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Big community offers little peek inside

The welcome center at Connerton gives more than 500 a preview of coming housing attractions.

By JAMES THORNER, Times Staff Writer
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LAND O'LAKES - Connerton, a new town in the center of Pasco County expected to reach 8,700 homes, is a giant among housing developments.

So when Connerton opened a new welcome center called Rose Cottage about a week ago, you might expect it to be on the large side.

And you'd be right.

Adorned with columns and stone-facing, its peaked roof stretching to two stories, the welcome center sprawls 3,800 square feet west of U.S. 41.

It's the first thing that greets visitors arriving at the 4,800-acre former ranch that's supposed to become a model of self-sufficiency within 10 years.

Terrabrook, the community's Texas-based developer, plans five different villages whose roads and walking trails merge in a commercially viable downtown between U.S. 41, State Road 52 and Ehren Cutoff.

Rose Cottage, along with eight model homes showcasing Connerton's six builders, is the first tangible evidence that Connerton is fit for habitation.

The building comes with brightly lit versions of the community's site plan, plasma screen televisions running video loops of the amenities and reams of builder information.

You won't find anything for under \$200,000, not with the recent run-up in housing prices in the Tampa Bay area.

Homes range from \$250,000 to more than \$1-million. Builders are Westfield Homes, Inland Homes, Morrison Homes, David Weekley Homes, Arthur Rutenberg Homes and Costanza Homes.

Builders have swallowed the first 265 home lots in Connerton, an enclave called The Arbors. The next phase, called The Gardens, begins development around Christmas with a further 1,700 lots.

Connerton promises its models will be exclusive to Connerton. Architectural styles are labeled neoclassical, folk Victorian, cottage, craftsman, Florida traditional and colonial revival,

Connerton general manager Stewart Gibbons said the styles share enough features to unify the neighborhood without creating cookie-cutter uniformity.

"The intent is to create a street scene that is interesting with a high degree of variation," Gibbons said.

Rose Cottage had its grand opening last Saturday. More than 500 invited potential customers got the carnival treatment with a unicyclist, face painting, trolley rides and a meal of hot dogs, ice cream and popcorn.

"Today is about giving back to all those who have expressed interest in Connerton while sharing in their excitement of being able to walk through our community," Gibbons said.