found a community and see it stand the test of time," Kearney said.

The newest builder to come to Babcock Ranch is Florida Lifestyle Homes. Denise Ogden, of Sales and Marketing, said the company's floor plans are each named after a loved one of someone in the company.

"The names come from the love we have in our lives," Ogden said. "That's what Babcock is all about - memories."

Prices for the first homes range from the \$300,000s to \$800,000s.

Babcock President Rick Severance said there are also townhomes and villas planned for Phase I, which he expects to go up in the next two to three years. Other multifamily options are planned in future phases, as the market demands.

Affordable housing will be added when there is a need for it. Severance said it's too premature to say when that might be but he stressed wanting to go above and beyond official requirements.

"We don't want it to be less than," Severance said. "We want it to be more attractive and more compelling than what the government standard has defined for affordable housing."

The town is governed as an Independent Special District, acting as its own municipality. The board already exists, and as time goes on, Severance believes it will transition to elected positions once there are enough residents.

Despite the limited, tourist-driven economy of Southwest Florida, Severance doesn't expect any trouble in filling the town.

"I think Florida in general is a place people want to move to, especially if they're going to wind down or retire," he said. "People are choosing to reside here in the latter part of their lives, but we're seeing a lot of folks who find

Babcock Ranch extremely interesting. They may already live in Florida and just want to live differently than they are living now."

Severance said young professionals with ties to Florida Gulf Coast University and Florida SouthWestern State College could live at Babcock while working in Punta Gorda, Fort Myers or Naples, and the town will create a number of jobs as well, through its charter school and continuing development.

The town is about 5 miles to the nearest Publix and CVS, and officials are recruiting a number of other retail and commercial developments to go up in the next three to five years. The downtown will be opening in spring of next year, so the first residents will have their basic amenities taken care of.

## New charter school application passed

By **SOMMER BROKAW** Charlotte Sun Staff Writer

Thursday night, board members approved an application for a public charter school in Babcock Ranch, a developing community in Charlotte County, just north of the Lee County line. Babcock Ranch developer, Kitson and Partners, asked the Collaborative Educational Network consulting firm to help them develop the application for a charter school for the new 'solar-powered' town, Collaborative Consultant Christy Noe said.

The first residents of Babcock Ranch are moving in early next year, and the developer wanted a school to attract people there.

"It's been a long time coming and to see it finally come to fruition tonight has been amazing," Noe said. "We're extremely excited this is approved and look forward to working with Charlotte County Public Schools as we get closer to school opening."

The kindergarten through- eighth-grade school called Babcock Ranch Neighborhood School will begin accepting enrollment applications this fall for the 2017-2018 school year. Projected enrollment is 76 students in K-5 the first year with four classes, the charter application shows.

"A public charter school approved for Babcock Ranch puts world-class education with a strong environmental focus within walking distance of the earliest settlers of the new solar-powered town," said the town's spokeswoman Lisa Hall.

The curriculum is "place-based." According to Hall, this means "the green spaces, lakes and trails that make up 50 percent of the 18,000-acre footprint of Babcock Ranch will serve as the ultimate experiential learning classroom. By focusing on local landscape, history, culture and context, learning takes on specificity and moves from the abstract to the concrete, engaging students with their surroundings."

Noe said the school's STEAM curriculum, which stands for science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics, also makes it unique.

"A lot of schools are STEM, but they don't include arts," she said.

Interested families can register at [babcockranch.com](http://babcockranch.com) to receive notification when applications are available.

Out-of-district students from Lee County are allowed to request admission to the new charter school under Florida's new open enrollment law.

Charlotte County School Board member Alleen Miller said the charter will save the district on the transportation expense. Board member Ian Vincent added the board decided to allow a charter school rather than creating a more traditional public school because enrollment is still less than 100 students, and the district didn't want to create a school for that low of a number of students.

School Board member Lee Swift said he is opposed to charter schools except for those "unique" ones that fulfill an unmet need, and he believes that Babcock Neighborhood School is doing that, so he ended up voting along with the rest of the board to approve it.

"While I'm morally and philosophically opposed to charter schools, this situation meets the true definition of being unique and I think would be an asset to the district to have," Swift said.

Still, President Bryan Bouton of the Florida Education Association, the local teachers' union, is unconvinced that another charter school is a good idea. He said he has seen too many charter schools nationwide fail that were run like a business.

"They run it as if it's a business, and like it or not schools are not businesses," Bouton said. "We don't make widgets. We create learners."

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## FLORIDA ECONOMIC NEWS

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- Merchandise exports from South Florida ([News Infographic](#))
- Incentives approved for two Titusville development projects ([Florida Today](#))
- Hotwire Communications to create Fort Lauderdale HQ, 375 jobs ([South Florida Sun-Sentinel](#))
- Florida businesses created 22,000 jobs in August ([First Coast News](#))
- Shipbuilder wins historic contract; hundreds of jobs coming to Bay County ([Northwest Florida Daily News](#))

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## US ECONOMIC NEWS

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