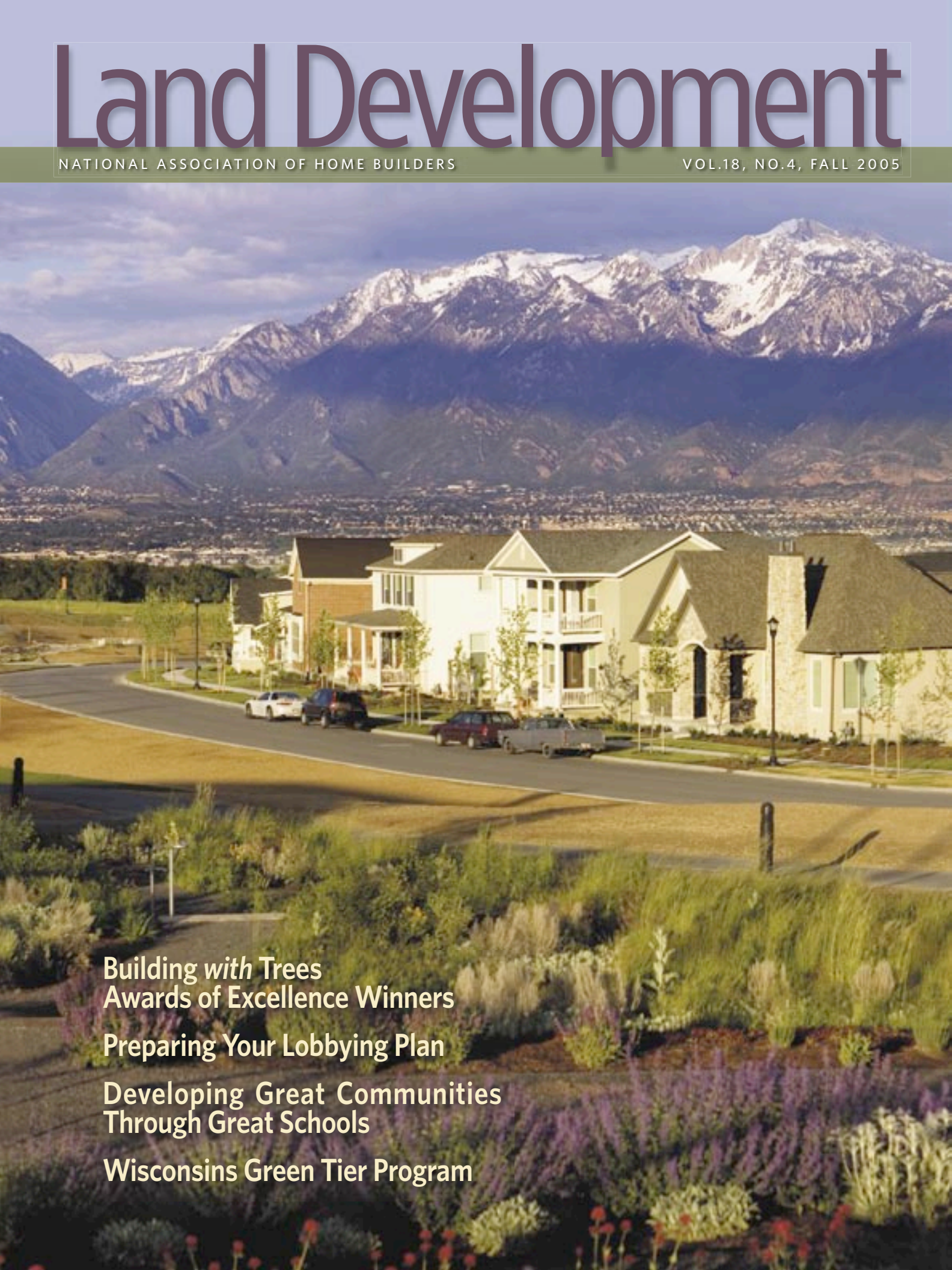


Land Development

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS

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Building with Trees
Awards of Excellence Winners
Preparing Your Lobbying Plan
Developing Great Communities
Through Great Schools
Wisconsin's Green Tier Program

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*Some men
see things
as they are
and say why,
I choose
to see things
as they could be
and say
why not.*

President
John F. Kennedy



Leading The Charge To Develop Great Communities THROUGH GREAT S



The Story of One Colorado Homebuilder's Efforts to Deliver Innovative Schools

THE REALITY

NEW ECONOMIC ERA REQUIRES FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN

OUR SCHOOLS—Despite continued efforts at the local, regional, and national levels, our K-12 public school systems continue to struggle to meet the dynamic needs of students in today's high-tech global economy. In too many places across the country, change is unfolding too slowly when instead, bold transformational actions are required. For developers and home builders, school districts can have a significant impact (both positive and negative) on the marketing of new or revitalized communities. In low performing school districts, adverse impacts to homebuilders can include:

- Underperforming schools fail to attract buyers to new communities no matter what other features the communities might offer;
- Fiscal challenges and lengthy procurement and design procedures can delay new school construction and result in overcrowding in existing schools;
- Limited educational programs that do not meet the needs of student learning styles. ➤

SCHOOLS

BY KELLY R. LEID

THE OPPORTUNITY

Developers and Homebuilders Can Play a Major Role in School Development—

A GROWING NUMBER OF DEVELOPERS and home builders are making it their business to engage school districts in the development of new schools and help reform existing schools, leveraging relationships with municipal agencies and private sector interests to advance innovative public/private partnerships. Developers and builders are even turning to consumer survey data on educational preferences as a way to attract buyers to their communities by ensuring that schools meet consumer expectations. Simply stated, devel-

opers and home builders who specialize in developing family-oriented communities increasingly see schools as a critical community asset that cannot be ignored.

Understanding the Breadth and Depth of the Issue —

SCHOOLS ARE PART OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY Across the United States, elementary, middle, and high school students started returning to classrooms in August. This annual ritual once again triggered debate among educators, elected officials, parents, and businesses and community leaders as to whether the nation's children will be prepared for college or the 21st century workforce. Our children are

entering an increasingly more complex economy that requires an ever-changing set of skills that, in many cases, many of our nation's school systems cannot deliver. Too many of the nation's schools are operating under a highly centralized and outdated delivery model that is not able to provide an education suited to the demands of today's marketplace.

By way of example, the traditional approach to new school development is historically reactive. That is, new schools (capital construction projects) tend to be built only after they are needed. And, with school construction usually dependent on general obligation funding and a required bond referendum, the lag between need and the realization of new facilities often necessitates reliance on temporary buildings and larger class sizes at existing schools. The school construction process is slow and can create even greater problems if voters fail to approve the issuance of bonds, leaving developers and home builders scrambling for what to tell their buyers. However, some school districts, such as the Denver Public Schools, are reaching out and engaging in a wide range of innovative partnerships to accelerate the way they meet the demand for public education. But what do school-related partnerships have to do with home building in new and/or revitalized communities? The answer is simple-everything! Given their experience in the creation of new or revitalized communities, residential developers and home builders are in a unique position to play an active leadership role in public education



The site plan for the Omar D. Blair Charter School includes the Green Valley Ranch Shared Use Facility Complex.

Growing Data Supports Importance of Developer/Homebuilder Involvement—

AN ACTIVE "SCHOOL CENTERED" STRATEGY CAN LEAD TO INCREASED HOME SALES

A growing body of economic research

shows a direct link between the quality of public education and home values. In addition, the data from buyer surveys repeatedly demonstrate that the reputation of schools and school districts can strongly influence consumers' selection of a home/community. Historically, developers and home builders have tended to take a hands-off approach to school development for fear that communities might start conditioning development approvals on school construction in combination with the more common requirements for the dedication of land toward school facilities and payment of school impact fees. For their part, school boards have resisted efforts to enter into partnerships for school construction, citing their "sole authority" to oversee and manage public school issues.

The past several years, however, have seen an increasing number of state legislative actions directed to nontraditional processes of school development (e.g., charter schools) that have given developers and home builders new options for engaging in school-related matters. In addition, as the homebuilding industry has become even more competitive, developers and home builders are constantly seeking strategies to help differentiate their communities and products from others in the marketplace. For those developers and builders who have chosen to create school-centered development strategies, many are reaping the benefits through increased sales and more vibrant, sustainable communities.

Oakwood Homes: An Example of Active School Engagement

OVER THE PAST EIGHT YEARS, Oakwood Homes, a privately held Colorado developer and home builder (founded in 1991), has made it a responsibility of the firm to become a leader in redefining the dynamics (that is, traditional relation-



Pictured above is the Green Valley Ranch Recreation Center which is a part of the Green Valley Ranch Shared Use Facility Complex.

ships with school districts) of creating great schools. Oakwood's effort is helping sell homes, leaving a legacy for the community and, most important, providing opportunities for children to become passionate life-long learners.

In 1997, Pat Hamill, president and CEO of Oakwood Homes, decided to become closely involved in determining how schools would be developed in a new master-planned community that the company was planning in the city and county of Denver—Green Valley Ranch, a 10,000-unit community. He enlisted the help of Marshall Kaplan, a leading public policy expert from the University of Colorado at Denver, to explore ways the company could better engage the school district with residents to help shape the direction of the community's schools and the long-term success of Green Valley Ranch. Preliminary discussions led to the formation of the Foundation for Educational Excellence in summer 1997. The foundation is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that set out to partner with the Denver Public Schools and the community on a wide range of public education issues.

Foundation Hits The Ground Running

Marshall Kaplan took on the responsibility to establish the basic organizational structure of the newly formed nonprofit

foundation, including the establishment of an independent board of directors to oversee the organization's operation. A formal funding agreement between Oakwood Homes and the foundation supports the nonprofit organization (Oakwood Homes commits to the foundation a flat dollar amount from each house sold). In addition, the foundation has secured financial support and grants from other home builders and nonprofit organizations.

From the outset, the foundation dedicated its efforts to changing the quality of public education in Green Valley Ranch and environs through a series of targeted projects, programs, and community engagement activities. Since its inception, the foundation has invested over \$2.5 million in educational programs, reform initiatives, teacher/staff development, student recognition, new school development, and the creation of collaborative public/private partnerships to improve school performance and expand opportunities for students. The foundation's mission has evolved over the years, taking on broader, more complex projects. As of 2005, the organization expanded its operational impact area beyond Denver to other school districts within Colorado where Oakwood Homes plans to build. This year, the foundation's board established a new vision and mission statement



Pictured above is the Martin Luther King, Jr., Middle School which is being transformed into an early college high school.

and clarified its areas of focus to include the following:

Vision, Values, and Mission

VISION: Sponsor educational research and applications that become the nation's leading model for sustainable high student achievement and school/community revitalization.

VALUES:

- Accountability—advocate program and student accountability
- Opportunity for all—promote programs that benefit all children
- Parental engagement—support parents' involvement in their children's education
- Community connectivity—help connect schools to their communities

MISSION: Serve as a catalyst for the development and application of cutting-edge educational initiatives that result in school and community revitalization.

PRIMARY PROGRAM EFFORTS

- Early Childhood Education—support the development of high-quality early childhood education programs that prepare children (age birth to five) with the critical capacities/skills to learn.
- K-12 Education—partner with school districts, parents, community leaders, and area businesses in the development of innovative learning environments that recognize that children acquire knowledge in different ways.
- Community Involvement—establish

community involvement among educators, parents, students, and civic leaders to promote schools as a centerpiece of community development and revitalization.

THE FOUNDATION'S (DESIRED) OUTCOMES

- Students are passionate about learning and are prepared for life.
- Parents, schools, and communities forge strong relationships.
- The foundation serves as a role model for cutting-edge educational research and initiatives.
- Communities are stronger, safer, and more attractive for residents of all ages.

Examples of Foundation Projects and Programs

■ **SCHOOL WITHIN A SCHOOL**—In 1997, the foundation approached the Denver Public Schools with a proposal to create a “school within a school” at a struggling middle school. Called the 21st Century High Tech Academy, the program emphasizes a highly focused curriculum, small class sizes, and the use of computers and other high-level technologies to enhance a student's educational experience. Based on initial successes at the middle school level, the program expanded to the neighborhood high school in 2000. Students participating in the program have consistently performed at high levels, and most, if not all, who complete the program have gone on to college.

■ SHARED USE FACILITY COM-

PLEX—In 2003, Oakwood Homes and the foundation led an effort to form a broad-based public/private partnership among the Denver Public Schools, the city and county of Denver, the Town Center Metropolitan District, and Edison Schools. The purpose of the partnership was to create a new collaborative model for developing a 42-acre master-planned complex that would maximize the use of public and private dollars toward the creation of schools, recreation centers, parks, and public libraries. The effort was notable for developer oversight, accelerated design and construction, state-of-the-art facilities, award-winning architecture, and reduced costs to taxpayers by leveraging limited resources through shared uses across each facility. Oakwood Homes served as the master developer for both the school and recreation center projects and assumed the necessary risk to make sure that the school would open when needed. Indeed, the Omar D. Blair Edison Charter School and Green Valley Ranch Recreation Center opened in August 2004 on time and under budget and have received national attention and the Denver Regional Council of Governments innovation award. The project resulted in nearly \$2.5 million in savings to Denver taxpayers. The school, which just started its second year of operation, boasts a significant student waiting list.

■ **MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. MIDDLE SCHOOL REVITALIZATION**—In 2004, the foundation, in partnership with Denver Public Schools and the administration at Martin Luther King, Jr., Middle School, helped coordinate a “revitalization project” to transform a long-struggling middle school into a high-performing early college high school for students in grades 6 through 12. A broad-based committee helped develop a new vision and plan for the school; after six months of

intense work, the Denver Public Schools approved the plan in June 2005. In August 2005, students sporting new mandatory uniforms returned to the new Martin Luther King, Jr., Early College and to a new, highly focused curriculum plan. High school grades will be added beginning in 2006 with a ninth grade, with subsequent grades added each year thereafter.

■ **HIGH SCHOOL DESIGN COMPETITION**—Based on growing development pressure for a new high school in Green Valley Ranch, the foundation is spearheading an effort to help the Denver Public Schools sponsor a design competition to design the school system's first new high school in over 20 years. The foundation will invite architectural firms to participate in the competition to help define a 21st century high school campus that will include a series of educationally "themed" smaller high schools on a shared campus, with no more than 400 students in each school. The foundation is funding the design effort through a grant and has assembled a team of school planning experts to assist the school district in accelerated design and construction strategies. In addition, the foundation hopes that the effort will help drive the debate around the importance of innovative educational programming options that provide an increasing number of high school students with the opportunity to attend college.

■ **E470 CORRIDOR EDUCATION MASTER PLAN**—During fall 2005, the foundation is helping to lead one of the most ambitious education efforts in Colorado by bringing together the Aurora Public Schools, the city of Aurora, the business community, home builders, developers, and other key stakeholder groups to develop a 25-year education master plan for the E-470 corridor. When fully built out, the corridor will include nearly 50,000

homes and upward of 20 new schools. This unprecedented opportunity to establish a comprehensive master plan will hinge on new public/private partnerships, innovative funding strategies, creative facility design/educational programming, and land planning coordination. The goal is to establish a seamless set of well-connected, high-performing schools from early learning centers to post-secondary opportunities for families that will call the eastern part of Aurora home.

A Focus On Results

High-quality schools attract buyers, increase raw land and residential property values, and provide one of the critical "cornerstones" for sustainable community development. On a broader front, high-quality schools prepare our children for their long-term success. In a recent letter to Oakwood Homes' growing list of partners, Pat Hamill summed up the company's involvement in public education by saying, "As we race into the 21st century, it is more important than ever as a developer and home builder that Oakwood Homes strives not only to build affordable quality homes, but we must also play an active role in establishing great communities that create a sense of sustainable purpose. Places where individuals feel a part of something special, and there are opportunities to explore, celebrate, and prosper as individuals and families—nowhere is this effort more important than in our schools. Our hope is that our effort to foster community building leaves a lasting legacy and plants the seeds for creating wonderful communities for our residents." **LD**

KELLY R. LEID is the executive director of the Foundation for Educational Excellence. For additional information, e-mail Kelly at kleid@morehouselessmoney.com.



LESSONS LEARNED

How you can begin to engage in school development issues

- Create internal expertise either through dedicated staffing or by securing an outside education planner to become a part of your core strategic planning team that can focus their attention on school development issues.
- Consider creating your own non-profit that can specialize in educational development and programming issues.
- If you choose not to create your own educational foundation, seek partnerships with existing local or regional nonprofit organizations that are actively engaged in school reform/new school development.
- Build relationships with your school boards, superintendent, neighborhood principals, teachers, parents and other key stakeholders to convey your interest in supporting the creation of quality schools. Start small to build trust and then over time seek broader, more in depth changes at specific schools or around new school development.
- Become a vocal advocate for school reform and innovative school development strategies that deliver personalized instruction based upon the way children learn.
- Engage your residents (parents) in the important role they can play in helping promote change at individual schools and on a broader effort at the district level.