



By Kathy Warbelow

In 1994, when developer Pete Dwyer first bought land in Manor, east of Austin, he paid just \$1,100 an acre. While Austin was on the cusp of a historic technology boom that would cause its economy to surge, things remained slow in the largely rural town of about 1,000 residents on U.S. 290.

Manor had lost out on a shot at becoming the site of a new regional airport when the city of Austin chose the closed Bergstrom Air Force Base property for Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, which opened in 1999. Most housing developers were looking west at that time, not east, to build homes for Austin's growing population.

These days, it's a different story.

Manor, Del Valle and other communities in eastern Travis County are enjoying their own boom, one that is bringing thousands of new homes, plus acres of commercial development, over the next several years.

New development is also springing up in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's southwestern territory, in the San Marcos area.

The co-op added 3,050 meters last year. Even with a modest growth forecast of 3 percent, Bluebonnet is expected to have almost 94,000 meters by the end of 2017.

The western side of the cooperative's service area has 16 residential developments either started or on the books, and they account for 90 percent of all planned home development in Bluebonnet's territory. Thousands of homes have been built, and thousands more are planned for the next few years.

Since Jan. 1, 2016, a total of 2,759 residential lots have been developed or are being built now. Another roughly 3,000 homes are scheduled for the next few years. Three new Manor ISD schools, one new Del Valle ISD school and various retail, medical and RV park locations are also being built.

Though not booming at the same rate as Bluebonnet's western areas, there are other housing developments dotting the co-op's service area. Bastrop County will add 500 houses in five developments in the next few years. The EDC Business Park is slated for Giddings. Brenham has several smaller housing and retail developments. Bluebonnet also continues to see steady business from oil fields.

Real estate consultant Eldon Rude of Austin said his clients once weren't interested in the communities along the Texas 130 toll road corridor.

"That's not the case any more," said Rude, principal of 360 Real Estate Analytics. "There is significant interest like I've never seen before."

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New homes, schools and other developments dot the landscape of Bluebonnet's bustling western border

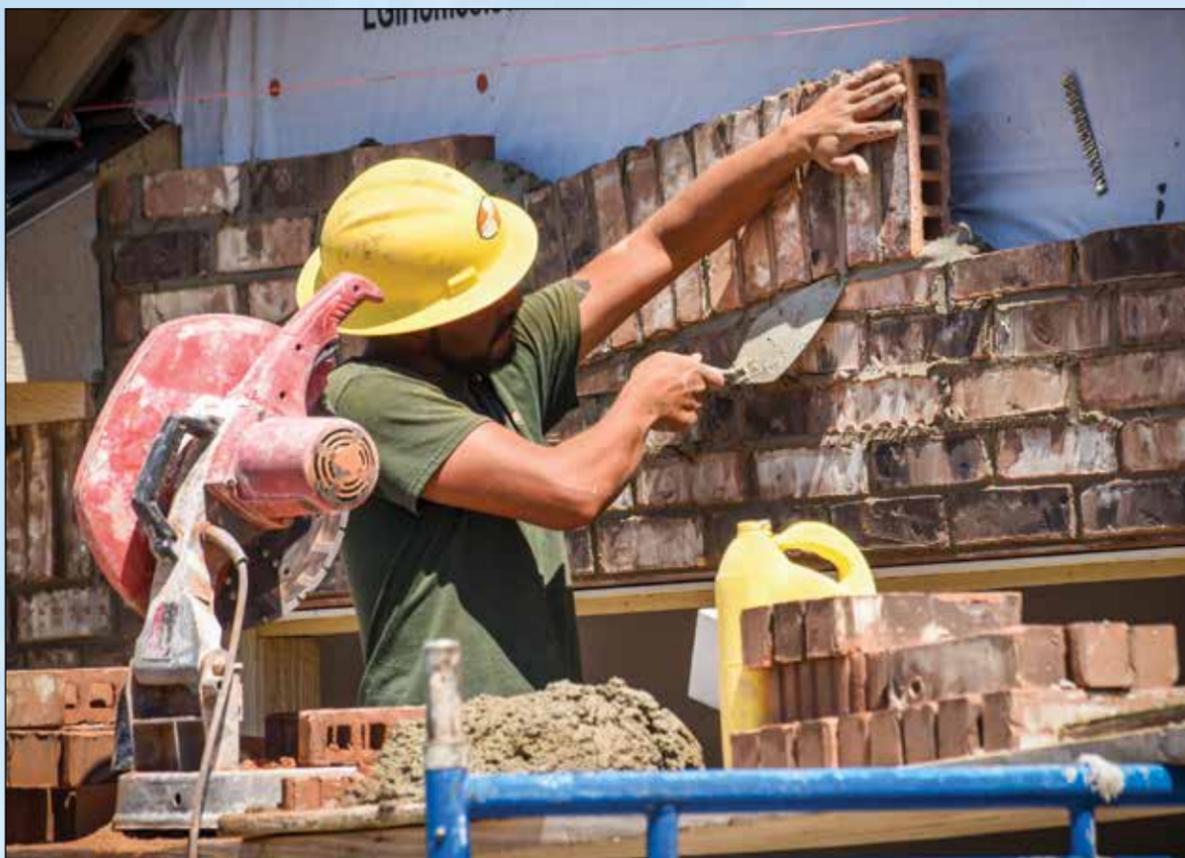
BOOM TOWNS

MANOR
DEL VALLE
SAN MARCOS

THE CENTRAL TEXAS TRANSFORMATION

This is part of an ongoing series highlighting economic growth throughout Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's region.

An estimated 3,000 new homes are scheduled to be built in Bluebonnet's service area in the next few years. Concentrated in the Manor area, the houses are, on average, more affordable than in Austin.



Sarah Beal photos

Presidential Glen, a subdivision in the Manor area, is growing quickly. Walls and roofs for 400 homes are going up now, and the development will have 1,600 lots when it is fully built out.



BOOM TOWNS

Growth in Manor and eastern Travis County

- 1 **Las Colinas subdivision**, 147 lots
- 2 **Pleasant Grove Estates**, proposed
- 3 **Las Entradas**, with Baylor Scott & White primary care clinic scheduled for fall 2017
- 4 **Shadowglen**, 1,250 lots remaining; 5,000 at buildout and health care Medical Towers at Shadowglen
- 5 **Manor Senior High School**, scheduled to open in fall 2018, located behind Manor High School football stadium.
- 6 **Stonewater**, 2/3 of lots built out
- 7 **Capital Wright**, regional beer distribution center, 438,000 square feet, complete
- 8 **Bellingham Meadows**, building of third phase has begun. The development is 43% complete
- 9 **Manor New Tech Middle School**, scheduled to open fall 2017
- 10 **Presidential Glen**, 400 lots completed, 1,600 at buildout
- 11 **Presidential Heights**, 600 lots; 109 completed, 30 homes under construction
- 12 **Wildhorse Triangle**; Heritage Point will be first subdivision in Wildhorse; starting with 113 lots. Development will have 221 lots
- 13 **Lagos Elementary**, new Manor ISD school, southeast of Texas 130/U.S. 290 intersection
- 14 **Manor Commons**, retail center located in front of Manor Walmart has 4 tenants, 2 more spaces available
- 15 **Presidential Meadows**, 1,600 lots; 60% complete
- 16 **Ergon Gas and Emulsions**, plant expansion, completed
- 17 **Eastwood**, first 60 lots underway; 2,000 at buildout
- 18 **Briarcreek**, 1,800 lots, final 200 in process
- 19 **Whisper Valley Ranch**, 237 lots complete, 7,500 at buildout on 2,000 acres
- 20 **Prado Ranch**, 205 lots at buildout; 103 lots under construction, completion scheduled for summer 2017
- 21 **NLand Surf Park**, first inland surf park, it is capable of 6-8 foot waves (scheduled to reopen May 2017 after repairs)
- 22 **Sun Chase**, first 100 lots built, 2,500 single-family homes planned, plus condominiums and townhomes
- 23 **Springfield**, 220 lots underway; 326 at buildout
- 24 **Newton-Collins Elementary School**, in Easton Park development, scheduled to open fall 2017
- 25 **Easton Park**, 1,500-acres, first 176 lots in process, plan for 10,000 total
- 26 **Fifth Generation** commercial solar farm and 160,000-square-foot warehouse completed; additional buildings planned



● Residential ● Commercial ● School

Growth in San Marcos/Lockhart area

- 1 **Tanger Outlet Mall**, 24,000-square-foot retail/restaurant additions
- 2 **Prime Outlet Mall**, overhaul of electric infrastructure
- 3 **San Marcos Apartments**, proposed 370-unit apartment complex
- 4 **Cottonwood Creek**, subdivision; section 1 has 29 lots, section 2 has 62 lots, section 3 has 60 lots (currently being designed). Total buildout for all sections in this phase is 575 lots
- 5 **Forister Ranch**, mobile home subdivision in Lytton Springs area of northwestern Caldwell County, under construction



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Manor now has 14,000 residents, including in its extraterritorial jurisdiction, and is forecast to hit nearly 18,000 by 2020.

As one measure of the area's new appeal, Dwyer, the area developer, said some commercial sites along U.S. 290 now sell for as much as \$1 million an acre. His company, Dwyer Realty in Manor, is behind 10 completed or active residential and commercial projects in and near Manor.

Local school districts are scrambling to keep up with enrollment growth. The Manor and Del Valle school districts are building new schools to accommodate families moving into the area.

Manor ISD has 8,700 students now, but forecasts that enrollment could double within five to 10 years. The district already is building a second high school, a New Tech Middle School and its ninth elementary.

In the Del Valle district east and southeast of Austin, construction trucks crowd the newly paved streets in residential projects such as Easton Park, near William Cannon Drive and McKinney Falls Parkway. The

1,500-acre project from developer Brookfield Residential eventually will have 10,000 residences, almost all of them single-family homes.

Whisper Valley, just south of Manor and east of Texas 130, has amenities such as solar panels to provide electricity, geothermal heating and cooling and homes pre-wired for Google's high-speed fiber internet service. Whisper Valley model homes opened in May, and Bluebonnet is providing

underground electric lines for the development. Boston-based developer Taurus, which started work on Whisper Valley earlier this year, plans 7,500 residences on the 2,000-acre tract.

"Finally!" said Tom Bolt, Manor's city manager, commenting on the city's growth. The city hired its first

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Tom Bolt, Manor city manager

Growth in other communities

Though not booming at the same rate as Bluebonnet's western areas, there are other developments dotting the co-op's service area.

BASTROP COUNTY

Work continues on the **Burleson Crossing** retail center in Bastrop; **Cedar Creek Estates** and **Pecan Park** subdivisions in Bastrop, the **Sun Chase** subdivision in the Garfield area and **Cedar Creek Estates** near Bastrop. Planned or proposed residential developments in Bastrop County include **Double Eagle Ranch** in the Cedar Creek area, **Oaks at Cedar Creek** and **Pleasant Grove Estates** in the Elgin area.

LEE COUNTY

EDC Business Park is proposed in Giddings.

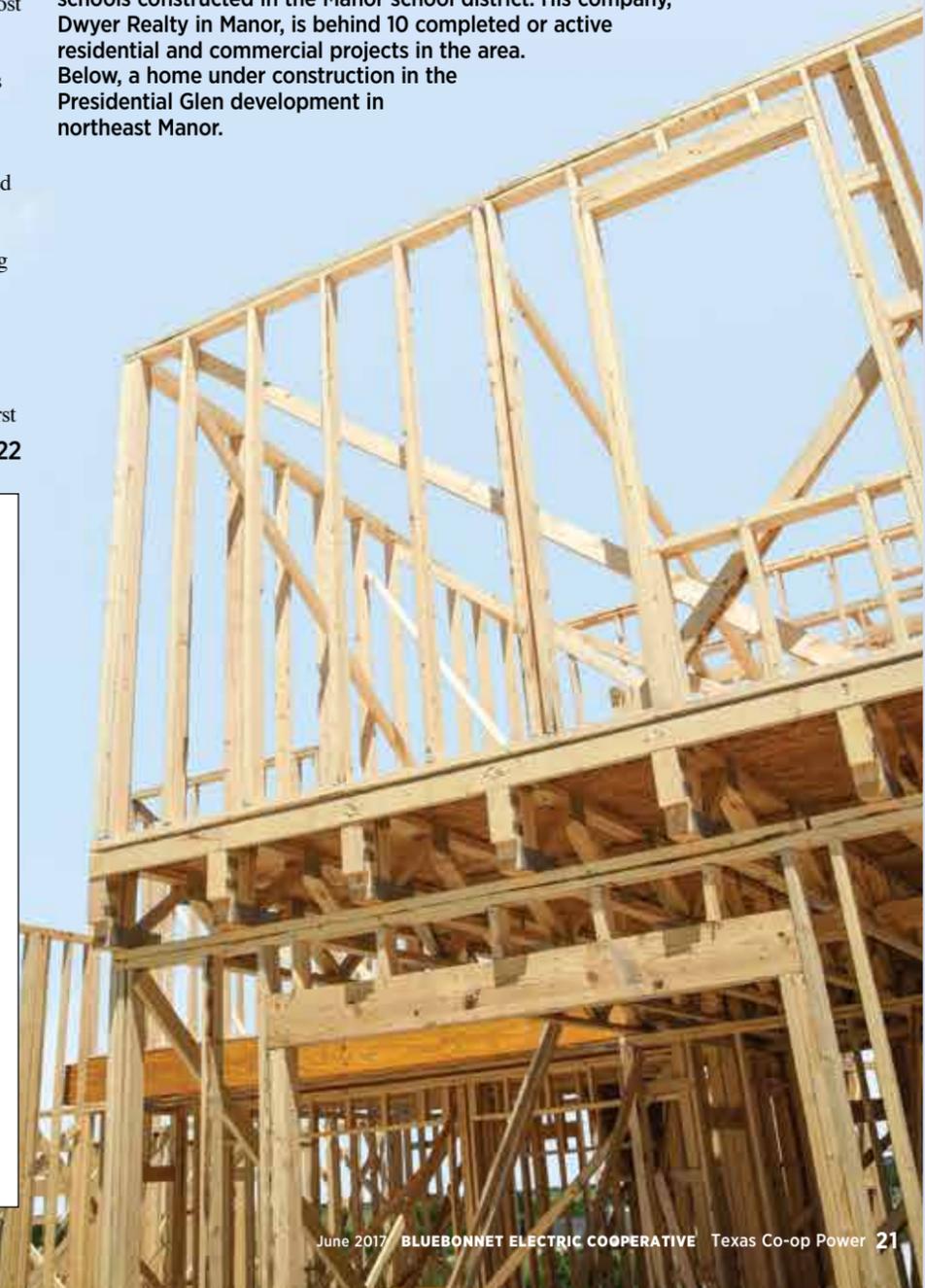
WASHINGTON COUNTY

Ralston Creek Estates, a subdivision being built in Brenham, and **Burton Villas**, a 22-lot subdivision in the Zionsville area off FM 2679; **The Crosswinds Estate**, a 14-lot development near Brenham, is complete.



Sarah Beal photos

Developer Pete Dwyer stands in Lagos Elementary, one of the new schools constructed in the Manor school district. His company, Dwyer Realty in Manor, is behind 10 completed or active residential and commercial projects in the area. Below, a home under construction in the Presidential Glen development in northeast Manor.



Long-term planning has Bluebonnet well prepared for growth

The growth transforming cities and school districts in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's western service area is no surprise. The co-op has been laying the technology groundwork for it for years. Today, Bluebonnet is improving processes to make operations more efficient and responsive, and planning new facilities to accommodate growing service demands.

Bluebonnet added more than 3,000 meters last year, an all-time high, said Eric Kocian, Bluebonnet's chief engineer and system operations officer. The co-op now has more than 92,000 meters, up from 82,000 in 2011.

"In the last year or so, we've gone through our processes with a fine-tooth comb to make them more efficient for both commercial and residential developers and for our employees," Kocian said. "We're working to allow our folks to focus on the things that are most important and to remove redundant steps."

A new member-service team for residential projects will be deployed this year to make the construction process more streamlined and efficient. The new member will deal with one person at Bluebonnet. "From the time they first call us to the day the meter is set, this single point of contact will keep the member informed about the job," Kocian said.

Technology that Bluebonnet installed a decade ago has made it easier to add new members and adjust as the economy changes. "We did that knowing someday we would grow. It was an investment for today," he said.

Bluebonnet makes strategic use of construction contractors to handle work in the Manor/eastern Travis County and San Marcos areas. "We know we'll need to add more employees as growth accelerates. It's coming," Kocian added.

In the next five years, Bluebonnet plans to build facilities in the San Marcos and Manor areas to be readily available for construction, power outages and member requests. The Texas 130 corridor in Travis, Hays and Caldwell counties will continue to see substantial residential and commercial growth. Building service centers near Manor and San Marcos will allow Bluebonnet field crews to rapidly meet the needs of hundreds of new homeowners.

The co-op is always looking at future technology enhancements and improved processes.

"We plan at least five years down the line. We will continue to make a significant investment in Bluebonnet's growth," Kocian said.

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full-time planner a couple of years ago, he said, and is adding other staff to handle the wave of development and permit applications.

The city plans to expand its wastewater plant, with bids going out in June. "We're expanding capacity where we need to," he said.

Rude, the real estate consultant, said the growth in Bluebonnet's western communities is partly the result of the "natural movement of the market."

"There are not as many areas left (in Central Texas) where land is available, with water and electricity access, in the lower price ranges," he said.

The stage was set for the development boom about 10 years ago. First, rising demand in recent years pushed up prices of homes on Austin's west side, putting them beyond the reach of many young families. The continuing gentrification of East Austin has had the same effect. Developers looking for flat, affordable land turned their sights farther east to build houses, especially attractive to first-time buyers.

By the mid- to late-2000s, a number of projects in eastern Travis County had been approved and permitted. Then the recession hit, and everything came to a halt.

When the economy began to recover a few years later, the area had plenty of projects poised to fill the pent-up demand.

"We had an abundance of lots ready to go" in Manor, Bolt said.

And builders were interested, including both local companies and national names.

D.R. Horton, the country's biggest home builder, is building in several developments in the Manor area and has committed to buy 491 lots in Austin's Colony, off Webberville Road east of Texas 130, said Vera Massaro, vice president at developer Qualico, a Canadian company. Other D.R. Horton subdivisions in the Bluebonnet service area include Cottonwood Creek near San Marcos and Windridge near Lockhart.



Sarah Beal photos



The Walmart in Manor was one of the earlier commercial developments in recent years in the area. At left, Shadowview shopping center will offer more retail space. The center is easily accessed from U.S. 290.

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Qualico also is the developer of Sun Chase in Bastrop County east of Texas 130 near the Circuit of the Americas race track, where plans call for 2,500 single-family homes as well as condominiums and townhomes. Major utilities are in place, and the first 100 lots are being developed, Massaro said.

“In the last 24 months or so, the level of demand has really increased,” Rude said.

So who is buying the houses? The mix includes newcomers to Central Texas and a few retirees, but mostly young couples and families looking for housing they can afford. Some work at Samsung’s giant chip plant in northeast Austin, Dwyer said.

“Slowly but surely, millennials are getting married and starting to realize that living in an apartment at \$3,000 a month (in central Austin) isn’t all it’s cracked up to be,” Dwyer said.

The new homes sell in the range of the \$150,000s to the mid-\$200,000s in developments with parks, trails, playgrounds and other amenities. By contrast, the median price for a home in the city of Austin is about \$330,000, according to the Austin Board of Realtors.

Recent transportation improvements have made the area east of Austin more attractive to both builders and buyers.

The 6-mile Manor Expressway toll road along U.S. 290 opened in 2014, cutting travel time from the east to jobs at major employers such as Samsung. In 2015, Parmer Lane was extended south from U.S. 290 to Texas 130. This year, a stretch of Texas 71 near Texas 130 was opened as a toll road, also.

Last year, Capital Metro, the public transportation system that serves Austin and parts of Travis and Williamson counties, started local bus service in Manor, with a loop route that connects to a weekday express bus from downtown Elgin to downtown Austin.

More is coming. The Texas Department of Transportation plans to add a lane in each direction on Texas 130, using what’s now an extra-wide grassy median.

The housing boom also is attracting more services and retail, including health care. Next year, the Seton Healthcare Family plans to open an emergency care center on Texas 71 in Bastrop, with 12 in-patient beds and a medical office building for primary care and specialty doctors.

Baylor Scott & White will build a new facility on Gregg Manor Road at the Las Entradas North development in Manor. That facility will include a lab and X-ray services and eventually will employ four to six physicians.

“We’ve always had our eye on Manor,” said Colleen Sundquist, the company’s president for clinic operations in Central Texas. “The community just made sense for us,” but until recently wasn’t quite large enough. Baylor Scott & White also is building a hospital in Pflugerville, just 10 miles away, she said.

In the past few years, Walmart and H-E-B have built or expanded stores in Manor, Elgin and Bastrop. H-E-B has purchased 17 acres for a new



Photo courtesy of Manor Independent School District



Sarah Beal photo

Dr. Royce Avery, Manor ISD superintendent, leads a tour of the district’s Manor New Tech Middle School, which is under construction. Lagos Elementary, at left, is also new. In the next 5 to 10 years, Manor ISD forecasts enrollment could double from its current 8,700 students.

will use the current high school. The district also is building a New Tech Middle School and its ninth elementary, Lagos.

Royce Avery, Manor ISD superintendent, has launched a “growth and innovation plan” that includes expanded technology and robotics programs, a fine arts academy and International Baccalaureate programs.

High school students can earn two-year college associate degrees in technology fields along with their regular classes, and go on to tech jobs at Samsung or Applied Materials in Austin.

The district has retained Templeton Consulting to analyze growth patterns in an area that is shifting from rural to suburban.

“We can’t just take on the growth; we have to plan for it,” Avery said. “Where are these families coming from? When will we need to go back to our voters for more funding?”

The Del Valle school district, which straddles Texas 130, has 11,300 students now, and Superintendent Kelly Crook said it is braced for growth from new subdivisions such as Easton Park, where it’s already building a new elementary school, and Whisper Valley.

In Manor, Dwyer has been able to watch the city evolve from rural town to growing suburb from his office on U.S. 290.

His early bets on the city — including investments in water supplies — are paying off.

“I knew it was going to come,” he said. ■

store east of the Austin airport, at FM 973 and Texas 71. The company has not set a timetable for construction.

Other employers are adding jobs. This year, Capital Wright, a beer distributor, opened a 438,000-square-foot distribution center and warehouse on U.S. 290 in Manor, with temperature-controlled storage for beer and a pickup area for keg buyers. The company is the distributor for Miller and Coors beer brands in 14 Central Texas counties.

Local school districts are scrambling to keep up with enrollment growth.

The Manor district, with 8,700 students, plans a third high school. Manor Senior High will be for juniors and seniors; freshmen and sophomores