



# Former airport transforms into a community with shops, offices and now homes

By [M.B. Taboada](#)

AMERICAN STATESMAN STAFF

Thursday, December 20, 2007

They are unpacking boxes, putting up pictures and arranging furniture. The first residents of Mueller are converging on the former airport this month and creating a neighborhood.

The development has been home to shops, a hospital and medical offices, but not until recently did it get its first residents.

"This is the more than just another step," said Matt Whelan, senior vice president of Catellus Development Corp., the project's master developer. "This is a huge milestone for Mueller in that these are the people who will turn Mueller into a community. These are the people who are going to create life in this place."

When the homes went up for sale earlier this year, Catellus called the first buyers pioneers. That term seems appropriate for the first residents of a swath of land east of Interstate 35 that's undergoing a transformation.

Homes are being framed and bricked, and construction trucks rumble through the streets. Fewer than 10 homes have been completed, with about 150 under construction. And the first phase of the redevelopment, with 350 homes, won't be finished until late next year.

But a few pioneers are paving the way.

The moving van rolled in for Ashok Thangavelu and Aparna Nandakumar on Wednesday morning.

The couple, who moved from an apartment complex off Parmer Lane, needed more space because they're expecting their first child in January. They were drawn to the Mueller development because of its central location.

The couple also wanted to live in a walk able neighborhood, like they did growing up in India, where they were close to public transportation.

"The concept of the community where we can potentially walk to restaurants and the park and mingle with the neighbors, those are the key factors that attracted us to Mueller," said Thangavelu, a logistics engineer for Dell Inc. "It's fairly close to what I'm used to. Both my wife and I can connect to the concept."

Mueller will eventually become a 711-acre mixed-use community — a city within a city with housing, shops and offices. It's Austin's largest public-private venture, and it's expected to add \$1 billion to the city's tax base, generate thousands of jobs and house up to 10,000 people.

About 2,200 homes will be built in the development, including the single-family homes that residents are beginning to occupy.

Jonathan and Maureen Slocum were the first to have their home completed, and they moved in three weeks ago. The couple moved from a five-bedroom home with a large yard- near West Lake Hills to live in a one-story home at Mueller.

"We raised three sons, and they're grown and gone, and we were rattling around in this big house," said Jonathan Slocum, a research scientist in the linguistics department at the University of Texas.

Their new home makes the commute slightly longer to his wife's job as a teacher at Pease Elementary School, but the couple "liked the idea of new urbanism ambiance," he said, adding that he's hoping for a grocery store within walking distance.

Mueller officials are getting feedback on what types of grocery stores residents want and where they might be located. One possible scenario includes a large supermarket on the north-central side, about one mile from the furthest residential housing, though no decisions have been made. They also have discussed having at least one smaller urban grocer within the town center.

It is expected to be two to four years before a full-service grocery comes to fruition and three to five years before smaller, specialty grocers are built.

Last month, Seton Family of Hospitals, the second-largest employer in Central Texas, broke ground on its corporate headquarters at Mueller. It is expected to be complete in late 2008.

Marketing for the next housing phase will begin in the first quarter of 2008, with construction on those homes beginning in early summer.

Even with the progress, Mueller is very much in flux.

"We look around, and there's no one else," Slocum said after moving in. "We've never lived in a home where there were no other residents. We've never lived in a construction zone, so that is strange."

**Courtesy of JBGGoodwin**