

Residents ready for Rhodes

Commercial center's opening a welcome sight

By TIFFANNIE BOND
VIEW STAFF WRITER

Rhodes Ranch Town Center opened officially on March 20 to grateful residents.

Rebecca Spehn, Robert Vaughn and their 5-year-old son, Ashton, drove for miles from their home near West Sunset Road and the Las Vegas Beltway to shopping centers and restaurants. They moved into one of the first residential developments in their area, so they knew they would have to wait a little while.

"And it felt like forever at first," said Spehn about the drive to Flamingo Road and the Beltway, the site for the nearest shopping. Rhodes Ranch Town Center is located two minutes from their home. "This is much closer, much better."

"When we saw the Vons sign up, we were like `Ooh!' " Robert Vaughn said.

Rhodes Ranch Town Center is located near the corner of Durango Drive and Warm Springs Road. Vons, Coldstone Creamery, Hollywood Video and Subway, along with beauty and health services, are available in the center.

Spehn and Vaughn treated Ashton to an ice cream cone at Coldstone Creamery the night before the official opening.

"When we first moved in there weren't any fast food or any place to eat," Vaughn said. "It's nice to see small restaurants open up, too."

Spehn and Vaughn joined other residents during the grand opening event. Residents wandered from store to store, checking out the new arrivals to the neighborhood. Stores not open for a few more weeks had booths for visitors.

Todd Nigro, developer of the project, wanted more for the opening than just an introduction to the community. To make it a true community event, a fund-raiser was put in place to benefit Habitat for Humanity. Vons donated \$500 and Coldstone donated \$585, all of its store profits from March 20.

Nigro auctioned three wooden playhouses, ranging in price from \$1,300 to \$1,500. In all, the event raised \$6,350 for the organization that helps families build homes when they think home ownership isn't in their financial forecast.

"I believe in what Habitat for Humanity is doing here in the valley. We've been excited and anxious about it to be a successful event, and it looks like it is," said Nigro, who also is the vice president of the organization's board of directors. "I personally believe any way you can convince people to give back to the community where they live is a good thing."

Nigro approached Theresa Gulbranson, owner of the Rhodes Ranch Town Center Coldstone, about participating in the fund-raising effort. She planned five fund-raisers for different organizations the first two weeks of operation. About 90 percent of her advertising budget is spent on fund raising each year, she said.

"It worked out really well," said Gulbranson as she greeted customers filing in and out of her store during the opening. "(Habitat for Humanity) is a great organization. I'm excited to be a part of giving to the group."

Corporate and private donors fund about \$60,000 per home constructed by Habitat for Humanity. The rest of the funding is made up by the city, county or state. Ten homes a year could mean a \$1 million budget, Nigro said.

Habitat for Humanity has one major fund-raiser a year, but local nonprofit organizations usually raise money in their honor throughout the year, said Susan Mackert, Habitat for Humanity executive director.

"This is a large event in terms of what we do," Mackert said. "So many people know what we do É they take on the role of doing things for us."

"Building is what they do, and it's what I do, too," Nigro said. "We can't build more houses without securing more donations."